

The Swarm: Children in Chicago, 1890-1933



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Abstract

Children made up almost half the population of Chicago in the 1890s, and they dominated street spaces in the city for the next forty years. While adults often spent their work and leisure time indoors, huge numbers of mobile and destructive children worked, committed crimes, had sex, and played outside in city spaces. Concerned middle-class adults developed a vast array of institutional and regulatory reforms to get them off the streets. Despite this, we know almost nothing about children's lives outside of schools, homes, and other institutions. This dissertation, *The Swarm: Children in Chicago, 1890-1933*, seeks to change that. Using Chicago as a case study – after all the city was the home to a host of child-saving institutions like municipal playgrounds and juvenile courts which still shape children's environments – this dissertation tells the forgotten story of this so-called swarm of children. Chicago's mainly working-class, immigrant children shaped the city. They disrupted adult uses of the street and enforced racial segregation. By the 1920s, gangs of school-aged children provided bootleggers with stolen vehicles and a stream of would-be gangsters. *The Swarm* demonstrates that children outside of institutions, overlooked by even historians of childhood, are key to understanding the history of urbanizing, industrializing America during the long Progressive Era

Extended Abstract

Children used the streets of Chicago in large, mobile, destructive, and even dangerous groups. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of children lived in Chicago, constituting almost half the population of the city. While adults often spent their work and leisure time indoors, huge numbers of children labored, played, committed crimes, had sex, and lived outside in city spaces in the 1890s. Children dominated the streets of the city for the next forty years. While children's street cultures may seem romantic and even a positive alternative to the highly prescribed lives of modern children, these subcultures were neither unimportant nor quaint. Children provided newspapers with a supply chain and new leisure spaces with customers. Children derailed trains, enforced strikes, and provoked police officers. Children interfered with adult uses of the street and caused traffic accidents.

Horried middle-class adults consistently referred to these children as 'a swarm'. Reformers, believing swarming children threatened American civilization, thought that moving children into supervised, ordered spaces would transform the swarm into productive citizens. During the Progressive Era, middle-class adults thus created a ranged of institutional and regulatory changes – many of which still shape the environment of children to this day. Yet adults soon discovered that children disrupted child-saving institutions as easily as they disrupted other city spaces.

Outside of institutions, the swarm's destructive power reached its acme in 1919. For years, gangs of children had policed Chicago's geographical color line, violently enforcing racial segregation. In 1919, children's violence played a crucial role in the Chicago Race Riot: a violent extension of everyday racist practices in the city that left scores of black and white Chicagoans dead and thousands of African-Americans without homes. After the riot, the swarm continued into the 1920s, with gangs of school-aged children providing bootleggers with stolen vehicles and a stream of would-be gangsters.

As the swarm grew up, they gradually left the streets – moving into indoor jobs and heterosocial leisure spaces – while on the streets a new generation of children took their place. Despite the best efforts of reformers, only the economic upheavals of the 1930s proved able to disrupt this cycle. For forty odd years, young adults had grown up and out of street places and street activities, but with the Depression, thousands of young men and women could no longer give up the street behaviors of their youth. Instead, hordes of unemployed men and women replaced the swarm, using the tactics of their childhood to survive.

The swarm had a lasting impact on Chicago. Swarming children enforced patterns of segregation which endured long after the swarm had disappeared; they inspired a myriad of reforms including the nation's first juvenile court and the world's first municipal playground system; they even forced adults to reconsider the nature of public and private

space and the meaning of such distinctions. Yet children on the streets remain largely absent from our histories of urban development, reform, and even childhood in the United States.

This thesis tells the story of the swarm and its impact on the city. In doing so, this dissertation examines how Chicago went from a child-rich city in the 1890s to one, by 1933, where children's use of city spaces had dramatically reduced and had become marginalized and problematized. *The Swarm* considers the forces that produced this change: cultural, institutional, legislative, social, and technological. However, this is fundamentally a child-centered study, positioned alongside children to understand how they were able and unable to resist, challenge, and adapt to incursions into their street lives but also to see their power to shape the outdoor city and the adults they encountered there. *The Swarm* thus tells a story of Chicago which is at once recognizable and distinctly unfamiliar.

Conventional histories of childhood begin with adult ideas and institutions. Even those histories that highlight children's agency and resistance do so as a response to adults' plans and ideas. But child-saving reform itself existed as a response to the swarm. Thus, this story begins with children's actions and experiences on the streets of Chicago in the 1890s, the heyday of child-rich Chicago. The first chapter concerns the swarm of the 1890s when hundreds of thousands of children spent their time working, playing, and getting into trouble in the outdoor spaces of the city. While adults dominated indoor spaces, this chapter argues that the swarm ruled the streets forcing adults to adapt.

Only in the second chapter do we turn to adult actions. This chapter considers reform-minded adults' responses to the swarm in the 1890s and early 1900s. Looking into the tenement neighborhoods, concerned adults feared for the next generation growing up on the streets. But if the metaphor of the swarm implied danger, it also suggested that children could turn into productive worker-citizens if placed in the proper environment. This chapter looks at the institutional and regulatory efforts of child-savers in Chicago and nationwide to hivy the swarm. By the First World War, child-savers had created parks and playgrounds, anti-child labor laws, truancy law, an extensive juvenile justice system, and even toyed with the idea of a curfew, all designed to change the spaces of childhood.

The third chapter examines the practice of these new institutions and regulations in Chicago during the 1910s and 1920s. Children forced institutional officials to adapt and compromise their idealized plans. Swarms of children all but ignored new institutional boundaries, crossing them whenever they pleased and bringing undesirable street behaviors with them. As children challenged adult control and appropriated new spaces, conflict between children and child-savers escalated. Adults turned to increasingly coercive methods, and eventually the help of the state, to try to control children.

If children failed to follow adult-created boundaries, this did not mean they ignored all urban borders. In fact, children created and enforced their own urban geographies in this period, slicing the city into gang territories and racially segregated neighborhoods. Chapter four considers these child-enforced boundaries in the 1910s and 1920s, specifically the 'color line' on Chicago's South Side. White children's violence along Wentworth

Avenue in the Great Migration period made it one of the most enduring 'color lines' in the United States. White gangs beat up African-Americans who dared to cross into white immigrant neighborhoods. In 1919, swarm violence reached a dramatic apex with the Chicago Race Riot, a bloody riot lasting for days which resulted in the state reinforcing the "gang line". Young black Chicagoans responded, laying claim to their own territories and asserting their right to use public spaces and prized recreational facilities.

Following the race riot, children's racially motivated violence continued; if anything, white children were emboldened by the riot. Furthermore, as children grew up they took the lessons they learned on the streets with them into their lives as adults. The fifth chapter examines the process of growing up with the swarm in the 1910s and 1920s. As children grew up, their ties to the street loosened. Older 'hoodlums' spent less time on the streets and more in clubhouses and poolrooms than the younger 'punks'. Most young hoods left street life altogether on reaching adulthood as they married and became absorbed into indoor adult work and leisure spaces. As the older generation grew up and off the streets, they made room for a new swarm to replace them.

By the end of the 1920s, institutional and regulatory changes, the rise of the automobile, and changing patterns of suburbanization had all converged to weaken but not eradicate this cycle. But only the economic problems of the 1930s and the demographic decline in children's numbers finally broke the cycle. With no jobs and little resources for marriage and commercial leisure, young people in the 1930s no longer left street activities on adulthood. As more and more adults spent their time on the streets, children's dominance ended. The final chapter examines the changes that occurred to the swarm in the late twenties and early thirties. Although children's use of the streets continued, the mobile, threatening, dominating swarm had gone.

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List of Abbreviations

ASP	Anthony Sorrentino Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago
CCC	Chicago Commons Collection, Special Collections and Research Centre, University of Chicago Library
CCRR	Chicago Commission on Race Relations
CCWE	Chicago Child Welfare Exhibit, 1911 Collection, Special Collections and Research Centre, University of Chicago Library
CHM	Chicago History Museum
CSPC	Chicago South Parks Commission
CWC	Chicago Women's Club
EBP	Ernest Burgess Papers, Special Collections and Research Center, University of Chicago Library
HHC	Hull House Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago
IAC	Italian American Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago
IJR	Institute of Juvenile Research
JDH	Juvenile Detention Home.
JLP	John Landesco Papers, Special Collections and Research Center, University of Chicago Library
JPA	Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago
JPAR	Juvenile Protective Association Records, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago
JRP	Julius Rosenwald Papers, Special Collections and Research Center, University of Chicago Library
LHC	Life Histories Collection, Institute of Juvenile Research, Chicago History Museum
LSRM	Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.
MMSHR	Mary MacDowell Settlement House Records, Chicago History Museum
NCLC	National Child Labor Committee

NCLCC	National Child Labor Committee Collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs
NUSAR	Northwestern University Settlement Association Records, Northwestern University Archives, Northwestern University Library
OSCR	Off the Street Club Records, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago
RSFM	Russell Sage Foundation Microfiche, Rockefeller Archive Center
SAC	Social Athletic Club

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Introduction

In 1893, Agnes Sinclair Holbrook, a young college graduate, moved to Chicago to live in the first settlement house in the United States: Hull House. Holbrook found her new neighborhood, the nineteenth ward, a distressing place. When the settlement published a landmark collection of sociological essays called *Hull House Maps and Papers* two years later, Holbrook herself wrote the introductory comments. Her vivid, sensory essay introduced her readers to one of the poorest of Chicago's immigrant neighborhoods. "Little idea," Holbrook wrote, "can be given of the filthy and rotten tenements, the dingy courts and tumbledown sheds, the foul stables and dilapidated outhouses, the broken sewer-pipes, the piles of garbage fairly alive with diseased odors."¹ The tenements shocked Holbrook with their filth and disease, but it was the inhabitants of the tenements that most disturbed her:

the numbers of children filling every nook, working and playing in every room, eating and sleeping in every window-sill, pouring in and out of every door, and seeming literally to pave every scrap of 'yard'. In one block the writer numbered over seventy-five children in the open street; but the effort proved futile when she tried to keep the count of the little people surging in and out of the passageways, and up and down outside staircases, like a veritable stream of life.²

As Holbrook observed, children filled the tenement neighborhoods. When the new, middle-class inhabitants of the tenement districts got to know their surroundings, many, like Holbrook, commented on the numbers of children "surging" around the streets and outdoor spaces of the tenements. Middle-class observers in these poorer neighborhoods wrote of streets "teeming" with children, children "flowing" around the streets, and children "pouring" in and out of buildings.³ With such mobility and in such large numbers,

¹ Agnes Sinclair Holbrook, 'Map Notes and Comments', *Hull House Maps and Papers*, (1895), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 5; The Investigating Committee of the City Homes Association (text by Robert Hunter), *Tenement Conditions in Chicago* (Chicago, 1901), 150.

reformers didn't see these young urbanites as individual children; time and again they referred to tenement children as a swarm.⁴

Perhaps the most prolific user of the metaphor was muckraker and innovative photographer, Jacob Riis. Riis used the metaphor of swarming children nine times in his book *The Children of the Poor*.⁵ His more influential exposé, *How the Other Half Lives*, which was published two years previously in 1890, described the conditions of tenements in New York, but it influenced reformers and concerned Americans around the country, and it could just as easily have described Chicago's poor. In this book, Riis started his chapter entitled 'The Problem of the Children' with the words: "The problem of the children becomes, in these swarms, to the last degree perplexing." Riis continued "Their very number made one stand aghast... I tried to count the children that swarmed there, but could not."⁶ Reformers like Riis looked upon children on the streets of urban America in the 1890s and named them a swarm.

Children used the streets of Chicago in large, mobile, destructive, and even dangerous groups, just as the language of the swarm suggested. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of children lived in Chicago, constituting almost half the population of the city. While adults often spent their work and leisure time indoors, huge numbers of children labored, played, committed crimes, had sex, and lived outside in city spaces in the 1890s. This so-called swarm of children dominated the streets of the city for the next forty years. While children's street cultures may seem romantic and even a positive alternative to the highly prescribed lives of modern children, these

⁴ See for example Addams, Jane, *Twenty Years in Hull-House with Autobiographical Notes* (New York, 1912); Charles Zueblin, 'The Chicago Ghetto', in *Hull House Maps and Papers*, 95; Benedict, Leonard, *Waifs of the Slums and Their Way Out* (New York, 1907), 33, 45, 149.

⁵ Jacob Riis, *The Children of the Poor*, (New York, 1892), 6, 12, 20, 83, 111, 132, 184, 185, 243.

⁶ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York, 1890), 118.

subcultures were neither unimportant nor quaint. Children provided newspapers with a distribution channel and the new leisure spaces with customers. Children derailed trains, enforced strikes, and provoked police officers. Children interfered with adult uses of the street and caused traffic accidents. Horrified middle-class adults reacted to the swarm with institutional and regulatory changes – many of which still shape the environment of children to this day. Yet adults soon discovered that children disrupted child-saving institutions as easily as they disrupted other city spaces.

Outside of institutions, the swarm's destructive power reached its acme in 1919. For years, gangs of children had policed Chicago's geographical color line, violently enforcing racial segregation. In 1919, children's violence played a crucial role in the Chicago Race Riot: a violent extension of everyday racist practices in the city that left scores of black and white Chicagoans dead and thousands of African-Americans without homes. After the riot, the swarm continued into the 1920s, with gangs of school-aged children providing bootleggers with stolen vehicles and a stream of would-be gangsters.

As the swarm grew up, they gradually left street spaces – moving into indoor jobs and heterosocial leisure spaces – while on the streets a new generation of children took their place. Despite the best efforts of reformers, only the economic upheavals of the 1930s proved able to disrupt this cycle. For forty odd years, young adults had aged up and out of street places and street activities, but with the Depression, suddenly thousands of young men and women did not give up the street behaviors of their youth. Instead, hordes of unemployed men and women replaced the swarm, using the tactics of their childhood to survive.

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playground system; they even forced adults to reconsider the nature of public and private space and the meaning of such distinctions. Yet children on the streets remain largely absent from our histories of urban development, reform, and even childhood in the United States.

This thesis tells the story of the swarm and its impact on the city. In doing so, I examine how Chicago went from a child-rich city in the 1890s to one, by 1933, where children's use of city spaces had dramatically reduced and had become marginalized and problematized. I'm interested in the forces that produced this change: cultural, institutional, legislative, social, and technological. However, this is fundamentally a child-centered study. I position myself and the reader alongside children to understand how children resisted, challenged, and adapted to incursions into their street lives, while also acknowledging children's power to shape the outdoor city. *The Swarm* thus tells a story of Chicago which is at once both recognizable and distinctly unfamiliar.

Islands and Boundaries

The metaphor of the swarm had important ramifications for the development of child-saving reform in the Progressive Era. The language of the swarm rendered street childhood a problem, but it also suggested a solution. The swarm implied that proper adult supervision could transform street-using children into productive citizens in the correct spaces. By moving the swarm into a suitable hive, reformers hoped to transform swarming children into orderly, productive worker-bees: no longer dangerous but contributing to, rather than endangering, society.⁷ Once off the streets and in other more suitable spaces, child-savers believed groups of children would no longer present a problem to urban society.

⁷ Jane Addams referred to the children who helped her clean the Nineteenth Ward as working like little bees. 'Waron Dirty Places', *Chicago Tribune* (May 3, 1895), 1.

To transform poor, immigrant children into citizens, Progressive Era child-savers created places specifically designed for them. While few institutional spaces for children existed prior to the 1890s, by the First World War, middle-class reform-minded groups had created an array of new places for children – separate juvenile justice systems, municipal playgrounds, organized recreation clubs, compulsory schools – as well as a host of laws designed to remove children from “adult” spaces including workshops, factories, and mines. Together these reforms attempted to create so-called “islands of childhood”.

In a 2005 essay on children’s spaces, historian of education Helen Penn argued that “One of the most significant changes in the urban landscape over the last century has been the disappearance of children.”⁸ As children disappeared from the streets, they increasingly spent their time in juvenile-centered institutions. Thus, according to most scholars of childhood, modern children exist in islands, isolated from adults and the adult world. Borrowing the concept of “islanding of children” from sociologists Helga and Hartmut Zeiher, historians have understood the history of childhood since the nineteenth century as one of increasing isolation within institutional islands specifically designed for juveniles.⁹ As historian Patrick Ryan explained in 2008: “the apparatus of the modern state is dedicated to unprecedented levels of service, regulation, protection, and segregation based on the age of individuals.”¹⁰ Within the highly institutionalized modern world, Zeiher and Zeiher argued, children are increasingly isolated from each other as well: there is, in the words of John Gillis, no space for a “shared time or territory of childhood, no

⁸ Penn, Helen, ‘Spaces Without Children’, in Dudek, Mark (ed.) *Children’s Spaces* (Burlington, 2005), 180

⁹ John R. Gillis, ‘The Islanding of Children - Reshaping the Mythical Landscapes of Childhood’, in Marta Gutman and Ning de Connick-Smith (ed.), *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children* (Piscataway, N.J., 2008), 316-330; Helga Zeiher, ‘Children’s Islands in Space and Time: The Impact of Spatial Differentiation on Children’s Ways of Shaping Social Life’, in M. du Bois-Reymond, Heinz Sunkel, et al. (ed.), *Childhood in Empire* (New York, 2001), 139-160.

¹⁰ Ryan, Patrick J., ‘How New is the “New” Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of a Paradigm Shift’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38:4 (Spring, 2008), 553.

mainland of childhood, only infinite archipelagos of stranded children, ever more dependent on adults to transport them from island to island”.¹¹ As many of these “islands” emerged in the United States in the Progressive Era, a corresponding body of historiography has also developed. Classic historians of childhood such as Anthony Platt, and Viviana Zelizer focused on the Progressive Era, demonstrating, in Zelizer’s case, that Progressive Era American society transformed childhood and dramatically expanded adult and state oversight of children’s lives.¹²

The institutions that reformers created islanded children’s activities as well as children’s bodies. Children’s work, as reformers envisioned, should take place in schools, and children’s play, in supervised playgrounds and clubs. In reform schools and homes, reformers also sought to separate delinquent children from both adult criminals and other, non-delinquent, children. Rather than questioning these assumptions, historians of childhood have replicated such institutional boundaries in their work. Histories of child labor rarely speak to histories of children’s leisure and vice versa, while histories of juvenile delinquency also remain isolated.¹³ In addition, most historians of childhood study children within institutional spaces.¹⁴ Orphanages, playgrounds, juvenile justice

¹¹ Gillis, *The Islanding of Children*, 316.

¹² Platt, Anthony M., *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (Chicago, 1969); Zelizer, Viviana A. Rotman, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York, 1985). For more on the importance of this period see Marten, James, (ed.), *Children and Youth during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (New York, 2014) and Marten, James, *Childhood and Child Welfare in the Progressive Era: A Brief History with Documents* (New York, 2004).

¹³ Textbooks and readers of historical childhood often reproduce this islanding, structuring books around separate activities, having individual chapters on play, work, schooling etc. See for example Marten, James, (ed.), *Children and Youth*, and Fass, Paula S., and Mason, Mary Ann, (eds.) *Childhood in America* (New York, 2000).

¹⁴ Historians such as Dominick Cavallo and David Macleod have studied recreation through playgrounds and the Boy Scouts and the YMCA, while Jane Humphries and Priscilla Clement have looked at child labor within the walls of factories and mills. Historians of juvenile delinquency, such as Anne Knupfer and Michael Rembis, have studied delinquency from within reformatories and juvenile courts. Cavallo, Dominick, *Muscles and Morals : Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia, 1981); Macleod, David I., *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners* (Madison, 1983); Humphries, Jane, *Childhood and Child Labor in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010); Clement, Priscilla Ferguson, *Growing*

institutions, and schools have all served as typical settings for histories of childhood. Within these spaces, historians have not only demonstrated the coercive intrusions of adults and the state into children's lives, but have increasingly focused on the ability of children to resist adult power.¹⁵ But even when children in these stories are "agents", not just victims of adult oppression, they remain trapped by the boundaries of institutional islands. The supposed islanding of children since the Progressive Era has thus led to a comparable islanding of the historiography of childhood.

A small group of scholars have chosen to look outside of traditional spaces and consider children in interstitial places such as city streets. Colin Ward's *The Child in the City*, although less historically focused than much of his other work, has provided a framework for historians keen to see children in non-institutional places in the city. Published in 1979, the book has had a lasting significance in showing how children's activities "colonise" the city.¹⁶ Another pioneering historian of children in urban space, David Nasaw, built on Ward's work in his book from 1985, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play*. Determined to look at the way children in the past actually used space, Nasaw documented children's activities in American cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He recreated children's lives outside of either homes or formal juvenile-centered institutions, and revealed powerful young historical actors able even to take on William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer during the 1899 newsboys' strike in New York.¹⁷

Pains: Children in the Industrial Age, 1850-1890 (New York, 1997); Knupfer, Anne M., *Reform and Resistance: Gender, Delinquency, and America's First Juvenile Court* (New York, 2001); Rembis, Michael, *Defining Deviance: Sex, Science and Delinquent Girls, 1890-1960* (Chicago, 2011).

¹⁵ For some examples see Chavez-Garcia, Miroslava, *States of Delinquency: Race and Science in the Making of California's Juvenile Justice System* (Berkeley, 2012); Rembis, *Defining Deviance*; Goodman, Cary, *Choosing Sides: Playground and Street Life on the Lower East Side* (New York, 1979); Hines, Michael, "'They do not know how to play': Reformers' Expectations and Children's Realities on the First Progressive Playgrounds of Chicago," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 10:2 (Spring, 2017), 206-227.

¹⁶ Ward, C., *The Child in the City* (Harmondsworth, 1979), 87.

¹⁷ Nasaw, David, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play* (New York, 1985).

Since 1985, a number of historians have considered children on the streets. For example, Timothy Gilfoyle, Peter Baldwin, and Howard Chudacoff have studied street usage by children in the United States, while Anne Davin wrote about working-class urban childhood in London.¹⁸ Simon Sleight's study from 2013 concerning children's street cultures in Melbourne between 1870 and 1914 has perhaps done the most to demonstrate that children outside of institutions were powerful and important historical actors. Addressing the over-emphasis on formal institutions in the history of childhood and dissatisfied with histories of Melbourne which ignored its large juvenile population, Sleight focused on the questions of how children and young people, not just adults' ideas about children, used and produced spaces in the city of Melbourne from 1870 to 1914. The young people of Melbourne whom he brought into the limelight were every bit as important in the formation of Melbourne's urban culture as the adults of the city.

These scholars have built on the work of children's geographers who have demonstrated how childhood, in addition to being socially constructed, is also spatially produced.¹⁹ American society deems only certain spaces suitable for children, and

¹⁸ Gilfoyle, Timothy J., 'Street-Rats and Gutter-Snipes: Child Pickpockets and Street Culture in New York City, 1850-1900', *Journal of Social History* 37:4 (Summer, 2004), 853-882; Chudacoff, Howard P., *Children at Play: an American History* (New York, 2007); Baldwin, Peter C., *Domesticating the Street: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford, 1850-1930* (Columbus, 1999); Davin, Anne, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (London, 1996); Sleight, Simon, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space in Melbourne, 1870-1914* (London, 2013). A more substantial number of historians have considered the street cultures of older youth, particularly those in gangs. See for example, Diamond, Andrew, *Mean Streets: Chicago Youths and the Everyday Struggle For Empowerment in the Multiracial City, 1908-1969* (Berkeley, 2009); Humphries, Stephen, *Hooligans or Rebels?: An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth, 1889-1939* (Oxford, 1981). This dissertation also builds on the work of other urban historians whose focus is not directly on children's street cultures, but who consider how young people have used street spaces as part of a broader history. See for example Jablonsky, Thomas J. *Pride in the Jungle: Community and everyday Life in Back of the Yards Chicago* (Baltimore, 1993); Fisher, Colin, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago* (Chapel Hill, 2015); Chatelain, Marcia, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Durham, 2015); Baldwin, *Domesticating the Street*.

¹⁹ For example see S.L. Holloway and G. Valentine, (eds.) *Children's Geographies : Playing, Living, Learning* (London, 2000); S.C. Aitken, *Geographies of Young People : The Morally Contested Spaces of Identity* (London, 2001).

children's youth, innocence, and other attributes are tied to the spaces they inhabit. Children's geographers have been more attuned than historians to the importance of children's own understandings of space. Kim Rasmussen's work in educational research has demonstrated how children relate not only to official places provided by adults (what Rasmussen termed "places for children"), but also to informal places, often unnoticed by adults ("children's places"). Rasmussen contended, while the history of childhood remains a history of institutions, that is "places for children", it is difficult to see and examine the meaning of "children's places".²⁰

Despite this scholarship, children's street culture remains peripheral to the historiographical understanding of childhood and youth in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. In part this is because historians of children outside institutions have often chosen not to write in conversation with the history of childhood reform. As such, the stories that these two strands of the historiography tell are quite different. In institutional spaces, children appear as vulnerable and oppressed, only occasionally able to resist the growing adult and state control; while on the streets, historians have written of powerful young people, living often quite separate lives from adults. When histories of children out of doors do mention institutions, they frequently do so negatively – portraying spaces like playgrounds, clubs, and even compulsory schooling in opposition to the independent mobility of street-frequenting youth. Histories of outdoor childhood have suffered from a romanticized view of street life and have framed their stories as the lamentable loss of an independent childhood. Reviewers criticized Nasaw, for example, for basically writing children as Horatio Alger characters informed by "a latent romantic individualism" while Carey Goodman, who wrote a history of street play and playgrounds in New York, argued that

²⁰ K. Rasmussen, 'Places for Children, Children's Places', *Childhood*, 11:2 (2004), 155-173.

adults forced children to choose between playgrounds and the streets, leading to the “destruction” of children’s independent street life.²¹

This dissertation builds on the work of historians like Nasaw, Goodman, and Sleight, but I argue that the strict dichotomy between institutional and non-institutional space is an artificial one that has created another historiographical island around the streets. By conforming to adult distinctions between public and private spaces, institutional and non-institutional spaces, much of this scholarship has relied upon and reinforced adult geographies and masked children’s own understandings of the city. This segregation can have important consequences, as sociologist Catherine Robinson wrote in 2000:

The ways in which street-frequenting young people understand and construct space have not been given the focus they deserve. There has tended to be an emphasis on the ways in which young people enter and threaten or contest already constructed spaces with their own meanings or spatial requirements. This is a view which potentially (re)produces street-frequenting young people’s marginalization in hegemonic space, as young people are effectively located outside the process through which space is produced.²²

In addition to continuing political consequences, the prioritization of adult understandings of geography inherent to much scholarship has had important historiographical consequences, distorting our understanding not just of children’s cultures but also of historical spaces. To give a brief example, consider Thomas Jablonsky’s spatial history of the Back of the Yards, a South Chicago neighborhood, in the interwar years. Jablonsky argued that the actual physical environment helped define neighborhood edges and explained that train tracks proved such enduring neighborhood boundaries as they provided a physical obstacle to movement. In children’s geography of the city, however, the tracks did no such thing. As this dissertation shows, children frequently used and

²¹ Nasaw, *Children of the City*; Ryan ‘How New’; Goodman, *Choosing Sides*; see also Riney-Kehrberg, Pamela, *The Nature of Childhood: An Environmental History of Growing up in America since 1865* (Lawrence, 2014).

²² C. Robinson, ‘Creating Space, Creating Self: Street-Frequenting Youth in the City and Suburbs’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 3:4 (2000), 430.

crossed railroad tracks, in fact they became such important sites in children's cultures that rival gangs fought over them, thus enforcing neighborhood boundaries through their repeated use and conflict over such spaces. Conflict and violence are part of this story, but this dissertation neither pathologizes nor romanticizes children's street culture.²³ Instead, I examine a spectrum of children's activities that occurred around the shared geography of the city.

Considering children's geographies reveals different stories of urban development as well as demonstrating that the boundaries between institutional and non-institutional spaces were not as concrete as reformers wished or historians have assumed. By focusing on children's mobility, this dissertation counters the historiographic islanding of "children's places", "places for children", and children's activities. To do so, my work synthesizes the disparate literatures on children's work, play, and delinquent behaviors in the Progressive Era. After all, these activities were never truly separate: on the streets children sold newspapers one minute, shot craps the next, picked pockets in the third, and fit all these activities around or instead of school. This dissertation also follows children in and out of institutions and the street, showing how children's lives encompassed both spaces.²⁴ Although the swarm's main habitat was Chicago's street space, children moved across the boundaries of institutional and non-institutional spaces. To shift the conventional narrative of urban childhood, I place children's geography at the center, following swarming children in and out of street space, homes, and juvenile-centered

²³ This thesis builds on the work of feminist historians like Christine Stansell who have demonstrated that, for historical women, cities were places of danger and possibility. Stansell, Christine, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York, 1986).

²⁴ Following the convention of both concerned reformers and the children themselves, I use the term "the streets" in an expansive manner as a shorthand for streets and other outdoor spaces of the city not designated as specific places-for-children. This definition includes alleys, vacant lots, railroad yards, and the lakeshore, but not playgrounds, parks, or schoolyards that reformers designed as juvenile-centered institutions. The "streets" in this definition aren't simply "public spaces", in part because many of these places were private but also because children in this study would not have conceptualized streets as "public spaces".

institutions. Despite reformer's plans, the swarm refused to be islanded and proved very difficult to confine. Instead of framing this dissertation around adult boundaries of urban space, the swarm's ordering of the city has dictated my research.

Hidden in Plain Sight

The long Progressive Era from the 1880s to the 1920s continues to capture the interest of historians as changes that occurred in that period had long-lasting impacts on American society. In this period, American society produced the first institutions of a welfare state, created the Jim Crow system of racial segregation, engaged in a number of imperialistic wars, and passed four constitutional amendments including Prohibition. During the Progressive Era, the United States underwent dramatic transformations: the frontier closed; the country became a fully industrialized and majority urban nation; millions of immigrants (mainly from eastern and southern Europe) settled in the cities; hundreds of thousands more African-Americans migrated from rural to urban areas and from South to North; women entered the public sphere and demanded a voice in politics; and streetcars, automobiles, radios, and movies all transformed how Americans lived and played.

Faced with such dramatic changes, Americans across the country genuinely feared for the future of their civilization. Historians such as Kristen Hoganson and Gary Gerstle have shown that Americans at the start of the twentieth century believed that American civilization rested on the 'manly character' of its citizens. Not only was industrialization and urbanization creating weak or wicked white American men, countless immigrants from eastern and southern Europe unfit for self-government were streaming into the country, undermining the civic virtue of its citizens. Both Hoganson and Gerstle stressed the importance of war in the reinvigoration of American civic virtue: war would transform

overcivilized men into virtuous soldiers and would transform millions of new immigrants into patriots.²⁵

Nevertheless, much of the vast reform movement of the Progressive Era sought to save and protect a new generation of Americans. Making sure that children grew up “right” was just as important to strengthening American civilization as the imperialistic wars of this period. Children roaming the streets of America’s cities, particularly immigrant children, threatened the foundations of the country. Concerned urbanites, like Jane Addams, feared children would fall into vice and the “murky fire of crime.” Boys would supposedly become criminals, pimps, and vagrants, while girls would fall into lives of prostitution.²⁶ Worse still, even those sympathetic to the immigrant communities of Chicago, like Jane Addams, felt the immigrant family could not cope with the pressures of modern urban life and was disintegrating, taking parental control and social order with it. As Addams wrote in *The Spirit of Youth*, “We certainly cannot expect the fathers and mothers who have come to the city from farms or who have emigrated from other lands to appreciate or rectify [the dangers the city posed to urban youth]”.²⁷ Compared with the rapidly growing numbers of immigrants, native-born, white Americans in the late nineteenth century were having fewer and fewer children leading to Theodore Roosevelt charging them with “the unpardonable crime” of “race suicide”.²⁸ As poor, un-Americanized youth visibly outnumbered native-born children, the future of the white race in America seemed doomed to corruption. If the country was to prosper, immigrant

²⁵ Hoganson, Kristen, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, 1998); Gerstle, Gary, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 2001).

²⁶ See for example, Clopper, E. N., *Child Labor in City Streets*, (New York, 1913); Lovejoy, Owen, ‘Child Labor and The Night Messenger Service’, *The Survey*, 24 (1910), 311-316; Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil in Chicago: A Study of Existing Conditions* (Chicago, 1911), 35-36.

²⁷ Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (New York, 1909), 15. See also Breckinridge, Sophonisba P., and Abbott, Edith, *The Delinquent Child and the Home* (New York, 1912).

²⁸ Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Twisted Eugenics,’ *Outlook* 106 (1904), 32.

children required Americanization, guidance and protection from the city. The stakes in child-saving were supremely high, leading a prominent judge to unironically call the founding of the Kansas City Juvenile Court in 1919 part of “a new age of citizen building ... indispensable in the battle for the nation’s destiny.”²⁹ Hiving the swarm was thus key to the health of future American civilization.

Yet, despite the best efforts of reformers, new juvenile-centered institutions failed to control or contain children. Following children in and out of institutions reveals neither a story of successful intervention into children’s lives nor a story of control and the power of the state. Instead, *The Swarm* uncovers a blundering state forced to adapt and often resorting to violence and coercion in its attempt to control children.

While not typical, Chicago was the obvious choice for this study. Chicago seemed to many Americans to symbolize the changing shape of their nation – rapidly growing, dominated by industry, and a home of immigrants and migrants. Chicago had just become the second city in America in 1890, with over a million inhabitants. Nowhere else rivalled Chicago in its extraordinary growth. While the population of New York remained far beyond Chicago’s throughout the nineteenth century, many Americans believed it was just a matter of time before Chicago overtook it. To late nineteenth century Americans, Chicago embodied the rise of new, urban, industrial America.

But Chicago’s growth went hand-in-hand with major urban problems. Pollution, labor unrest, disease, and vast numbers of unAmericanized newcomers worried the middle-class population. While child-saving was well established in New York earlier in

²⁹ Ward, Geoff K., *The Black Child Savers: Racial Democracy and Juvenile Justice* (Chicago, 2012), 32. For more on Americanization and Progressive-Era reform see Tanenhaus, David, *Juvenile Justice in the Making* (Oxford, 2004); Wegner, Kathryn L., ‘Progressive reformers and the democratic origins of citizenship education in the United States during the First World War,’ *History of Education* 42:6, (2013), 713-728; Bullard, Katharine S., *Civilizing the Child: Discourses of Race, Nation and Child Welfare in America* (Lanham, 2015).

the century, by the 1890s, Chicago emerged suddenly as the new focus for reform networks. Home to some of the most prominent reformers of the era, including Edith and Grace Abbott, Florence Kelley, and, of course, Jane Addams, Chicago's reputation as the heart of child-saving innovation drew would-be reformers from across the nation and around the world in search of inspiration, training, and advice. Playground specialists visited Chicago's parks and playgrounds, while reform-minded sociologists, social workers, and criminologists came specifically to study at the University of Chicago. These men and women would return to diverse homes and adapt Chicago's child-saving innovations to their own city settings. Thus, Chicago provided a model for child-savers around the world: indeed, many of the ways adults regulate children's environments to this day emerged in this forty-year period, in this one mid-western city.

As African-American novelist, Richard Wright observed in 1945, "Chicago is the known city."³⁰ All these reformers, sociologists, and social workers who converged on the city, collected data and produced research on life in the city cementing Chicago's role as the model in urban sociology. Many trained or worked at the university of Chicago under the supervision of sociologists such as Ernest Burgess and Robert Park. Burgess, Park, and their colleagues at the Chicago School of Sociology specialized in urban ecology and conducted research into urban life. They investigated diverse aspects of the lives of Chicago's poor, immigrant communities. Chicago's many settlement houses provided bases and support for these researchers and some of the earliest sociology from Chicago was written by settlement house residents (including Agnes Holbrook).³¹ Historians have explored the female-centered reform networks and the developing sociology of the

³⁰ Wright, Richard, 'Introduction' in Drake, St. Clair, and Cayton, Horace R., *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York, 1945), xviii.

³¹ Chicago was the foremost city in the nation for the settlement house movement. It was home to settlements such as Chicago Commons, Northwestern University Settlement, Frederick Douglas House, University of Chicago Settlement, and, of course, Hull House.

settlement houses, but we still know little about the details of daily life in settlement houses: the daily activities of settlement workers, how successful their activities were, and how their work was received by local communities.³²

Children appear repeatedly in the papers from settlement houses in the Progressive Era. From kindergartens to clubs to overseeing delinquent children's probation, settlement houses provided a range of services and programs aimed at neighborhood children. Perhaps more surprisingly, however, children also feature frequently in some of the most historically and historiographically important reports and publications of the era including: the Chicago Commission on Race Relation's report *The Negro in Chicago*; Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*; Jane Addams' *Twenty Years at Hull House* and Edith Abbott's *The Tenements of Chicago*.³³ Publications such as these have formed the basis for much of our understanding of the period, particularly in urban history. Each of these reports include children, and by no means in peripheral roles. The commissioners, muckrakers, sociologists, and settlement house residents who produced the era's most influential publications saw children as central to their work and to their understanding of urban America.

Adults could hardly fail to miss children on the streets of Chicago. This was a period of extremely high juvenile numbers. The proportion of Chicagoans under the age of twenty

³² For example see Flanagan, Maureen A., *Seeing With Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871-1933* (Princeton, 2002); Williams, Joyce E., and Maclean, Vicky M., *Settlement Sociology in the Progressive Years: Faith, Science and Reform* (Leiden, 2015); Deegan, Mary Jo, *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918* (New Brunswick, 1988); Sklar, K. K. "Hull House Maps and Papers: Social Science as Women's Work in the 1890's," in Bulmer, Martin, Bales, Kevin, and Sklar, K. K., (eds.) *The Social Survey Movement in Historical Perspective, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1992), 111-147; Sklar, K. K., 'Hull House as a Community of Women Reformers in the 1890's', *Signs* 10:4 (Summer 1985), 257-277; Muncy, Robyn, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York, 1994).

³³ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and A Race Riot* (Chicago, 1922); Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*; Addams, Jane, *Twenty Years in Hull-House with Autobiographical Notes* (New York, 1912); Abbot, Edith, (ed.) *The Tenements of Chicago 1908-1935*, (1936).

reached its all-time high in the 1890s. Figure 1 shows the proportion of Chicago's population under twenty from 1870 to 2010, according to the US Bureau of the Census, peaking at forty-three percent in 1890. Census data notoriously underestimates the number of young children, and reports by the Board of Education by 1900 counted approximately one hundred and eighty thousand (over a quarter) more minors than the census.³⁴ Thus in 1900, when the population of Chicago approximated 1.7 million, the Cook County Board of Education counted a staggering (and staggeringly precise) 873,247 Chicagoans under the age of twenty-one: around half the city's total population. According to this count, about a quarter of the city was under ten years of age.³⁵ The numbers used in Figure 1, derived from the US Bureau of the Census publications, are thus best understood as minimums. Even so, only New York had a greater total number of children in the 1890s and proportionally Chicago still ranked higher.³⁶

³⁴ Board of Education, Annual Report of 1900, Illinois State Archives, Springfield Illinois; US Bureau of the Census, *United States Life Tables, 1890, 1901, 1910, 1901-1910*, (Washington D.C., 1921); US Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing, (1890-2010)* accessed online at <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> accessed (09.05.2017); United States Census Bureau, 'The Undercount of Young Children', (working paper), (February, 2014), available online at www.census.gov (accessed 11/07/2017).

³⁵ US Bureau of the Census, *United States Life Tables*.

³⁶ According to the census 38.6% of new York was under the age of twenty in 1890, compare this to Chicago's figures in Figure 1. *Report on the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census (1890)* available online <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> (accessed 04/09/2017).

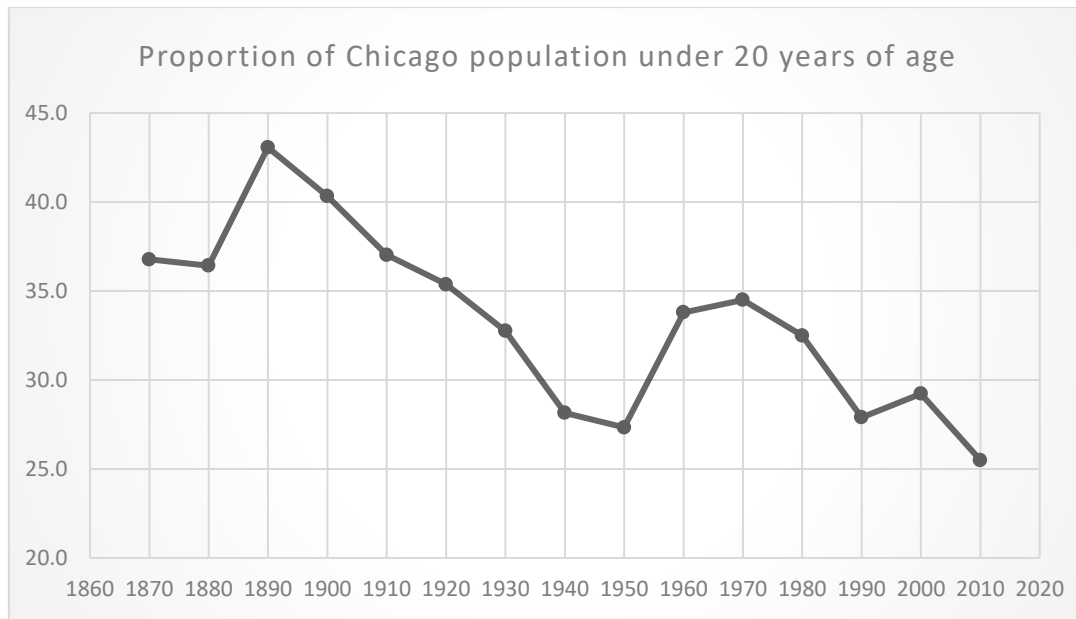


Figure 1: Approximate proportion of Chicago's population under the age of twenty from 1870 to 2010.

The proportion of the population of Chicago under the age of twenty in 1890 was, therefore, at least forty-three percent and possibly as high as fifty percent. Now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the proportion of under twenty-year-olds to the population is around a quarter, just more than the proportion of Chicagoans under the age of ten at the turn of the twentieth century.³⁷ Chicago's demographics from the late nineteenth century are more akin to booming cities in the developing world than any American city since the Second World War.³⁸ The proportion of children in Chicago in the 1890s dwarfed even the post-World War Two baby boom, when the proportion of young people in Chicago peaked again below thirty-five percent. Despite this, historians have pointed to the Baby Boomers' demographic size to argue for its importance. As historians Charles Strickland and Andrew Ambrose wrote: "In fact, it may be that the baby boom generation, because of its sheer size, left a greater mark on the life of the nation than any

³⁷ US Bureau of the Census, *United States Life Tables*.

³⁸ 85% of the world's youth (under 25) now live in developing countries. It is estimated that, by 2030, sixty percent of global urban dwellers will be under the age of twenty-five. Ruble, Blair A., Tulchin, Joseph F., et. al. (eds.), *Youth Explosion in Developing World Cities: Approaches to Reducing Poverty and Conflict in an Urban Age* (Washington D.C., 2003)

comparable age group in American history.”³⁹ But, not only was the 1890s generation proportionally larger, they were also a much more independent group than the baby boomers, spending a far greater time away from the supervision and control of adults than any generation after the 1930s.

Generational size also depended on when childhood ended, sometimes difficult to ascertain as the category of “child” was and is quite fluid. With the publication of Philippe Aries’s *Centuries of Childhood*, the new social studies of childhood have argued that “child” is a socially constructed category: what “child” means and who it includes is historically and culturally specific.⁴⁰ Even within a particular time and place, “child” can have a variety of even contradictory meanings. In Chicago, during the Progressive Era, the juvenile court defined a juvenile as a boy under seventeen-years-old or a girl under eighteen-years-old. Child labor regulation was more varied, but by 1900 it was illegal to employ children under fourteen in Illinois. The state law prohibited young men from marrying before the age of twenty-one without parental consent, and young women before the age of eighteen, although with their parents’ blessing men and women could marry at seventeen- and fourteen-years-old respectively.⁴¹ For the first time, adults were recognizing adolescence as a distinct stage of life, following the theories of G. Stanley Hall whose major book on the subject *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime and Religion* was published in 1904.⁴² Hall loosely defined adolescence as starting around twelve to thirteen and ending in the early- to mid-twenties. Then, as now, race,

³⁹ Strickland, Charles E., and Ambrose, Andrew M., ‘The Baby Boom, Prosperity, and the Changing Worlds of Children, 1945-1963’, in Hawes, Joseph M., and Hiner, N. Ray, (eds.) *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Westport, 1985), 533 -586; For an overview see Mintz, Steven, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, 2004).

⁴⁰ Aries, Philippe, *Centuries of Childhood* (London, 1969).

⁴¹ This was raised to eighteen for males and sixteen for females in 1905. See ‘Who Can I Marry? A Chicago History’ accessed at www.chipublib.org (26.04.2018).

⁴² Hall, G. Stanley, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, vol. i, ii, (New York, 1904).

gender, and class all impacted on when a child ceased being a child and became an adult. Thus when nineteen-year-old Nathan Leopold and eighteen-year-old Richard Loeb kidnapped and murdered Bobby Franks in 1924, the newspaper coverage of this “trial of the century” consistently referred to white, upper-class young men as “boys” even as the nation continued to treat poor, young, black delinquents as adult criminals.⁴³

In this dissertation, I use an inclusive definition of child to reflect the nebulous nature of the term during the Progressive Era. The young people who appear in the following pages range in ages from infancy to their early twenties. This broadly corresponds to the definition of children employed by the Chicago Juvenile Court and, from its opening in 1915, the Boys’ Court. Where possible, I specify the ages of the children discussed. In general, the majority are of street-frequenting age: old enough for parents to allow them out unsupervised (around age six or seven) but not yet absorbed into the indoor worlds of work and heterosocial leisure which took hold in the late teens.

Between 1890 and 1930, the children reigned on the streets of urban America. Although the swarm has largely remained absent from historiography, it was forefront in the minds and the writings of some of the most influential Progressives. Looking upon the swarm, white middle-class adults feared for American civilization and were motivated to reform American society from the streets of the city outwards. But because children had the ability to ignore and transcend adult spatializations, this is not a story of either successful intervention into children’s lives or of the enormous, coercive growth of the state. Children outside institutions frustrated the plans of reformers and state actors and forced adults to adapt to their plans of the city.

⁴³ Fass, Paula S., *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America* (Cambridge, 1997); Ward, *The Black Child Savers*. For a recent analysis of black children and the Chicago Juvenile Court see Agyepong, Tera Eva, *The Criminalization of Black Children: Race, Gender, and Delinquency in Chicago’s Juvenile Justice System, 1899-1945* (Chapel Hill, 2018).

Children in the Archives

Children swarm through the archives, just as they did on the streets of Progressive Era Chicago. Because of the swarm's prominence on the streets and in the minds of reformers and social scientists, children and even children's voices are everywhere in the archival material. I encountered children in all the places I looked: from the red-light districts covered by Chicago Vice Commission to Al Capone's Syndicate in its suburban home of Cicero. In addition to the reports already discussed, I consulted newspapers and court cases, advertisements and photographs, oral histories and movies, parenting guides and "bad boy" novels. Much of my material came from new child-saving and reform institutions, including the annual reports of settlement houses. The sources I used in this study were thus as varied and wide-ranging as the children's experiences themselves.

The bulk of the material I consulted came from the staggering amounts of research produced by sociologists and social workers in Chicago in this period. Many, like Frederic Thrasher and Clifford Shaw, were particularly interested in juvenile delinquency and the city. Some of their research was published and books such as Thrasher's 1927 book, *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago*, provide insight into children's experiences outside of institutions in the early twentieth century.⁴⁴ In addition to published studies, I have made extensive use of unpublished research materials collected by sociologists, particularly the collection of 133 life histories of juvenile delinquents now housed at the Chicago History Museum (CHM). Often hundreds of pages long, the life history interviewees detailed countless aspects of their childhoods including: their family relationships, life in immigrant communities, institutional life, hetero- and homosexual experiences, schooling, gang life, and the changing city.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Thrasher, Frederic M., *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1936).

⁴⁵ Surprisingly give the wealth of information they contain, historians have largely overlooked the IJR life history collection. Two exceptions are Salerno, Roger A., *Boyhood and Delinquency in 1920s*

Anonymization was a condition of access to the case files at the CHM even when the interviewees have already been anonymized. I have chosen to pseudonymize. I created a database of names that appeared in the life histories and then allocated each interviewee a new name, following gendered and ethnic naming patterns, by keeping the very typically Italian names Italian, for example. Following the convention of case workers in the 1920s and 1930s, I use first names and initials of the pseudonymized children. Case workers tended to use diminutized names like “Laddie”, “Benny”, and even nicknames like “Catseyes” to describe their interviewees, adding to the construction of these young men and women as children.

Because researchers were well aware that interviewees might lie, Clifford Shaw, who oversaw the collection of many of the life histories, urged case workers to compile a complete case history to accompany the boy’s ‘own story’.⁴⁶ This case would include family histories, medical histories, psychiatric and psychological findings, official records of arrests and commitments, and “any other verifiable material” – some of which remain included in the collection. But, the veracity of the story was not really the point of the interview. As Shaw wrote:

The validity and value of the personal document are not dependent upon its objectivity or veracity. It is not expected that the delinquent will necessarily describe his life-situations objectively. On the contrary, it is desired that his story will reflect his own personal attitudes and interpretations, for it is just these personal factors which are so important in the study and treatment of the case. Thus, rationalizations, fabrications, prejudices, exaggerations are quite as valuable as objective descriptions, provided, of course, that these reactions be properly identified and classified.⁴⁷

The role of the interviewer was thus to transcribe the child’s voice and to separately provide a discussion and analysis of the interview. The drive to uncover children’s “voices” in the

Chicago: A Sociological Study of Juvenile Jack-Rollers and Gender (Jefferson, NC, 2017) and Bennett, James, *Oral History and Delinquency: The Rhetoric of Criminology* (Chicago, 1981).

⁴⁶ See for example Sutherland, Edwin H., ‘Review of *The Natural History of a Delinquent Career* by Clifford R. Shaw and Maurice E. Moore’, *American Journal of Sociology* 38:1 (July, 1932), 135-136.

⁴⁷ Shaw, Clifford R., *The Jack-Roller: A Delinquent Boy’s Own Story* (Chicago, 1930)

archives, along with a desire to demonstrate children's "agency", has become the foundation of much of the new social studies of childhood.⁴⁸ Although the "voices" of children in these interviews are mediated, edited, and collected by adults, they are not straightforward Foucauldian confessions. As Michael Rembis demonstrated in his study of examinations of "deviant" girls at the State Industrial School for Delinquent Girls at Geneva, Illinois, even the ritual of the examination became an arena where girls could "express their demands, desires, concerns, and troubles."⁴⁹ The collection of these sources involved a push and pull between interviewer and interviewee where children used lying, truth-telling, and humor to determine the course of the interview. Like case workers, I used a wide range of sources in addition to the life histories to complement children's voices in the life histories.

Using an expansive source base also allowed me to look beyond the demographic skew of the life histories. The life history interviewees were children who had been in reform institutions. Most were born in the early 1910s, though some were much older. The vast majority of the interviewees were white, male, working-class, first- or second-generation immigrants. Just one interviewee was identified as African-American and only two as female. Of the others, many of the interviewees were identified by their ethnicity and, while often written in the first person, it seems that they were exclusively male.

This demographic weighting, except for the institutionalization, is replicated across the other primary material as well, although not to the same degree. Photographs of children on the streets, for example those taken by anti-child labor photographer Lewis Hine, predominantly depicted young white males.⁵⁰ When mixed-sex groups did appear,

⁴⁸ Ryan, 'How New'.

⁴⁹ Rembis, *Defining Deviance*, 93.

⁵⁰ See Kubie, Oenone, 'Reading Lewis Hine's Photography of Child Street Labour, 1906-1918', *Journal of American Studies* 50:4 (Nov., 2016), 873-897.

the girls were frequently captured on the periphery of the images, watching as the boys in the center played and worked.⁵¹

Girls and middle-class children certainly used public spaces within the city, yet no group had the same freedoms and the same disposable income as working-class boys. Child labor abounded throughout the United States by 1890, and Chicago was no exception. With the onset of a general economic depression across the country in 1893, which hit Chicago hard in the aftermath of the World's Fair, the numbers of children working rose yet further, as working-class families struggled with the problem of mass unemployment.⁵² Both parents and the law restricted girls' ability to earn an independent income when compared to boys' relative freedom, especially in the street trades. Girls more frequently than boys did unpaid labor in the house and, when they did work, girls often had to hand over their whole pay checks. Very few girls worked in the street trades as newspaper sellers or messengers. Furthermore, parents were more likely to limit their daughters' street play than sons', especially in strict immigrant communities.⁵³ Yet, despite the greater parental authority exercised upon girls, historians know more about their street culture than that of working-class boys.⁵⁴ As for children of the middle-class, since parents controlled familial income, few had the money to use city space like working-class children, while increased schooling and greater supervision also limited independence.

Young white working-class immigrant boys dominated the streets of Chicago in this period. In the 1890s, the vast majority of Chicago's population, around two-thirds of

⁵¹ For examples see Trachtenberg, Alan (ed.), *America and Lewis Hine: Photographs 1904-1940* (New York, 1977) and chapter 1.

⁵² Kelley, Florence, and Stevens, Alzina P., 'Wage-Earning Children', in *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895), 49-78.

⁵³ See chapter 1

⁵⁴ See, for example, Peiss, Kathy, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986); Stansell, *City of Women*; Rembis, *Defining Deviance*; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*; Chatelain, *South Side Girls*.

Chicagoans, and probably a higher proportion of children, were working-class. Just over one percent of Chicagoans, and less than one percent of Chicago's children, fell into the census category of 'colored' which included African-Americans, Chinese and Japanese immigrants, and 'civilized Indians'.⁵⁵ In contrast, over eighty percent of all Chicagoans were first- or second-generation white immigrants. European immigrants and their children dominated the working-classes: nearly ninety percent of working-class Chicagoans were foreign born or had foreign born parents.⁵⁶ By the 1890s, the city had large populations of Irish immigrants, Italians, and European Jews. There were also substantial communities of Bohemians, Scandinavians, and Poles. These immigrants and their families crammed into the poorer neighborhoods of the city.⁵⁷ By the early 1930s, Chicago's demographics had changed in notable ways. The black population, while still only a small proportion of the city, had reached over two hundred thousand in 1930. Mexican-American families with their children had also started to move to the city in growing numbers and found an uneasy position in the racial hierarchy of Chicago: neither black nor able to access the whiteness of the older European immigrant communities.

Although the idea of the swarm captured the most troubling aspects of children's street culture in the minds of urban reformers, it also masked some of the reality of children's experiences on the street. Children in Chicago were much more than one homogenous, threatening mass. The experiences of children on the streets were as diverse as they were and changed over time as children aged. The youngest children were often closely monitored by family members and neighbors even as they played outside. After

⁵⁵ US Bureau of the Census, *Report on the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census* (1890) available online <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> (accessed 04/09/2017).

⁵⁶ Ibid. Although working-class did include a variety of economic situations and a spectrum of respectability. Eric L. Hirsch, *Urban Revolt: Ethnic Policies In The Nineteenth Century Chicago Labor Movement* (Berkeley, 1990), 93. I am using the term 'white' here as this is the term the census of 1890 used, it included a variety of European immigrants including Jews. For a discussion on the historicity of 'whiteness' see Chapter 4.

⁵⁷ Park, Robert E., and Burgess, Ernest W., *The City* (Chicago, 1925).

around the age of seven, boys and girls often had quite different relationships to street culture, with boys able to engage in a wider range of work and play activities. And children's experiences also varied with ethnicity: Jewish boys often enrolled in extra schooling, for example, while the Italian calendar of festivals shaped the lives of Italian boys and girls.

Furthermore, children on the streets were often far more vulnerable than the swarm suggests. Children faced the physical dangers of accidents, certainly, but they were also at risk of abuse and exploitation. In one case, for instance, the police arrested a man who employed eight newsboys on a commission basis, brought them to his room to collect their wages, and assaulted them regularly.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, many children took to the streets in the first place to avoid abusive or alcoholic parents.⁵⁹

Several recent scholars have critiqued the so-called "agency trap" of childhood studies.⁶⁰ Historian of education, Mona Gleason, has provided an extensive critique of the "agency trap", arguing that scholars' preoccupation with children's agency has limited rather than expanded historians' ability to show how children contributed in significant ways to change over time, and has obscured nuanced and negotiated interactions as well as child to child relationships and intergenerational alliances.⁶¹ Despite this ongoing critique, children's independent "agency" has remained a key theme in the history of childhood.⁶²

⁵⁸ Addams, Jane, *Newsboy Conditions in Chicago* (1903).

⁵⁹ 'Life History of Cuno C.', LHC b.45 fol.4-4, 4-5; 'Life History of Tony D.', LHC, b. 46, fol.5-1; 'Life History of Philip M.', LHC, b.49, fol. 52; 'Life History of Ray M.', b.50 fol.54 (9-2); 'Life History of Glenn O.', LHC, b. 50, fol. 56 (9-7).

⁶⁰ Gleason, Mona, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education' *History of Education* 45 (2016), 446-459; Kraftl, Peter, "Beyond 'Voice', Beyond 'Agency', Beyond 'Politics'? Hybrid Childhoods and Some Critical Reflections on Children's Emotional Geographies." *Emotion, Space and Society* 9 (2013), 13-23.

⁶¹ Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap', 446-459.

⁶² Many of the most recent articles published in the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* have focused on children's agency. See, for example, Skold, Johanna, and Soderlind, Ingrid, 'Agentic

In *The Swarm* children clearly demonstrate their agency: they derail trains, avoid the police, and enforce segregation. They also speak frequently. Yet, uncovering children's voices and agency in turn of the twentieth century Chicago, is not the aim of this dissertation. Children are also victims in this story – victims of parental abuse, victims of state abuse, victims of rape, even victims of murder, as well as victims of poverty, disease, and pollution – and their lives were, in many ways, increasingly constrained by external structures like truancy laws and economic hardships. Importantly, children were victimized and restricted by other children. One child's 'agency', for example to control playground space, forced another child to adapt. The children in this study figure at various times as powerful and powerless, even within an individual's own life story. Neither agents or victims, children in *The Swarm* are historical actors.

Following children in and out of institutional space, it is possible to see children's subcultures at their most powerful, least affected by the aims of middle-class reformers, and to fully understand the fluidity of institutional boundaries. Putting children at the center of the study does not only reveal the effects of child-saving reform on children's lives and cultures, but demonstrates that children and reformers existed in dialogue with each other.

Children First

This dialogic approach informed the dissertation structure. Conventional histories of childhood begin with adult ideas and institutions. Even those histories that highlight

Subjects and Objects of Political Propaganda: Swedish Media Representations of Children in the Mobilization for Supporting Finland During World War II', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 11:1 (Winter 2018), pp. 27-46; Ballah, Henryatta L., 'Politics is Not for Children: Student Activism and State Repression in Liberia, 1944-1990', *JHCY* 10:3 (Fall, 2017), pp. 362-379; Hines, 'They do not know how to play' 206-227.

children's agency and resistance do so as a response to adults' plans and ideas.⁶³ But child-saving reform itself existed as a response to the swarm. Thus, this story begins with children's actions and experiences on the streets of Chicago in the 1890s, the heyday of child-rich Chicago. The first chapter concerns the swarm of the 1890s when hundreds of thousands of children spent their time working, playing, and getting into trouble in the outdoor spaces of the city. While adults dominated indoor spaces, this chapter argues that the swarm ruled the streets, forcing adults to adapt.

Only in the second chapter do we turn to adult actions. This chapter considers reform-minded adults' responses to the swarm in the 1890s and early 1900s. Looking into the tenement neighborhoods, concerned adults feared for the next generation growing up on the streets. But if the metaphor of the swarm implied danger, it also suggested that children could turn into productive worker-citizens if placed in the proper environment. This chapter looks at the institutional and regulatory efforts of child-savers in Chicago and across the country to hive the swarm. By the First World War, child-savers had created parks and playgrounds, anti-child labor laws, truancy laws, an extensive juvenile justice system, and even toyed with the idea of a curfew, all designed to change the spaces of childhood.

The third chapter examines the practice of these new institutions and regulations in Chicago during the 1910s and 1920s. Here I argue that children forced institutional officials to adapt and compromise their idealized plans. Swarms of children all but ignored new institutional boundaries, crossing them whenever they pleased and bringing undesirable street behaviors with them. As children challenged adult control and appropriated new

⁶³ For example see Rembis, *Defining Deviance*; Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance*; Gagen, Elizabeth A., 'Too Good to Be True: Representing Children's Agency in the Archives of Playground Reform', *Historical Geography* 29 (2015), 53-64.

spaces, conflict between children and child-savers escalated. Adults turned to increasingly coercive methods, and eventually the help of the state, to try to control children.

If children failed to follow adult-created boundaries, this did not mean they ignored all urban borders. In fact, children created and enforced their own urban geographies in this period, slicing the city into gang territories and racially segregated neighborhoods. Chapter four considers these child-enforced boundaries in the 1910s and 1920s, specifically the 'color line' on Chicago's South Side. White children's violence along Wentworth Avenue during the Great Migration made it one of the most enduring 'color lines' in the United States. White youth gangs beat up African-Americans who dared to cross into white immigrant neighborhoods. In 1919, swarm violence reached a dramatic apex with the Chicago Race Riot, a bloody riot lasting for days which resulted in the state reinforcing the "gang line". Young black Chicagoans responded, laying claim to their own territories and asserting their right to use public spaces and prized recreational facilities.

Following the race riot, children's racially motivated violence continued; if anything, white children were emboldened by the riot. Furthermore, as children grew up they took the lessons they learned on the streets with them into their lives as adults. The fifth chapter examines the process of growing up with the swarm in the 1910s and 1920s. As children got older, their ties to the street loosened. Older 'hoodlums' spent less time on the streets and more time in clubhouses and poolrooms than the younger 'punks'. Most young men left street life altogether on reaching adulthood as they married and became absorbed into indoor adult work and leisure spaces. As the older generation grew up and off the streets, they made room for younger children to replenish the swarm.

By the end of the 1920s, institutional and regulatory changes, the rise of the automobile, and changing patterns of suburbanization had all converged to weaken but not eradicate this cycle. Only the economic problems of the 1930s and the demographic

decline in children's numbers finally broke it. With no jobs and little resources for marriage and commercial leisure, young people in the 1930s no longer aged out of street activities. As more and more adults spent their time on the streets, children's dominance ended. The final chapter examines the changes that occurred to the swarm in the late twenties and early thirties. Although children's use of the streets continued, the mobile, threatening, dominating swarm had gone.

Chicago of the 1930s, when this dissertation ends, was a dramatically different place to the city of the 1890s. Although Chicago, like much of the country experienced economic difficulties following the Panic of 1893, for most of the decade the city boomed, growing upwards and outwards. But the city's expansion in the latter half of the nineteenth century had gone hand in hand with deteriorating living conditions, mass poverty, and civil unrest. For every thing of beauty, wonder, and wealth in Chicago, there was a corresponding depth of poverty, disease, and disorder. The packinghouses, for example, which processed more meat than anywhere else in the world in the 1890s, brought the elite packers riches, while the animal wastes the packers dumped relentlessly into the water turned the South Branch of Chicago into "Bubbly Creek", so named for the gasses bubbling out of the decomposing entrails. Rotting stench added to the air pollution of the city, which made the sky difficult to see even on sunny days. Pollution in the water, the air, and on the land proved dangerous for health, and Chicago suffered from cholera, dysentery and frequent typhoid epidemics.⁶⁴ Despite the filth, Chicago promised a chance at good jobs and a share of the city's wealth, and so immigrants and migrants continued to move to the city. These families filled Chicago's tenement districts, where living conditions and pollution were the worst in the city.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Pacyga, Dominic A., *Chicago: A Biography* (Chicago, 2009), 106.

⁶⁵ Hunter, *Tenement Conditions in Chicago*.

Among the dirt and the poverty, the skyscrapers and the packinghouses, Chicago teemed with hundreds of thousands of children. This was the city of the swarm and children were everywhere: mobile, disruptive, and threatening.

Chapter 1

Teeming Streets

Children's Street-Cultures, 1890-1910

Charles Zueblin, a sociologist and settlement house worker, who in the early 1890s visited the Chicago Jewish neighborhood, known locally as “the ghetto”, wrote:

The physical characteristics of the Ghetto do not differ materially from the surrounding districts. The streets may be a trifle narrower; the alleys are no filthier. There is only one saloon to ten in other districts, but the screens, sidedoors, and loafers are of the ubiquitous type ... In all but the severest weather, the streets swarm with children day and night. On bright days groups of adults join the multitude.¹

In the tenement neighborhoods, as Zueblin recognized, children swarmed on the streets. Indoors, adults dominated. Indoor work, leisure, and domestic spaces such as homes, saloons, and factory floors were the realms of adults. Inside these spaces, adult activities pushed children to the peripheries and then, as children grew older, outdoors.

Once outside children dominated. On the streets adults were secondary users, almost an anomaly. According to Zueblin, the only adults who spent much of their time on the streets were “loafers” – men who idled away their time on the street corner. Children, unlike loafers, moved constantly, swarming around street spaces. They seldom recognized boundaries between public and private spaces, co-opting private land like vacant lots and railroad yards for games and work as easily and as often as they took over street spaces. Their outdoor activities proved dangerous, not only to children's own lives and limbs, but also to the adult inhabitants of the city. Thus, the disorderly swarm, crammed into the city tenements, genuinely scared many middle-class Americans. And worse still, children of the slums didn't stay there. Thousands of children may have lived in the tenement

¹ The author of this essay, Charles Zueblin, used the word ghetto to refer specifically to the predominantly Jewish neighborhood in Chicago in the late nineteenth century on the West Side. For more on the word ghetto see Chapter Four. Zueblin, ‘The Chicago Ghetto’, 95.

neighborhoods, but their work and their pleasure-seeking took them throughout Chicago with little regard for the official geography of the city.

The age-segregation of Chicago's indoor places had not always been the case. For decades children in urban America had worked indoors alongside adults. But in the 1890s, changing child labor regulations disrupted the old household economy, forcing children out of indoor workplaces and compelling many working-class mothers to take up wage-work as compensation. The late nineteenth century boom in Chicago's population and industrial development coincided with these changes to household labor. Hundreds of thousands of immigrant children filled the tenement neighborhoods, not permitted to work indoors, nor compelled to stay in schools, nor having the space to play at home. Outdoors, children created places for themselves where they worked, played, and distressed Chicago's reform-minded adults.

This chapter examines Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century using a children's geography of the city. Once outside the indoor "islands" of homes, factories, and schoolrooms, the swarm revealed itself as a powerful, dangerous force in the city. This chapter follows children across boundaries between different outdoor spaces as well. As children in Chicago in the 1890s didn't adhere to a strict distinction between public and private land, this chapter doesn't either. Mobile, destructive, and dominating, swarming children challenged adults to adapt and confront children's use and understanding of the city.

Indoors

At the turn of the twentieth century, the tenement districts of Chicago housed between three and four hundred thousand people.² One study, conducted by the

² Hunter, *Tenement Conditions in Chicago*.

Investigating Committee of the City Homes Association of Chicago, found tenement districts in Chicago with population densities of over two hundred people per acre and blocks with a density of over four hundred and fifty people per acre.³ With so many people, buildings spread upwards and outwards, diminishing spaces between buildings and reducing light at ground level. Even in neighborhoods where houses remained fairly low and spaced out, large families crammed together into buildings and “doubled up” with boarders and other families to save on rent.

Families could spare little room for children inside the tenement buildings. Figure 2, a photograph from the 1901 investigation into tenement neighborhoods in Chicago, depicted the interior of a typical tenement home. The rooms were clearly small, and multi-use. In the background stood three men, one presumably the father, the others either relatives or boarders (or both). At a small table, sat a mother, mending or making clothes. Sweating work in the home, particularly garment manufacture, employed an estimated 30,000 Chicagoans in the mid-1890s, particularly young mothers. Factory-based work offered higher wages and shorter hours, but for many mothers with young children, with the responsibility of child-rearing, as well as the stigma surrounding married women who worked in factories, home-based labor remained the only choice.⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ Florence Kelley, ‘The Sweating System’, in *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895), 27-45; Home Work in the Tenement Houses Of New York City’ in National Child Labor Committee, *Child Labor in 1912* (New York, 1912); See also Kessler-Harris, Alice, *Out To Work: A History of America’s Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, (Oxford, 1982); Boris, Eileen, *Home To Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge, 1994).



Figure 2: 'Interior of a Typical Tenement House in Chicago, 1901', from The Investigating Committee of the City Homes Association (text by Robert Hunter), *Tenement Conditions in Chicago* (Chicago, 1901)

Alongside adult labor, little room remained for playing children. In the photograph above, a girl almost literally played under her mother's feet as the mother worked. Many parents expected children to contribute to household chores and sweating work such as the manufacture of clothes, lace, and artificial flowers. Numbers are difficult to find as families sought to hide child labor from investigators and the only large investigation into child home-work was conducted in New York in 1912. Yet, from what investigations we do have, many children clearly contributed to home sweating work.⁵

Both boys and girls did sweating-work in the home from a young age.⁶ In the Progressive Era anti-child labor organization, the National Child Labor Committee's, investigation into child labor, many of the photographs depicted mothers working

⁵ 'Home Work in the Tenement Houses'; See also Boris, *Home To Work*; Kelley, 'The Sweating System', 27-45; See also, Lewis Hine's photography of home workers for the National Child Labor Committee available online at NCLCC, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclcc/> (accessed 11/07/2017).

⁶ 'Street traders – Criminals in the Making – Reports', JPAR, b.5, fol.82.

accompanied by sons and daughters, sometimes looking as young as two or three.⁷ When mothers had to work while caring for youngsters, children, even infants, worked too. As children grew up, gender played an increasing role in their relationship to home labor and, with it, home space. Boys, growing up, tended to grow out of home-work, frequently working on the streets instead. Often boys found themselves pushed to the edges of domestic space. In figure 2, the older child, a boy, appeared at the forefront and center of the photograph but separated from the rest of the family. While the adults kept the infant and the girl, the boy sat alone in a different room. Girls, who faced far more restrictions (both legal and parental) when it came to working outside the house, continued in home-work. Anti-child labor publications usually portrayed child home-workers, particularly the older ones, as girls.⁸

Girls also tended to have more household chores than boys, especially babysitting. Although some boys did care for younger siblings, like eight-year old Harry Cunningham who was watching his six-year-old brother when he was struck by a train in 1907, parents more often saddled girls with looking after younger siblings or even the young children of a neighbor.⁹ Known to child-savers as “little mothers”, these girls often took their young charges out onto the streets.¹⁰ Here they too could socialize and play with their peers while watching the smaller children together. But while taking care of younger children did not usually confine girls to the home, it did reduce the mobility and range of “little mothers”. Lewis Hine, the anti-child labor photographer, photographed little mothers and captured their distinct relationship to domestic space. In one photograph from Pittsburgh in 1907 or

⁷ See for example, Lewis Hine, ‘Tenement homework, Lower West Side, New York City, December, 1911’ NCLC, reproduced in Trachtenberg, Alan (ed.), *America and Lewis Hine: Photographs 1904-1940* (New York, 1977).

⁸ CCWE, b.2; ‘Home Work in the Tenement Houses’.

⁹ *Harry Cunningham, v. Illinois Central Railroad Company et al.*, Court Of Appeals Of Illinois, Fourth District, 165 Ill. App. 382; 1911 Ill. App. LEXIS 188.

¹⁰ Nasaw, *Children of the City*; CCWE b.2-3.

1908, Hine captured a girl standing on the threshold of the house with her young (female) charge: one foot inside, one foot out – the typical domain of the little mother.¹¹

Older “little mothers” on the verge of adulthood, could pose a problem for parents trying to provide care for their children. One man, Charlie B., who was interviewed about his childhood in Chicago in the early 1900s, remembered how his mother had to go out to work and left him and his brothers with a young woman from the neighborhood.¹²

This girl would take good care of us while mother was around but as soon as mother left for work she would tell us to get out and play. She didn’t care what we did or how we managed to get along. About ten o’clock each morning her men friends would come over and they would all start drinking and having a good time.¹³

Charlie told the interviewer that his mother never found out about the girl’s treatment of him and his brothers, highlighting the difficulties working parents faced in providing adequate childcare for their children. Furthermore, for children like Charlie and his brothers, rather than keeping them close to domestic spaces, the adolescent “little mother” pushed the boys out of indoor spaces and into the streets.

When boys and girls were old enough to not need childminders – normally around age seven – busy mothers and “little mothers” who needed the inside spaces sent them out to the streets. The report that accompanied figure 2 read:

Crowded in the tenements where the bedrooms are small and often dark; where the living-room is also a kitchen, laundry, and often a garment-making shop, are the growing children whose bodies cry out for exercise and play. They are often an irritant to the busy mother and likely as not the object of her carping and scolding. The teeming tenements open their doors and out into the dark passageways and courts, over the foul alleys and upon broken sidewalks, flow ever-renewed streams of playing children.¹⁴

Girls who labored in the home more frequently than boys may have been needed inside, but boys often just got under the feet of their mothers. Yet even when mothers went to

¹¹ Lewis Hine, ‘Tenement House and Yard, Pittsburgh, 1907/8’, *America and Lewis Hine*, 56

¹² ‘Life History of Charlie B.’, LHC, b.2, unnamed folder.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hunter, *Tenement Conditions in Chicago*, 150.

work, older children often could not use indoor spaces. Jane Addams observed in the 1890s that when both parents went out to work they would lock their houses for fear of thieves. In winter, children were often locked inside all day, but as soon as the weather allowed, parents locked them out instead.¹⁵ Thus whether mothers worked at home or went out to work, children in general and boys in particular found themselves unable to use indoor spaces.

Children did not tend to swap the indoor world of the home for the indoor schoolroom even though schooling was ostensibly compulsory in Chicago in the 1890s. The state legislature had passed the Compulsory School Attendance Law of Illinois in 1883 and for the first time, children between the ages of eight and fourteen were required by law to attend school, although only for twelve weeks a year. In 1889, a revised law extended the compulsory school year to sixteen weeks and the school age lowered to seven. Regrettably, in the words of the Chicago Board of Education itself, the compulsory schooling law was "entirely ineffective and practically incapable of enforcement."¹⁶ The state did not introduce truant officers until 1893 and even their appointment did little to keep children in schools. In the 1890s, not a single parent was prosecuted for allowing his or her child to skip school.¹⁷ It was only after World War Two that the city strictly enforced school attendance laws. Furthermore, even if children attended the full school session, they would spend only a fraction of their time in schools. With considerable overcrowding in the public schools, by 1905, over sixteen thousand Chicagoan school-children attended schools in half-day shifts.¹⁸

¹⁵ Addams, *Twenty Years in Hull-House*, 168.

¹⁶ A report of a committee of the Chicago Board of Education from 1888 cited in Abbott, Edith, and Breckinridge, Sophonisba Preston, *Truancy and Non-Attendance in the Chicago Schools* (Chicago, 1917); see also 'Fail to Find Truants', *Chicago Times Herald* (June 13, 1896).

¹⁷ Abbott and Breckinridge, *Truancy and Non-Attendance*, 87.

¹⁸ 'Need more school room', *Chicago Evening American* (July 17, 1895).

Few children in Chicago in the 1890s left home-work to go to work indoors in factories or sweatshops either. Certainly, child labor abounded throughout the United States by 1890, and Chicago was no exception. With the onset of a general economic depression across the country in 1893, which hit Chicago hard in the aftermath of the World's Fair, the numbers of children working had risen, as working-class families struggled with the problem of mass unemployment.¹⁹ By 1894 new regulations as well as labor organization limited options for child laborers. New laws prohibited the employment of children under the age of fourteen in any manufacturing establishment, factory, or workshop or indeed in any occupation unless the child's school testified to the necessity of a child's labor to his or her family.²⁰ In Chicago, organized labor's opposition to children's work also contributed to the low numbers of children employed in factories and other union-controlled industries. While a few industries, namely box-making, tobacco and snuff trades, and candy-making, did not have unions that effectively barred child labor, the majority of manufacturing trades in the city did.²¹

In contrast, few laws controlled children's money earning activities on the streets. Laws that limited adult uses of the street, such as the anti-peddling law, specifically did not apply to the most common child street laborers, the newsboys. While the new child labor laws prohibited the employment of children throughout Illinois, newspapers could easily circumvent the regulation as they did not actually employ the newsboys. Instead newsboys worked as independent merchants, buying papers from distribution offices, and

¹⁹ Kelley and Stevens, 'Wage-Earning Children', 49-78.

²⁰ 'An Act to Prevent Child Labor' (1891); 'An Act To Regulate the Manufacturing of Clothing...' (1893), in Hurd, Harvey B., *The Revised Statutes of the State of Illinois* (1893) see also, Stormont, Frank Edward, 'The Evolution of Child Labor Legislation in Illinois: 1818-1917', unpublished master's thesis, Eastern Illinois University, (1978).

²¹ Kelley, and Stevens, 'Wage-Earning Children', 49-78.

selling them on their own specific corner.²² If anything, the child labor law pushed more children into street trades, as the state criminalized and punished the indoor employment of children in factories and sweatshops.

Factories, sweatshops, and homes all pushed children out into the streets in the 1890s. Some children, the very young and the very useful, remained in domestic spaces, but others had to make room for domestic work and adult leisure. While girls were by no means tied to the house, often they had more of a place in the home as piece-workers and little mothers. Boys, on the other hand, tended to leave home for work and play from around the age of seven. Indoors, children, particularly boys, remained peripheral, but once outside, it was the adults who became marginal.

Outdoors

Outside, children took over streets, alleys, and sidewalks for their games and their labor. Bootblacks, messenger boys, and newsies worked on the streets but played there too. Boys and girls played a variety of street games thus transforming streets into arenas. As well as public streets, children also used vacant lots and other privately owned spaces. Moreover, they weren't static in these spaces, instead they constantly surged in and out of different areas. Both play and work took mobile children across the official, adult-defined boundary between public and private spaces, and children's crossing of urban boundaries forced adults to reconsider the nature of the boundaries themselves.

Even household chores caused children to move around the city. Fetching coal, going to the store, and running other errands were often the roles parents designated to children. These errands took children out of the house, into the streets, and even into

²² Adams, Myron E., 'Children in American Street Trades', *Child Labor: The Addresses at the First Annual Meeting of the National Child Labor Committee, Held in New York City, Feb 14-16, 1905* (New York, 1905).

private spaces.²³ Foraging for fuel, for example, took children into garbage dumps and the railroad yards. Chicago was a transport hub for the whole country in the late nineteenth century. The city's railroads connected the continent. By 1860 the eastern terminus for almost every major railroad west of Lake Michigan was Chicago.²⁴ These links brought industry and wealth to the area and Chicago became the wholesale market for the entire midcontinent.²⁵ Meatpacking, the largest industry in Chicago, relied completely on the railroads to bring in livestock and take out packed meats. By 1893, one twenty-fifth of the world's railroad mileage terminated in Chicago, shaping the city physically and economically.²⁶ All these railroads relied on coal, but so did the people living near the tracks. Lying wasted on the tracks or even stored in the coal-yards, coal tempted families to forage. A typical scene, figure 3, depicted women and children collecting coal from the coal yards. Picking coal fallen from railroad yards was only semi-legal, and usually involved trespassing onto railroad land. Yet, even respectable working-class families saw it as a legitimate practice. Not satisfied to wait for coal to fall from cars, some children climbed aboard coal cars and threw down fuel for waiting foragers to collect, an activity that railroads viewed much more harshly.²⁷ Children who foraged or pilfered fuel alone, took it home to their parents or sold it on the streets to make an extra income.²⁸

²³ 'Life History of Joe N.', LHC, b.50, fol. 55 (9-4); Five-year-old, John Tuohy, was injured when sent out to fetch oil by his mother. *Chicago City Ry. Co. v. Touhy* 196 Ill 410, 63 N. E. 997 (1902).

²⁴ For more on the development of Chicago's railroads see Cronon, William, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ 'Boy Steals Coal To Buy Whiskey', *Chicago Tribune* (October 31, 1895), 1.

²⁸ 'Life History of Mike F.', LHC, b.47, fol. 37 (6-1); 'Life History of Ernie O.', LHC, b.50, fol. 9-8.



Figure 2: 'Women and children picking up coal from the ground at the coal yards', *Chicago Daily News* (c. 1902)²⁹

Junking, a similar job to foraging, was also a common task among Chicago's poor, immigrant children. Junking involved collecting valuable waste material and selling it to junk dealers. Sometimes the promise of an easy sale with no questions asked induced children to steal. Lead pipes got a good price, so children like Joe N. who grew up in Chicago in the 1890s and 1900s, broke into empty houses and sheds and cut lead pipes to sell to the dealers.³⁰ Junk dealers happily bought more than pipes from budding young thieves so children like Ray M. stole from shops and broke into railroad cars to sell stolen products to the dealers.³¹ Yet, while it could be profitable, junking did not provide children with as dependable an income as more formal wage-earning activities. Like foraging for

²⁹ All Daily News photographs are from Chicago History Museum, available online at www.chsmedia.org/ (accessed 02/05/2017).

³⁰ 'Life History of Joe N.'

³¹ 'Junk Dealers and the Schools They Keep', *Charities*, 10:6 (February 14, 1903), 150; 'Punish the Real Offender, Not the Child', *Charities* 12:35 (August 27, 1904), 858; 'Life History of Ray M.', Ray was born around 1895; See also 'Small Boys As Car Robbers', *Chicago Tribune*, (May 13, 1901), 1.

fuel, junking, also took children across the boundaries between public and private land ignoring property rights and trespass restrictions.

Prohibited from working in factories and organized workshops, it is unsurprising that working-class children turned to occupations like junking and street trading to make a living. Not officially considered employment, and thus completely unregulated in the 1890s, the street trades appealed to young working-class boys and girls. Child street laborers polished shoes, pedalled fruit and gum, and delivered messages, but by far the most common street trader was the newsboy.³² The numbers of street traders are hard to ascertain, particularly as Chicago had no licensing system in the 1890s or early 1900s.³³ In 1894, at least 3,000 newsboys sold the *Chicago Tribune* on the streets of Chicago, while an 1892 *Daily News* parade attracted over 500 *Daily News* newsboys.³⁴ A study from 1901 suggested that at least six thousand newsboys worked in Chicago but this was probably an underestimate.³⁵ In certain areas, the proportion of children involved in street trading outnumbered those who were not. One school in Chicago in the early twentieth century, for example, reported that sixty-five percent of children in the 5th grade traded on the streets.³⁶

³²The term street trader generally included all children who worked on the streets whether they actively traded or not, for example, messenger boys. Clopper, *Child Labor*.

³³ For attempts at licensing and repercussions for newsboys see Chapter 2.

³⁴ 'Gamins at the Show', *Chicago Tribune* (April 18, 1894), 1; 'Newsboys' Parade' *Chicago Daily News* (6 February, 1892). Reports by the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) in the 1900s were more extensive in other cities across the United States and revealed that many boys were involved in street trading: a quarter of all boys in Washington D.C. apparently engaged in street labor in 1908, as did fifteen percent of all Cincinnati boys in 1909. *Washington Post* (April 2 1908) extracted at Joseph H. Manning, 'The Lewis Hine Project', <http://sevensteeples.com/> (accessed 10/05/2014); Clopper, *Child Labor*.

³⁵ Benedict, *Waifs of the Slums*, 24.

³⁶ Clopper, *Child Labor*, 17.

Girls traded on the streets alongside their male peers, but in far fewer numbers.³⁷ Selling gum rather than papers seems to have been more acceptable among “respectable” working-class families for girls, perhaps because by selling gum girls could avoid the notorious newspaper alleys where newsboys often slept out while waiting for the morning’s papers.³⁸ Some families who permitted younger girls to trade on the streets, kept those girls from street labor when they neared pubescence. Thus, most newsgirls in this period were under the age of thirteen.³⁹ Those girls who did work as newsies often had a harder time than the boys. Charities, such as the Chicago Waif’s Mission, which provided lodging to young newsboys as an alternative to sleeping out, refused to accept girls.⁴⁰ Importantly, most of the newspapers refused to sell to newsgirls, meaning the few girls who sold papers relied on boys for their supply.⁴¹

Street labor brought in considerable sums of money. While a family of tenement workers making garments could expect around \$1.50 to \$2 a week in 1912, in 1905, according to child labor expert Myron E. Adams, a Chicago newsboy could earn one or two dollars a day “without any great effort.”⁴² NCLC investigator E. N. Clopper suggested that newsboys stayed in that trade because other jobs they found paid such pitiful wages in comparison. Clopper met one sixteen-year-old boy who he reported “hopes for a better job, but says that although he has hunted one, so little is offered for what he can do (\$2 to \$3 per week) that it would hardly suffice for spending money.”⁴³ Although some reformers like Myron Adams, contended that newsboys were compelled to work by lazy or ignorant

³⁷ A 1903 estimate put the number of newsgirls in Chicago at just sixty while an 1884 estimate counted just ten Chicago newsgirls. See Addams, ‘Newsboy Conditions in Chicago’; Adams, ‘Children in American Street Trades’, 23-44, and ‘Newsgirls’, *Chicago Tribune* (May 3, 1884), 15

³⁸ Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil*, 242.

³⁹ Adams, ‘Children in American Street Trades’, 23-44.

⁴⁰ David J. Talbot reminiscences [manuscript], (1957), CHM.

⁴¹ ‘Newsgirls’, *Chicago Tribune* (May 3, 1884), 15

⁴² Adams, ‘Children in American Street Trades’, 23-44.

⁴³ Clopper, *Child Labor*.

parents who sent the children out to work and took their earnings for themselves, Juvenile Court officers in Chicago in the early 1900s actually tended to complain that newsboys kept money for their own spending.⁴⁴

Children started working on the streets at an early age. An investigation of a thousand street traders in Chicago showed newsboys as young as five, and, out of the thousand, a hundred and twenty-seven were under the age of ten. A further six hundred and twenty-four were between the ages of ten and fourteen.⁴⁵ As we can see in figure 4 below, young newsboys mixed with the older ones, working alongside them. Younger boys had something of an advantage over the older newsies in that they could often supplement their paper earnings by begging. Boys told child labor reformer Myron E. Adams that they targeted men accompanied by ladies, presuming that women would urge the men to be more generous.⁴⁶ Younger boys occasionally worked directly for older newsies. Joe N. remembered, for example, that he hired a younger kid to be his helper, paying him fifty cents a week and buying him candy.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Adams, 'Children in American Street Trades', 23-44

⁴⁵ Adams, 'Children in American Street Trades', 29.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 23-44.

⁴⁷ Life History of Joe N. Joe started selling papers aged 9, but his age when he hired a helper was not recorded.



Figure 4: 'Newsboys standing next to a gate holding bundles of newspapers and drinking from cups', *Chicago Daily News* (August 11, 1904)

Street labor like newspaper selling mainly took place on street corners, but some children chose to sell in and out of saloons as well as on the street. As one young newsboy told child labor investigator and photographer, Lewis Hine, in Hartford, Connecticut, "Dunks are me best customers".⁴⁸ The boy would enter a saloon with a few papers, leaving the rest outside with his older brother, and ask some of the drunk saloon-goers to buy him out so he could go home. The boy probably also made use of another newsboy trick of intentionally under-changing customers, something that presumably proved easier the more inebriated the target. Newsboys like these who wanted to sell to drunks kept irregular hours, a fact which disturbed early street labor-opponents. Although some were truant, most newsies combined work with attending school, often selling well into the night or in

⁴⁸ Lewis Hine, 'A common case of "team work"' (Hartford, Conn., March 1909)', NCLCC, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclcc/> (10/05/2014).

the early morning.⁴⁹ Those who wanted to sell the morning paper, either had to rise in the middle of the night, or choose to sleep in the newspaper alleys.

In the alleys, waiting for the paper distribution, peer groups formed, and the lines between labor, play, and delinquency remained ill-defined. According to investigators, black and white newsboys mixed freely outside the distribution offices and spent their time smoking, fighting, and gambling.⁵⁰ Work, after all, was not separated from play for child street laborers; while waiting for papers, or in less busy moments, street traders would catch moments of recreation. Newsboys would lay down their papers if they saw an interesting game going on nearby.⁵¹ Much to child labor reformers' consternation, newsboys seemed to spend as much time "loafing" around, gambling, and drinking as they did actually working.⁵² Perhaps because of this, many, if not most, street traders enjoyed street labor. Although somewhat later than this period, a 1918 survey of newsboys conducted by the University of Chicago revealed that eighty-seven percent of the boys interviewed enjoyed their work.⁵³

Children's street play, including newsboys', was even less regulated than street labor. When young Chicagoan Leo LeBeau turned ten in May 1893, he could spend the summer playing on the streets with a group of boys around his age. Their favorite spot was the intersection of Rockwell and Lexington where they watched the trains of the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad Company travelling north and south along Rockwell Avenue.⁵⁴ All summer, the boys practiced jumping on and off the passing trains.

⁴⁹ Clopper, *Child Labor*.

⁵⁰ Adams, 'Children in American Street Trades', 23-44.

⁵¹ 'Boy drowned While At Play', *Chicago Tribune* (August 8, 1903), 1.

⁵² "Effects of Street Trades On Children", CCWE, b.2-3.

⁵³ Nasaw, *Children of the City*, 71.

⁵⁴ Two miles west of Hull House, this was a neighborhood populated mainly by working-class families and different communities of immigrants like Leo's. Leo's father was a second-generation immigrant: his own father having immigrated to Chicago from Canada. Leo's father was a skilled laborer, a carpenter, placing the family in a stable economic position.

They got to know the tower man who worked there, and often stopped to chat with him. But despite all their practice, the boys still made mistakes. One late October day, Leo watched a train travelling north along Rockwell and, as it passed him, Leo attempted to leap aboard a car, misjudged his jump, and fell underneath. The wheel of one car ran over his right leg, horribly injuring him. He was rushed to hospital and doctors amputated his leg close to the hip.

Leo and his family attempted to sue the railroad company. The counsel for the LeBeaus argued that the tower man, employed by the railroad to watch over the intersection, failed to warn Leo and his friends to keep away from the tracks and made no attempt to stop the boys from flipping cars. The LeBeaus stood a chance. The Illinois courts, using what was known as the “attractive nuisance doctrine”, frequently penalized railroad companies when children injured themselves while playing on railroad land. But this was not private land and the Illinois Court of Appeals found for the railroad company, contending that it was not the duty of the railroad to keep or warn boys off a public street. In any case, Justice Waterman declared, such a warning would have been ineffectual:

[Leo] was injured upon a public street in which *he had a right to be*. A warning to boys to keep away from a place into which they know they have a right to go, is not usually sufficient to induce them to keep away ... Jumping from the ground upon a moving freight train is dangerous, all men and all ordinarily intelligent boys ten years of age know it to be so.⁵⁵

The LeBeaus lost the case but the judge had upheld children’s right to play on the streets and even play dangerously.

The excitement of the streets drew children like Leo out whether they were laborers or not. Typically beginning around age six or seven, working-class families allowed

⁵⁵ *Leo LeBeau v. The Pittsburg, C., C. & St. L. Ry. Co.*, 69 Ill. App. 557, (1897).

children out unsupervised onto the streets.⁵⁶ Games such as kick-the-can, cops and robbers, and shooting craps were perennial favorites.⁵⁷ But on the streets, even “doing nothing” held the promise of excitement. Middle-class observers may not have recognized “hanging around” or “loafing” as play activities, but they formed a substantial part of children’s leisure time on the streets.⁵⁸ Street corners were prime “loafing” spots, as the passing traffic brought the possibility of excitement or novelty.⁵⁹ As a study from 1914 entitled *Boyhood and Lawlessness* argued, the attractions of the street “ever var[ied]. Now a funeral, now a fire ... always fresh incident and excitement, always nerve-racking kaleidoscopic confusion.”⁶⁰

Play varied from group to group, day to day, season to season. Chicago’s winters were notoriously cold, temperatures could drop below zero degrees fahrenheit (minus eighteen degrees centigrade). Nevertheless, the freezing temperatures did not stop children from playing outdoors. Children passed winter days skating and having snowball fights. Many children did spend more time junking in the winter as demand for fuel

⁵⁶ ‘Life History of Joe N.’; ‘Life History of Bill C.’, LHC, b.45 fol.4-1; ‘Life History of Andrew H.’, LHC, b.48, fol.44.

⁵⁷ Carmichael, M., ‘Crimes and Criminals in Chicago, 1891’, EBP, b.129, fol.3; CCWE, b.2-3; ‘Shot At Boys’ Base-Ball Game’, *Chicago Tribune* (June 2, 1890), 1.

⁵⁸ Although Lewis Hine was primarily concerned with child labor, he also documented instances of children “Jest Hanging Around”, see for example Lewis Hine, ‘Late at night. Street boys. “Jest hanging around.” Location: Boston, Massachusetts’ (1909) and Lewis Hine, “Just hanging around.” See 4197. Location: Fall River, Massachusetts’ (1916), both at NCLCC <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclc/> (10/05/2014); see also Life History of Ray M. who was born in 1895.

⁵⁹ Sociologist Paul Corrigan developed the idea that ‘doing nothing’ was central to youth street culture, albeit in a quite different time and place. For an introduction, see Corrigan, Paul, ‘Doing Nothing’, in Hall, Stuart, and Jefferson, Tony, (eds.), *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London, 1976), 103-106.

⁶⁰ Russell Sage Foundation, *Boyhood and Lawlessness* (New York, 1914), 11.

increased, and some built fires for fun and for warmth.⁶¹ Lower temperatures did translate to slightly fewer children on the streets.

It was during Chicago's long summer days and warm nights when children really swarmed on the streets. With no school for even those who regularly attended during term time, children could fill their days with work and play. As temperatures rose, many took to the lake shore to cool down. Situated on the banks of the second largest of the Great Lakes, Lake Michigan, Chicago had miles of lakeshore and as soon as the weather grew warmer, the *Chicago Tribune* reported, "the lakeshore swarmed" with children.⁶² Children swam in less pleasant waters as well. In the sweltering August of 1900, seven boys died from swimming in a polluted clay hole near the Stock Yards.⁶³ That summer, whole families took to sleeping outside as adults as well as children tried to spend as little time as possible in the oppressively hot tenement buildings.⁶⁴ Boys and girls played in the sun while adults watched, gossiped, and tried to cool off.

Newspaper articles that documented girls injured at the hands of boys suggest that girls and boys played in the same spaces if not always together or peacefully.⁶⁵ Photographs like figure 5, a *Chicago Daily News* image from 1903, attested to the fact that boys and girls not only shared street space, but actively played together. It depicted some sort of game with both boys and girls in the middle of the street, while other boys and girls (including a typical "little mother") looked on.

⁶¹ Life History of Joe N.; 'Dropped To Two Degrees Below', *Chicago Tribune* (February 4, 1891), 1; 'Thin Ice, 3 Boys Drowned', *Chicago Evening American* (8 December 1904); Life History of Andrew H. ; Life History of Nathan W.

⁶² 'Boys Go Swimming in the Lake', *Chicago Tribune* (April 30, 1895), 1.

⁶³ 'Clay Hole, Death Place of Seven Boys', *Chicago Tribune* (August 6, 1900), 1.

⁶⁴ 'Hot Wave, Here To Stay', *Chicago Tribune* (August 8, 1900), 1.

⁶⁵ 'By A Stray Bullet', *Chicago Tribune* (July 4, 1892); 'Peddler Breaks A Girl's Jaw', *Chicago Tribune* (September 7, 1899), 1; 'Fight Among Skaters Fractures Girl's Skull', *Chicago Tribune* (January 15, 1902), 1.



Figure 5: 'Polska Stacya, a Polish saloon, with children playing and men standing nearby', *Chicago Daily News* (May 29, 1903)

Although boys and girls both played street games, some play remained gender-specific. According to one observer, Percy Stickney Grant, who wrote a report on children's street games for the national social reform journal, *The Survey*, play divided easily into games for girls, usually collaborative, and games for boys, usually competitive.⁶⁶ Grant grounded his conclusion that sex differences prompted different play desires in speculation

⁶⁶ Percy Stickney Grant, 'Children's Street Games', *Survey* 23 (Nov 13, 1909), 235.

rather than any evidence, but some games do seem to have been off limit for girls. Despite multiple sources documenting boys' practice of "flipping" (i.e. jumping on and off) cars, for example, I have not found a single example of a girl flipping a car.⁶⁷ In addition, photographs of playing children at the turn of the century tend to show girls at the edges, often observing the center of the game where the boys played.⁶⁸ Lewis Hine's 'Playground in a tenement alley, Boston, 1909', in figure 6, captured a typical alley game of stickball where the boys played and the girls looked on.



Figure 6: Lewis Hine, 'Playground in a tenement alley, Boston, 1909', Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Walter Rosenblum, Object Number, P1975.44.

Ball games, in particular, caused children to cross boundaries between spaces adults had separated for different uses. In 1896, William Fitzgerald, a boy of twelve, was playing with his friends on the public land between the tracks of two railroad companies on the

⁶⁷ For examples of the range of sources documenting boys flipping cars see 'Arrested for "Flipping" Cars', *Chicago Tribune* (December 6, 1901), 1; figure 7; 69 Ill. App. 557, (1897); Chicago South Parks Commission, 'Annual Report of the South Park Commissioners', (1906), 55.

⁶⁸ See Lewis Hine, 'Children at the Dump, Boston, c. 1909', in *America and Lewis Hine*, 45.

West Side of Chicago. The boys were playing a game of ball but the ball kept escaping onto the tracks of the railroads on either side. William ran to fetch it as a freight train was passing. As the train was moving slowly, he tried to climb over it. He fell and his legs were crushed under the wheels, leading to the amputation of both limbs.⁶⁹ Thus, although the boys had chosen an empty piece of land for their play-space, the nature of their play required their movement through occupied spaces, leading eventually to the loss of William's legs.

Play without playgrounds was inherently dangerous to children like William. Traffic accidents frequently resulted in fatalities on Chicago's streets at the turn of the century among both adults and children.⁷⁰ Other threats added to the dangers of traffic to children on the street. Charles S. Bernheimer, a settlement worker writing on the state of Russian Jews in Chicago, said the infirmaries around the Jewish neighborhood were often filled with children hurt playing on the streets: "Passing wagons and trolley cars, defective plank pavements, disease breeding garbage boxes, and falling missiles play sad havoc with these innocents."⁷¹ While all street users faced these dangers, children were particularly vulnerable. Children's games, such as tag and kick-the-can, involved erratically running through street space, distracted children from street dangers, and encouraged them to explore and hide in poorly maintained or disease-ridden spaces.⁷²

⁶⁹ *William Fitzgerald v. Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company*, 114 Ill App 118, (1904).

⁷⁰ Adler, Jeffrey S., *First in Violence, Deepest in Dirt: Homicide in Chicago, 1875-1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006)

⁷¹ Bernheimer, Charles Seligman, *The Russian Jew in the United States: Studies of social conditions in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, with a description of rural settlements* (Philadelphia, 1905), 320.

⁷² See, for example, *The Star Brewery Co. v. Josephine Houck*, 126 Ill App 608, Ill. App. Lexis 543, (1906).

Sometimes children chose places to play specifically because of the excitement dangerous play offered.⁷³ In Chicago, with its plethora of railroads, favorite play-spaces included trains, railway tracks, and streetcars.⁷⁴ Notoriously, railway turntables were such common play-spaces that one Illinois judge asserted that “It is a matter of common knowledge that turntables and other devices of like character, are unusually attractive and peculiarly alluring to children, even those of the age of twelve.”⁷⁵ The very danger of playing on turntables and heavy machinery seemed to entice children. Jumping on and off trains and streetcars was infamously dangerous, but children persisted in doing it throughout this period and were frequently injured and killed.⁷⁶

Across the country, children played on railroad turntables and were seriously injured there so often that they spurred their own group of court cases known as the “turntable cases” or the “attractive nuisance” cases. The attractive nuisance doctrine held that private landlords in urban “built-up” areas owed a duty of care to children that went above and beyond the duty of care they owed adults, even if those children had no right to be on the land. To an adult trespasser, the law only required that a landowner should not inflict intentional harm, and even this was permitted when the landowner was exercising his legal rights of defense and expulsion. The law did not compel a landowner to maintain his property in a safe manner for the use of any potential adult trespassers, nor did the law require landlords to warn adult trespassers of any dangers on the property.⁷⁷ In contrast to

⁷³ The Opies discussed children playing games for the thrill of danger such as ‘Last Across’ a game which seemed to involve being as nearly run over as possible. See, Opie, Iona, and Opie, Peter, *Children’s Games in Street and Playground* (Oxford, 1969), 11

⁷⁴ See William Fitzgerald, by next friend, v. Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Co., 114 Ill. App 118, Ill. App. LEXIS 389 (1904); and *The Chicago City Railway Company v. Frank Wilcox* 138 Ill. 370; 27 N.E. 899 (1891).

⁷⁵ *Lake Erie and Western Railroad Company v. Klinkrath*, 130 Ill App 322 (1906).

⁷⁶ For just a few examples see 57 Ill. App. 587, (1894); 318 Ill. 142, 149 N.E. 23, (1925); 162 Ill. App. 243, (1911); 175 Ill. App. 377, (1912); 223 Ill. App. 288, (1921).

⁷⁷ Jeremiah Smith, ‘Liability of Landowners to Children Entering Without Permission’, *Harvard Law Review* 11:6 (January 1898), 349-373.

the lack of legal protection for adult trespassers, beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, jurisdictions across America began to implement a new doctrine requiring landlords to protect “infant” trespassers.⁷⁸

The attractive nuisance doctrine had been a federal rule since 1873 with the US Supreme Court decision in *Sioux City and Pacific R R Co v. Stout*. In this case, the Supreme Court Justices decided that landowners had some responsibility to prevent children “being drawn” onto private land in order to play upon dangerous machinery or in dangerous spaces, otherwise known as attractive nuisances.⁷⁹ The foundational case for the attractive nuisance doctrine in Illinois came before the Illinois Supreme Court in 1895 and concerned the death of one Frank McMahon, a boy of nine. Frank lived in the town of Pekin, Illinois. The children of the town often played in and around a pond which had accumulated in a deep pit near a public street. On the day of his death, Frank had been playing with his friends around the pond when he fell in and drowned. Frank's father, Patrick McMahon, sued the city of Pekin. The city declared that, as Frank was a trespasser on its private property, it owed no duty to Frank and his well-being. The trial court, the Court of Appeals, and, eventually, the Illinois Supreme Court disagreed with the city, arguing that:

Although a child of tender years, who meets with an injury upon the premises of a private owner, may be a technical trespasser, yet the owner may be liable if the things causing the injury have been left exposed and unguarded, and are of such a character as to be an attraction to the child, appealing to his childish curiosity and instincts. Unguarded premises, which are thus supplied with dangerous attractions, are regarded as holding out implied invitations to such children.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Legally an infant was one who had not yet reached the age of majority. In the turntable cases, only “infants of tender years” were specifically protected, a somewhat ambiguous term which judges used to include children of varying ages up to their mid-teens. Hudson, Manley O., ‘The Turntable Cases in the Federal Courts’, *Harvard Law Review* 36:7 (May, 1923), 826-857.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *The City of Pekin v. Patrick McMahon*, 154 Ill. 141, 39 N. E. 484 (1895) this case was repeatedly cited in subsequent cases.

Lured onto private property, not by choice but by the draw of the attractive nuisance, child trespassers needed protection not punishment. The attractive nuisance doctrine understood children as ruled by their instincts, especially their "childish curiosity". As the judge, Manley O. Hudson put it "children are little barbarians" who, in the "wantonness of infancy ... are certain to go on their quests without regard to the civilized conception of land ownership."⁸¹ Furthermore, Hudson argued that what was a temptation to the adult mind, was irresistible to children – an implied invitation.

Not all states accepted the attractive nuisance doctrine uncontested. By the first decade of the twentieth century, a small but growing number of high courts rejected the doctrine. These courts in mainly eastern and highly industrialized states like New York and Massachusetts decided that the rights of property owners precluded any claims of trespassing children. Some writers like Thomas Cooley, Christopher Patterson, and Amasa Redfield argued that the "allurement" rule placed responsibility for children "everywhere except where it belongs – with their parents."⁸² By 1907, eleven courts had rejected the attractive nuisance doctrine.

While some of the influential eastern states undermined the attractive nuisance doctrine, judiciaries to the south and west continued to uphold the doctrine throughout this period. Among them was Illinois. Yet, although Illinois upheld the doctrine, the terms and the boundaries of the doctrine came up for debate. Those children most likely to fall under the protection of the attractive nuisance doctrine were poor children whose parents were unable, due to economic considerations, to supervise them, and who lived and played in congested urban areas. In *Grauslis v. Kellyville Coal Company*, a case from 1906, the Court

⁸¹ Hudson, 'The Turntable Cases', 826-857.

⁸² Peter Karsten, 'Explaining the fight over the Attractive Nuisance Doctrine etc.', *Law and History Review* (1992), 45-92. Karsten used the attractive nuisance doctrine to argue persuasively against the idea that nineteenth century jurists were pro-entrepreneurial instrumentalists unwilling to bend the law to serve social needs.

of Appeals found against a twelve-year-old child who was injured while playing on rail car tracks at a coal mine in a rural location in Vermillion County. The court referenced the *Pekin v McMahon* decision, not to support the child's case but, rather, to invalidate it. The judge ruled that in the case of *Pekin v. McMahon* the city's liability "was put upon the ground that the dangerous device or pond was in a populous city and bounded on two sides by public streets and on a third side by a public alley". As the coal mine was not in a populous city, nor near a public highway, the child could not argue that the temptation of the rail cars had drawn him onto the land.⁸³ The hierarchy of spaces under the attractive nuisance law worked both ways though, and urban children found themselves winning cases under the doctrine on the basis that their playgrounds of choice were in "thickly settled neighborhoods" and not a rural coal mine.⁸⁴

Through the attractive nuisance doctrine, the courts explicitly protected working-class children who lived in densely populated neighborhoods in the city, whose parents had to work and could not mind them. The attractive nuisance doctrine, thus seemed necessary in the late nineteenth century to protect children swarming on the streets and other outdoor urban spaces. Middle-class adult society understood swarming children to be mobile, instinct driven, and unable to understand let alone respect adult-defined urban boundaries. The attractive nuisance doctrine at least partially legitimized a separate children's geography and confirmed the ability and the right of the swarm to cross the boundaries of the city. Crossing boundaries endangered children's bodies, but also disrupted and disturbed adult plans for city spaces. Sometimes, when these geographies clashed children transformed from "in danger" to "dangerous".

⁸³ *Grauslis v. Kellyville Coal Company*, 127 Ill App 311(1906).

⁸⁴ For example, see *Stollery et al v. Cicero and Proviso Street Railway*, 243 Ill 290 (1909).

Dangerous Children

It wasn't just turntables that children appropriated for play and work. A winter street became a toboggan slide; a sidewalk became a gambling den; a street corner became a work-place; and almost any object became a play thing. As in figure 7, children flipped cars to avoid paying fares for transport, in order to sell newspapers to travelers, and just for fun. Although Lewis Hine took the photograph in Boston, jumping on and off street cars and trains was a common practice among boys in Chicago. Children, like those who flipped cars, took a space created for one purpose and transformed it into a place where they could work and play in ways that suited them. For all children's street activities, children repurposed city spaces to suit their needs and desires. But children's disruptive uses of the streets did not occur in a vacuum. At best irritating and at worst dangerous and destructive, the swarm threatened the order of the city and children's street-usage forced adult Chicagoans to adapt and respond.



Figure 7: Lewis Hine, "Flipping Cars." Location: Boston, Massachusetts., National Child Labor Committee Collection, Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

Children's disruptive use of the streets annoyed and inconvenienced adult Chicagoans in part because children's games often took up much of the street space. "Curbstone meetings", for example, where groups of children would shoot craps, play cards, or just "hang out" could take up the whole of the sidewalk, forcing passers-by to go around. Ball games, usually staged in alleys, also used large amounts of space, and spilled out onto streets where they caused delays and accidents.⁸⁵ Groups of boys disrupted daily life and special events in the city. When the first ride on the South Side elevated line occurred in October 1890, boys threw large lumps of coal and bricks at the car all along the line.⁸⁶ A decade later, boys still disrupted trains, this time by rolling large snowballs onto the tracks in the winter of 1900 so trains had to continually stop and clear the tracks.⁸⁷ In winter snowball fights took over as the ball game of choice for young Chicagoans. Adults walking past groups of children became frequent targets for teasing or ball throwing. Figure 8 is a cartoon from the *Chicago Tribune* published in 1896, depicting a group of young boys snowballing on the North Side of Chicago. The boys in the cartoon took over the street and transformed it into a playground, or indeed a battle-ground, for their snowball fight. Instead of targeting each other, the boys focused their attention of two passing adults, who cowered away.

⁸⁵ "The Gangs", "Associations and Clubs", "Street Pastimes". CCWE, b.2.

⁸⁶ 'First Official Ride', *Chicago Tribune* (October 22, 1890), 1;

⁸⁷ 'Pile Snowballs On Tracks' *Chicago Tribune* (March 29, 1900), 1.



Figure 8: 'Snowballing On The North Side In September', *Chicago Tribune* (September 14, 1896), 7.

Children also disrupted the soundscape of the city, announcing their use of urban space, for example, as they cried headlines. Indeed, the author of a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in 1912 was so unsettled by newsboys' cries that he asserted it was a serious health hazard to those of a nervous disposition. He wrote: "Doctors will testify that the chances of recovery for patients are sometimes seriously impaired by the raucous shouts portentous of calamity."⁸⁸ Thus, through the very sound of their work, the newsboys laid a claim to the city, troubling adult inhabitants.

But children's appropriation of public urban spaces was often dangerous, not just annoying, to adult Chicagoans. While the snowballing in figure 8 may seem like innocent fun, children actually filled their snowballs with stones and ice and groups of boys who threw stones and bricks often targeted adults. The *Tribune* reported on incidents of

⁸⁸ Extracted in Nasaw, *Children of the City*, 79.

children's snowballs breaking adults' bones, blinding them, and, in one case at least, causing a fatal head wound.⁸⁹ Children in the street caused traffic accidents. Children caused lumber piles to fall and crush people. Children playing with matches in barns and stables caused fires. Children making toboggan slides created icy traps for pedestrians.⁹⁰ And, at least once a year, children's street play prompted many Chicagoans to retreat from the city.

To a modern reader calls for a 'Sane Fourth of July' in the late nineteenth century, may seem like a puritanical crackdown on a harmless American tradition, especially when the movement insisted on publishing such titles as "A Safer, Saner Fourth of July With More Patriotism and Less Noise."⁹¹ However, in the 1890s, the fourth of July celebrations, which often lasted several days, could become violent.⁹² Casualty lists appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* on a yearly basis. Many of those injured or killed were children. But children were as much perpetrators as victims of this annual violence. Firecrackers were particularly dangerous; blasting off the fingers of those setting them alight, burning unlucky passers-by, and spooking horses.⁹³ In one notable example, a crowd of boys threw

⁸⁹ 'What the North-Siders Endured' *Chicago Tribune* (December 7, 1891), 1. 'Teacher Struck By Snowball', *Chicago Tribune* (February 7, 1901), 1; 'Rabbi Dies: 6 Boys Held', *Chicago Tribune* (December 9, 1904); 'Chicago Rabbi Slain', *Chicago Evening American* (9 December, 1904), 1; 'A Wanderer's Gleanings' *Chicago Daily News* (21 January 1892).

⁹⁰ For just a few examples see 'Was Burned To death', *Chicago Tribune* (August 4, 1890), 1; 'Children As Firebugs', *Chicago Tribune* (June 7, 1896); 'Clothed in White', *Chicago Tribune* (January 25, 1890), 1; 'Was Struck By a Brick', *Chicago Daily News* (March 22, 1895). 'Boy Pleads for Prisoners', *Chicago Evening Post* (June 30, 1899).

⁹¹ 'A Safer, Saner Fourth of July With More Patriotism and Less Noise' (1909), 104 CHy 31 0024, RSFM.

⁹² Fourth of July weekends are still violent events in Chicago. In 2017, over one hundred people were shot, including a thirteen-year-old boy. The character of the violence has changed, however. Gun violence has replaced fireworks as the principal danger, and alcohol, revenge, and adults are now the principal ingredients in creating the casualties. 'Chicago Police Express Frustration After More Than 100 Shot in Violent Fourth of July Weekend', *Chicago Tribune* (July 6, 2017).

⁹³ 'It's Usual Results', *Chicago Tribune* (July 5, 1890), 1; 'By A Stray Bullet', *Chicago Tribune* (July 4, 1892), 1; 'An Incident of the Fourth', *Chicago Daily News* (5 July, 1895); 'Victims of the Fourth', *Chicago Daily News* (5 July, 1895); 'Sizz, Boom, Bang, Ah!' *Chicago Times Herald* (July 4, 1896). 'Woes of a Fiery Day' *Chicago Tribune* (July 6, 1897); 'Hurt on the Fourth', *Chicago Tribune* (July 5, 1897), 1;

firecrackers into a firework store, which ignited the gasoline tank as well as many of the fireworks, causing a huge explosion. Somehow no-one was killed although several were severely injured, including the proprietor who was trapped inside the burning building.⁹⁴ Children's antics on the Fourth became so violent that by 1901, thousands were fleeing the city every year, in the words of the Tribune "Leaving the City for the Small Boy to Blow Up if He Can".⁹⁵

The dangerous swarm of children on the street had great destructive capabilities. One of the most perilous activities children, particularly groups of boys, engaged in in this period was attempting to derail trains and street cars.⁹⁶ In the majority of derailing cases, police found no evidence to show who was responsible, but as the Tribune reported in the 1896 when someone laid a plank across an electric car track attempting to wreck it: "almost instantaneously on the stopping of the car a crowd of boys came from behind a fence and took a deep interest in the removal process".⁹⁷ When accidents did happen, children, like these boys, descended as a swarm and got to work. For example, just twenty minutes after the crash of a streetcar on a busy Chicago street in 1892, the small boys of the neighborhood had stripped the vehicle and "carried off a good portion of it."⁹⁸ Children on the streets of Chicago thus endangered all street-users and could profit from the destruction they caused.

'Death in Fire Crackers', *Chicago Tribune* (July 2, 1899), 1; 'Fourth of July Death List 144', *Chicago Tribune* (July 17, 1899), 1.

⁹⁴ 'Hurt on the Fourth', *Chicago Tribune* (July 5, 1897), 1.

⁹⁵ 'Gore and Glory of Fourth Here', *Chicago Tribune* (July 4, 1901), 1.

⁹⁶ 'Attempt To Wreck An Electric Car', *Chicago Tribune* (June 12, 1896), 1; 'Round Up Eleven Mischievous Boys' *Chicago Tribune* (November 22, 1896), 1; 'Youthful Desperadoes Locked Up', *Chicago Times Herald* ('Boys Try To Wreck Trains', *Chicago Tribune* (February 22, 1899), 1; 'Boy Tries To Wreck Train', *Chicago Tribune* (July 17, 1905), 1. A similar activity was placing objects onto rails to make them fly off, in one case a boy used a gun cartridge which shot out and hit a lady, injuring her. 'Struck By a Bullet', *Chicago Daily News* (1 February, 1892).

⁹⁷ 'Attempt To Wreck An Electric Car', *Chicago Tribune* (June 12, 1896), 1

⁹⁸ 'Crushed in a Wreck', *Chicago Tribune* (February 11, 1892), 1.

Many children, both boys and girls, supplemented their incomes by semi-legitimate or downright illegitimate ways. Pickpockets worked throughout Chicago, and small children used their apparent helplessness to their advantage. Mickey Ward's trick, for example, was to run up to women on the street, throw his arms around them asking for protection from the big boys who were going to kick him, and, while being comforted, picked his marks' pockets.⁹⁹ As anti-child labor activists feared, child street labor could lead to crime. Some children used newspaper selling as a front for picking pockets.¹⁰⁰ Others, more brazenly, grabbed patrons' wallets as they tried to pay for papers: in one case, a newsboy made off with three hundred dollars.¹⁰¹ By 1901, Chicagoans associated newsboys with stealing to such a degree that the stockyards banned them from entering.¹⁰²

Certain street activities like stealing caused conflict with parents. Joe N., who stole and sold pipes, had to hide his earnings from his parents. Clearly members of the "reputable" working-class, who considered themselves a "good family", Joe's parents punished him for his less respectable street activities. When Joe's father discovered he was skipping school to hang out on the streets with his friends, Joe was given "a bawling out" and sent to bed without supper.¹⁰³ Other parents like Ray M.'s showed little interest in what children got up to outside of the home. Ray's mother was a drunk who "ran around" with lots of different men, was not a part of the reputable working-class. According to Ray, who grew up in the 1890s and 1900s on the North Side of Chicago: "My mother never asked me what I was doing or where I had been when I stayed out all night. As long as I could give her a dollar so she could get some booze she was satisfied."¹⁰⁴ Most parents probably fell

⁹⁹ 'Big Boys Were Going To Kick Him', *Chicago Tribune* (February 25, 1892), 1.

¹⁰⁰ 'Chicago Fagin Behind The Bars', *Chicago Tribune* (March 20, 1895), 1; 'Fagin in A Police Court', *Chicago Daily News* (March 22, 1895).

¹⁰¹ 'Still Waiting For His Change', *Chicago Tribune* (August 11, 1895), 1.

¹⁰² 'Gates closed to newsboys', *Chicago Tribune* (June 8, 1901), 1.

¹⁰³ 'Life history of Joe N.'.

¹⁰⁴ 'Life History of Ray M.'.

somewhere between Ray's and Joe's parents when it came to attitudes towards their children's street activities. But even among those who felt most concerned with boys maintaining respectability, such as Joe's parents, punishments for breaching acceptable street behavior tended to be physical and temporary: a beating or an early night without supper rather than limiting boys' access to street space through more long-term sanctions. The popular, present-day punishment of grounding, for example, does not appear in the life history accounts of this period. Thus, while parents ruled the indoor spaces, their discipline remained tangential to children's lives outdoors.

Other, official, adults also failed to discipline destructive or thieving children on the streets. When children committed actual crimes on the streets, punishment tended to be immediate and physical. Children whose transgressions were serious ended up in the city jails, but for most minor offences, judges often hesitated before incarcerating a child, instead choosing to release children with a warning.¹⁰⁵ Most children who misbehaved on the streets did not even appear in court. On the whole, policemen, who often heralded from the neighborhoods they policed, preferred immediate, physical punishments, and reporting transgressions to parents rather than dragging a child to court.¹⁰⁶ Newsboys in 1901, for example, complained that the police officers simply stole their money whenever they found the boys shooting craps in the street.¹⁰⁷

Compared to policemen, watchmen and railroad detectives proved more zealous in their attempts to control children and stop them trespassing. A watchman guarding a school in 1901, shot a seven-year-old boy who had refused to move on when asked.¹⁰⁸ Later

¹⁰⁵ Julia Lathrop, 'The Background of the Juvenile Court in Illinois', Addams, Jane (ed.), *The Child, The Clinic, and The Court* (New York, 1927), 290-299; David J. Talbot, *Reminiscences* (1957).

¹⁰⁶ Wolcott, David B., *Cops and Kids: Policing Juvenile Delinquency in Urban America, 1890-1940* (Columbus, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ 'Profits By Raiding "Craps"', *Chicago Tribune* (October 24, 1901), 1.

¹⁰⁸ 'Child Shot By Watchman' *Chicago Tribune* (August 31, 1901), 1.

in that year railroad detectives began a “crusade” against boys stealing rides on their cars, and arrested forty-three boys in just one night.¹⁰⁹ Railroads also enlisted policemen in their struggle against boy trespassers. After a police officer arrested fifteen-year-old newsboy, Theodore Theonson, at the behest of Metropolitan railroad officials, police court judge, Justice Sabath, complained in 1899 that it had become “very apparent that the police are being used to further the interests of a private corporation.”¹¹⁰

Children’s mobility meant they could, in most cases, evade even the combined forces of policemen, watchmen, and railroad officials. Swarming children knew the street inside out. They could run from the corner whenever they saw police coming and return as soon as the police passed. In fact, catching a “shag” – the street term for being chased – was such a thrilling incentive, that gangs of children deliberately provoked policemen and guards.¹¹¹ It was children’s mobility that largely kept them out of reach of adult control and adult discipline.

But the swarm could discipline adults. Children used their numbers on the streets to target and intimidate specific adults. This ability became obvious during strikes. According to the Chief of Police “half-grown boys” were the most annoying element of the Pullman Strike in Chicago in 1894.¹¹² During the freight handlers’ strike in 1903, children enforced the strikers’ blacklist, following the families of non-union men everywhere they went, making sure the blacklist was respected.¹¹³ Child laborers, like messenger boys and newsboys, staged their own strikes. During the 1902 messenger boys’ strike, they attacked so many adult messengers, brought in as strikebreakers, that the telegraph companies had

¹⁰⁹ ‘Arrested for “Flipping” Cars’, *Chicago Tribune* (December 6, 1901), 1.

¹¹⁰ ‘Scores the Policeman’, *Chicago Evening Post* (February 22, 1899).

¹¹¹ See for example ‘Life History of James F.’ LHC, b.46, fol. 36; ‘Life History of Cuno C.’.

¹¹² ‘His Men Are Heroes’, *Chicago Tribune* (March 22, 1895), 1.

¹¹³ ‘Alton Striker’s Was on Women’ *Chicago Tribune* (June 28, 1903), 1.

to call the police to protect their new workers.¹¹⁴ Newsboys, who went on strike in Chicago in 1901, 1905, and 1912, were such an asset to newspapers that an editorial in the Editor and Publisher in 1907 stated: “As the newsboys can increase street sales or can, by refusing to handle a paper, cut them down, their good will and support are considered a valuable asset.”¹¹⁵ The power of striking newsboys on the streets transformed them into a “mob”, a word implying even greater danger than swarm.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

Children were everywhere in Chicago, disrupting the city and appropriating every space for themselves. Their use of space brought them into conflict with landowners and other street users, often resulting in injuries and creating the body of court cases out of which the attractive nuisance doctrine grew. As the practice of children using urban spaces became more problematic, the idea of children using city space changed as well. Adults, particularly middle-class, progressive-minded adults who ventured into the poorer neighborhoods, saw children’s street cultures as a problem. Mobile, dangerous, and in large numbers children were apparently swarming in Chicago. The reference to “swarming children” reconceptualized children in city spaces as a dangerous, disorderly problem.

As investigators and reformers developed the language of swarming children, they acknowledged the threat the swarm posed to the order of the city, but they did not ignore the dangers to which children on the streets were exposed either physically or, more commonly, morally. Stretching back to the eighteenth century and the writings of Jean-

¹¹⁴ ‘Boys Strike Against Speed’, *Chicago Tribune* (May 2, 1899), 1; ‘Arbitrate For Boys’, *Chicago Daily News* (July 26, 1902); ‘Police Guarding Men Messengers’ *Chicago Tribune* (July 27, 1902), 1; ‘Boys Out On Strike’, *Chicago Tribune* (February 27, 1904), 1.

¹¹⁵ Nasaw, *Children of the City*, pp. 167-173; ‘Tiny Leads Kids’ Strike’, *Chicago Tribune* (January 20, 1905), 3; ‘Newsboys Call Off Strike’, *Chicago Tribune* (September 17, 1912), 1; ‘Schardt Quits Council Chair’, *Chicago Tribune* (February 19, 1901), 1

¹¹⁶ ‘Strikers Attack Aged Newsman’, *Chicago Tribune* (May 7, 1912), 1; ‘Riots and Intimidation By Newsboys’, *Chicago Tribune* (July 7, 1894), 1

Jacques Rousseau, Americans had believed that the “black morals of cities” were “seductive and contagious for children.”¹¹⁷ Middle-class adults feared that boys on the streets would become criminals and vagrants, whereas girls risked sexual dangers. As child labor reformer Edward Clopper argued, girls who hung around bad streets “becoming so familiar with the practices of the district, [would] take up the profession of the neighborhood [prostitution].”¹¹⁸ While urban wickedness endangered the morality of all city dwellers, still developing children seemed particularly vulnerable.

Although susceptible children were in danger, middle-class Progressives also believed Chicago’s street-frequenting children posed a danger to American society. Observing the vast quantities of children in the tenement districts, reformers feared that children growing up corrupted by the streets would one day outnumber the respectable population. Lucy Flower, an influential member and later president of the Chicago Women’s Club, wrote in 1887: “Every boy, who grows up depraved and vicious is a danger to the State.”¹¹⁹ In Flower’s opinion, street-frequenting boys would grow up to be adults unworthy of voting, and in their huge numbers, would undermine the democratic foundations of the country. Poor, semi-delinquent, and foreign, swarms of children on the streets complicated the boundaries between “in danger” and “dangerous”.

Yet, reformers in the 1890s lacked legal recourses or institutions to tackle the problem of swarming children. In general, dedicated playgrounds emerged in the twentieth century, with only a few existing in Chicago in the 1890s. The Hull House playground, one of the first private playgrounds, opened in 1895, while Chicago’s first city-

¹¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau cited in Wojcik, Pamela Robertson, *Fantasies of Neglect: Imagining the Urban Child in American Film and Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2016), 8.

¹¹⁸ Clopper, *Child Labor*.

¹¹⁹ Lucy Flower, ‘The Dependent Children of Illinois’, clipping, January 1887 cited in Clapp, Elizabeth J., *Mothers of All Children: Women Reformers and the Rise of Juvenile Courts in Progressive Era America* (University Park, Pa., 1998), 33. See also Conn, Steven, *Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2014).

run playground opened in the last year of the nineteenth century at Old Jones School in South Loop.¹²⁰ While playgrounds barely existed and tenement homes were inadequate, the only other institutional space available to reformers were schools which touched too few children, too late, and for too little of their time. By the time they entered school, working-class and immigrant children, particularly boys, had usually already developed a so-called “street habit”. Street culture began for children in the tenements as soon as their mothers, sisters, and neighbors could take them outdoors. If reformers wanted to cut out the street habit, they would have to find ways to control children outside of school spaces from a young age. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, disparate groups of philanthropists, settlement house workers, and social scientists set about trying to do just that.

¹²⁰ Newspaper Clipping, ‘W. M. S Tothill Dead; Launched City Playground’, Pamphlets of the Playground Association of Chicago, fol.1, Chicago History Museum; ‘Opens in Jolly Romp’, *Chicago Tribune* (May 5, 1895) 1.

Chapter 2

Better Surroundings

Child-Saving Institutions, 1890-1912

“Let us know the modern city in its weakness and its wickedness,” wrote Jane Addams in her 1909 book *The Spirit of Youth and The City Streets*.¹ In it she called for adult Americans to protect young people from the city and to provide wholesome recreation to nourish “the spirit of youth.” Addams ended with a biblical flourish:

We may either smother the divine fire of youth or we may free it. We may either stand stupidly staring as it sinks into a murky fire of crime and flares into the intermittent blaze of folly or we may tend it into a lambent flame with power to make clean and bright our dingy city streets.²

This quotation may seem histrionic with its allusions to hellfire and celestial flames, but Addams was not exaggerating the threat she perceived. In fact, this almost apocalyptic language was mirrored throughout reform literature in this period. Charles Henderson, professor of sociology at University of Chicago and the President of the National Conference for Charities and Corrections in 1899 warned the conference that the “rising tide of pauperism, insanity, and crime” threatened to “overwhelm and engulf” American civilization itself.³

Children growing up on the streets of America’s cities, particularly immigrant children, threatened the foundations of the country. Unprotected on the city street, concerned urbanites, like Jane Addams, feared children would fall into vice and the “murky fire of crime.”⁴ Bodies, as well as morals, suffered in the “weak” and “wicked” city. As

¹ Addams, *The Spirit of Youth*, 14.

² *Ibid.*, 161-162.

³ Henderson quoted in Platt, *The Child Savers*, 30-31.

⁴ See for example, Clopper, *Child Labor*; Lovejoy, ‘Child Labor and The Night Messenger Service’, 311-316; Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil*, 35-36.

social gospel leader, R. Heber Newton told a national conference in 1886, tenement life “is sapping the vitality of the children, poisoning their blood, sowing their bodies with the seeds of disease, and [rendering them] unfit physically to contend in the struggle for existence.”⁵ Worse still, even those sympathetic to the immigrant communities of Chicago, like Jane Addams, felt the immigrant family could not cope with the pressures of modern urban life and was disintegrating taking parental control and social order with it.⁶ Threatened by the city these un-Americanized children supposedly needed protection that their parents could not provide.

The magnitude of this problem demanded a big solution and child-savers responded, hoping to completely transform working-class childhood and, with it, urban life. As urban reformers and child-savers organized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they created a vast new array of institutions and regulations to limit children’s use of urban street space. In just twenty years, Progressive reformers like Addams dramatically curtailed the right of the swarm to use the streets.⁷ This chapter examines reform-minded adult responses to the swarm during the height of the child-saving movement in Chicago. This chapter looks at why urban childhood posed such a problem to Progressive Era reformers and then considers three different components of child-saving reform that worked together to attempt to solve the crisis of the swarm: juvenile justice, child labor, and the play movement.

⁵ Quoted in Platt, *The Child Savers*, 40.

⁶ Addams, *The Spirit of Youth* 15. See also Breckinridge and Abbott, *The Delinquent Child*.

⁷ While the categories of maternalists, urban reformers, Progressives, and child-savers certainly overlap, I am not using them interchangeably. Most child-savers (those who wanted to promote child welfare) believed in urban reform and vice versa and many, like Jane Addams, wore both hats; but not all urban reformers were concerned with children’s welfare and some child-savers had little time or inclination to push for urban reforms. And, as we shall see, by no means were all child-savers maternalists.

Saving the Urban Child

Large numbers of poor, immigrant, urban children were by no means a new problem to Chicago in the 1890s. For decades, Chicago's elite had viewed the swarms with varying degrees of pity and fear. As early as the 1870s, the Board of State Commissioners of Public Charities repeatedly called attention to the "very large number" of children "growing up in the state under the most deleterious influences."⁸ In 1887, the Board called for the state to provide institutional care for "those children and others who swarm in the streets ... and are almost sure to take up crime as a trade."⁹ Despite these early concerns for Chicago's children, efforts to reform urban childhood only really took off in the late 1880s and the 1890s.

While not a completely new problem, swarms of children became visible to middle-class adults in the city in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In part this visibility was due to the efforts of muckraking journalists and social documentary photographers, like Jacob Riis, who transformed the slum into a packaged, distributable spectacle in the 1890s.¹⁰ New photographic technology enabled Riis to take his camera out of the studio and into the tenements and the streets. He used his camera to pioneer a new investigative style accompanied by photographs of the poor, immigrant, slum neighborhoods of New York. Riis framed and posed his subjects, as in figure 9, to shock middle-class readers. Riis's books like *How the Other Half Lives* (published in 1890) and *Children of the Poor* (1892), reached

⁸ Fifth Biennial Report of the Board of State Commissioners of Public Charities, (1878), 218.

⁹ Platt, *The Child Savers* 107.

¹⁰ For slum as spectacle see Gandal, Keith, *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane and the Spectacle of the Slum* (New York, 1997); This was a very different form of slum as spectacle than the descriptions of slumming in guidebooks from earlier in the century which gave readers a sensationalist tour of the "shadowy" sides to the city. See for example, McCabe, James D., *Lights and Shadows of New York Life; or, the Sights and Sensations of The Great City* (Philadelphia, 1872).

huge audiences and propelled Riis to fame.¹¹ In Chicago, images of New York's suffering children were complemented by images of Chicago's own youthful poor. Illustrated lectures, like those of photographer and journalist George Wharton James, showed audiences photographs of slum conditions, hungry young bodies, and plucky newsboys "risk[ing] their lives ... in their struggle for a livelihood."¹² Progressive Era photography differed from dry statistical reports that failed to have an emotional impact on readers. But, grounded in fact, and supposedly depicting unmediated reality, photographs enabled Progressive Era reformers to distance themselves from the sentimentality of earlier reform movements as well as from the disdain for contemporary female reporters or "sob sisters".¹³ Scientific, yet moving, these early reform photographs had a unique impact on their viewership.

¹¹ Yochelson, Bonnie, and Czitrom, Daniel, *Rediscovering Jacob Riis: Exposure journalism and Photography in Turn-Of-The-Century New York* (Chicago, 2014); Buk-Swienty, Tom, *The Other Half: The Life of Jacob Riis and the World of Immigrant America* (New York, 2008).

¹² 'Tells of Chicago's Dark Places', *Chicago Tribune* (March 13, 1892), 5.

¹³ McBride, Genevieve G., and Byers, Stephen R., 'On the Front Page in the "Jazz Age": Journalist Ione Quinby, Chicago's Ageless "Girl Reporter"', *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 106:1 (Spring, 2013), 91-128.



Figure 9: Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York, 1890)

The audience for these new social documentary media mainly hailed from the urban middle-class. The late nineteenth century saw the burgeoning of a new reform-minded generation of middle-class women. Contrasting the images of slum children with the lives of the offspring of their own class – children who led increasingly sheltered, supervised lives – compelled many middle-class women to engage in urban reform movements in the late nineteenth century.¹⁴ These women used the traditional feminine role of the homemaker and mother to affect change in the public sphere. Portraying themselves as municipal housekeepers uniquely able to clean up the city and maternalists

¹⁴ For an introduction to the 'sheltered childhood' model of middle-class child-rearing see Macleod, David I., *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890-1920* (New York, 1998)

extending their motherly care to all children, women justified and cemented their role at the center of urban reform.

Membership of clubs, like the Chicago Women's Club (CWC), became increasingly fashionable for these middle- and upper-class women in the decades around the turn of the century. The social problems of the city disturbed clubwomen who often spent their sessions reading the latest reform and muckraking literature. Relying on the language of maternalism, clubwomen particularly concerned themselves with matters affecting women and children.¹⁵ Early efforts by the club included creating industrial schools designed to provide children with "a trade" supposedly to keep them from idleness and crime; attempts to get clubwomen onto school boards; investigations into conditions at police stations, prisons and jails; and, in 1886, the creation of the Protective Agency for Women and Children, which provided free legal aid to women and children.¹⁶ The CWC's reform activities provided much of the impetus and laid the groundwork for professional and state-run social work that emerged in the 1890s and early twentieth century.

Just participating in the burgeoning reform movement through club work did not satisfy all of Chicago's elite, reform-minded women in the late nineteenth century. A young, dissatisfied, Jane Addams spearheaded another reform movement in Chicago: the settlement houses. After visiting the world's first settlement house in London's East End, Toynbee Hall, Addams returned to Chicago and opened Hull House in 1889. Hull House became the archetypal American settlement house: a home, largely for young women, in a poor, immigrant neighborhood known as the Near West Side. There, social workers, social scientists, and other reform-minded individuals, lived among a working-class community, studying urban life, and supporting the community through programs like kindergartens

¹⁵ For an introduction to the Chicago Women's Club see Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*

¹⁶ Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*.

and public kitchens.¹⁷ The idea quickly became popular. By 1910, more than four hundred settlement houses operated nationwide, at least twenty in Chicago alone.¹⁸ Although some, like Chicago Commons were founded by men, the majority were run and staffed by women. Living among the poor communities of Chicago, these women saw first-hand the conditions urban working-class families lived in. As maternalists, clubwomen and settlement house workers formed the backbone of the child-saving movement of the Progressive Era.¹⁹

While pity, a desire to improve the lives of others, and Christian beliefs inspired many progressive child-savers; fear and a sense of danger also motivated urban reformers. To middle-class Chicagoans, the hordes of poor immigrant families that thronged Chicago's neighborhoods in the late nineteenth century threatened the order of the city. Labor unrest flourished in Chicago, and indeed, across the country. In 1886, a strike for the eight-hour working day attracted tens of thousands of Chicagoans but resulted in bloodshed when the police opened fire on protestors. Newspapers depicted the affair as a riot, blaming anarchists and socialists, and called for revenge on foreign born troublemakers. The events of the Haymarket Riot shocked middle-class Chicagoans and reinforced their fears of the disorderly poor.²⁰

But it was the children of the poor, above all, who troubled social reformers. Disorder and danger were inherent in the language of "the swarm". Furthermore, middle-class urbanites thought crime was on the rise in America's cities, particularly among the

¹⁷ Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*

¹⁸ Fabricant, Michael, *Encyclopedia of Social Work. Settlements and Neighborhood Centers* (Oxford, 2013); Woods, Robert, and Kennedy, Albert J., (eds.), *Handbook of Settlements* (New York, 1911).

¹⁹ Not all child-savers fit this model of course. Black women's benevolent associations, for example, sought to expand sheltered childhood into their communities, see Ward, *The Black Child-Savers*.

²⁰ Avrich, Paul. *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton, 1984); David, Henry, *The History of the Haymarket Affair: A Study of the American Social-Revolutionary and Labor Movements* (New York, 1936); Schneirov, Richard. *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origin of Modern Liberalism in Chicago, 1864-97* (Urbana, 1998).

young. Jacob Riis voiced this fear in 1894, writing: “there has surely been of late a very great and significant increase in the number of child criminals that are brought to our police courts... there are more of them, they are younger than they used to be, and they are vastly tougher.”²¹ Unlike a growing school of criminologists known as the Lombrosians (after Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who believed that criminals inherited their deviant tendencies) a new generation of social reformers like Riis thought criminals were made not born.²² For Riis, the demoralizing effect of the urban environment, not the genetic stock of the immigrant poor created delinquents.

The idea that the slum created delinquents proved hugely influential among the new reforming class. At Hull House, Jane Addams increasingly believed “that pliable human nature is relentlessly pressed upon by its physical environment.”²³ Many social reformers were informed by a new Protestant ethic, known as the Social Gospel, which highlighted social causes of sin and the impact of environmental factors on the creation of sin.²⁴ Surrounded by the vice and disorder intrinsic to the late nineteenth century city, social reformers like Addams believed people became criminals, vagrants, prostitutes, and pimps. Urban reformers may not have viewed crime as a congenital disease, but it was

²¹ Jacob Riis, ‘The Making of Thieves in New York’, *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 49 (Nov, 1894), 109-116. Although about New York, this was quoted in Chicago publications like the *Tribune* as though about their own city. See for example ‘The Crop of Juvenile Criminals’, *Chicago Tribune* (November 8, 1894), 13.

²² Chamberlain, Alexander E., *The Child: A Study in the Evolution of Man* (London, 1900); Mennel, Robert M, *Thorns and Thistles: Juvenile Delinquents in the United States, 1825-1940* (Lebanon, NH, 1973); Morn, Frank, *Forgotten Reformer: Robert McClaughery and Criminal Justice Reform in Nineteenth Century America* (Lanham, MD, 2010); Lombrosian ideas came to the United States in the 1890s but they strengthened rather than created American’s belief in the hereditary nature of crime. Homegrown scholars, like Richard Dugdale who studied a family of criminals in the 1870s, had been arguing that criminals were physical and moral degenerates for decades. Dugdale, Richard, *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity* (1877).

²³ Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, 186.

²⁴ Lindley, Susan Hill, ‘Gender and the Social Gospel Novel’, in Deichmann Edwards, Wendy J., and De Swarte Gifford, Carolyn (eds.), *Gender and the Social Gospel* (Chicago, 2003), 185-202; Bowman, Matthew, ‘Sin, Spirituality, and Primitivism: The Theologies of the American Social Gospel, 1885-1917’, *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 17:1 (Winter, 2007), 95-126.

certainly a contagious one. No group stood more at risk of moral contagion than children. Unlike the innocent maid coming into the city who, reformers feared would be lured into vice, or the countrified “rube” visiting the city from the farm and falling to the immoral temptations of the city, child-savers like Addams feared for urban children growing up with too much knowledge of the city’s vice.²⁵

In the 1880s and 1890s, the study of child development entered the academy. It was led mainly by G. Stanley Hall, the president of Clark University and Earl Barnes, a professor of education at Stanford.²⁶ Malleable, and naïve, children in new, turn-of-the-century science seemed uniquely vulnerable to the corrupting influence of the city. Juvenile justice professionals like Ohioan, Charles D. Hilles, believed “the child... is plastic to everything” with “the stress of the city streets, irregular habits, late hours, observations of evils, and perverted appetites” providing the worst influences.²⁷ With all these dangers threatening to derail children’s development, according to early twentieth century science children’s malleable natures demanded protection and supervision by adults.

The urban setting complicated supervision of children, however. William Douglas Morrison, an influential criminologist, articulated concerns over city childhood. In the countryside, Morrison wrote, community and communal supervision protected the child’s innocence. Yet in the city “the restraining eye of the village community is no longer upon them.”²⁸ Where parents tended to be foreign immigrants, child-savers believed the control

²⁵ One of the most influential books ever written about Chicago, *Sister Carrie* concerned a young country girl who is drawn into vice by the city, indeed the first chapter is entitled “The Magnet Attracting: A Waif Amid Forces.” Dreiser, Theodore, *Sister Carrie* (London, 1901) The ‘rube’ was also a common figure in popular culture, see, for example Irving Berlin, ‘I’m Going Back to the Farm’ (New York, 1915) and Edison, Thomas A., Inc and Paper Print collection, *Rube and Mandy at Coney Island*. United States: Edison Manufacturing Co. (1903) Video available at www.loc.gov (Accessed 04.30.2018).

²⁶ See Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*.

²⁷ Hilles, Charles D., ‘Treatment of the Criminal’, *Charities and Commons* 15 (November 18), 245.

²⁸ Morrison, William Douglas, *Juvenile Offenders* (New York, 1897), 31.

and supervision of children broke down even further as traditional supervision techniques disintegrated in the process of immigration.²⁹ Thus while child-savers did not believe immigrant children inherited criminality from their parents, they certainly linked immigrant communities to criminality.

But if child-savers tended to reject the idea of hereditary criminality, they still believed in the biological causes of crime. By 1900, changing ideas about misbehavior and child development had come to dominate discussions of the causes of crime. Rather than juxtaposing environmental and biological factors, a new theory espoused by scholars such as Edgar J. Swift and Alexander E. Chamberlain, combined these two strands in what was known as the “recapitulation theory”.

The most influential proponent of this theory was G. Stanley Hall who popularized the recapitulation theory with regards to child development. Hall argued that children passed through (or recapitulated) all the stages of the evolution of the race before they achieved adulthood. This recapitulation was physical, scholars often pointing to the “gill-slits” visible in human embryos, but also mental and moral. In the recapitulation theory white boys must relive the “primitive” stages of the race before they could enter the more civilized state of white manhood.³⁰ Thus misbehavior, or “savagery”, was a requirement for a boy to achieve full manhood. Indeed, some, like play administrator George E. Johnson, went so far as to argue that delinquent boys were in fact biologically superior to “good” boys. “Who is a bad boy?” he asked rhetorically. “He is one in whom the streams of heredity run deep and strong, in whom the virtues of his ancestors are expressed in tireless

²⁹ This idea still exists among some scholars of early twentieth century gangs, see, for example, Howell, James C., *The History of Street Gangs in the United States: Their Origins and Transformations* (Lanham, 2015).

³⁰ Chamberlain, *The Child*; Swift, Edgar J., ‘Some Criminal Tendencies of Boyhood: A Study in Adolescence,’ *Pedagogical Seminary* 8 (March 1901), 65-91; Hall, *Adolescence*, vols.i, ii; Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall* (Chicago, 1972).

energy.”³¹ Progressive Era science thus normalized and even advocated for white boys’ misbehavior.

Advocates of this new evolutionary idea of child development idealized almost all of white boys’ misbehavior as recapitulation of the race’s past. Edgar J. Swift, for example, argued that “truancy is not evidence of youthful depravity.” Instead, Swift contended: “[Truancy] is temporary reversion to the migratory habits of our ancestors. It is the awakening in the boy of the natural life of the race, and a revolt against the oppressive gloom of the schoolroom.”³² Proponents like George E. Johnson explained away serious violent behavior as childish impulses in an unsupervised environment: “Boy gangs stoning and knifing each other is unsupervised rivalry play, organized games [baseball, basketball etc.] the supervised.”³³

Recapitulation theory did not clash fundamentally with ideas that the urban environment caused crime. According to Hall and his colleagues’ understanding of delinquent behavior, childish impulses, which were perfectly safe in the countryside, led boys in the city down dangerous paths to crime and dependency.³⁴ Thus, congenital factors caused childhood crime. Boys were born criminals, but in the proper, supervised environments, adults could guide white boys’ criminal tendencies into productive, safe avenues. Edgar Swift summarized the links between evolutionary and environmental causes of crime:

This period of savagery, or semi-criminality, is normal for all healthy boys. Those whose surroundings are favorable to a life of crime continue in it, finally to end in the reform school, and still later, probably, in the penitentiary, while those of better surroundings pass through it without permanent moral injury, and perhaps, indeed, with a stronger character and a keener insight into human nature.³⁵

³¹ George E. Johnson, ‘Why Teach a Child to Play?’ (1909), 104 CHy 34, RSFM.

³² Swift ‘Some Criminal Tendencies’, 67

³³ Johnson, ‘Why Teach a Child to Play?’

³⁴ Heller, ‘The Playground as a Phase of Social Reform’; Hall, *Adolescence*, i, chpt.v.

³⁵ Swift, ‘Some Criminal Tendencies’, 86

Criminologists like Swift proved popular among Progressive Era child-savers who saw in white boys' criminality unsupervised but natural misbehavior.

In contrast, the misbehavior of girls and children of color seldom received praise or justification. As nineteenth century American culture linked femininity to dependence and submission, girls who misbehaved seemed unnatural and abnormal, especially when that misbehavior took place in the city.³⁶ Thus, in the same paragraph where early influential child-saver Charles Loring Brace praised the adventurous, romanticized life of boys on the street, he also wrote: "With a girl vagrant it is different ... the strange and mysterious subject of sexual vice comes in."³⁷ Child-savers linked girls' misbehavior to sexual corruption rather than recapitulation and, thus, deemed the problem far more serious. Sophonisba Breckinridge and Edith Abbott (both of whom worked in Chicago but had national child-saving roles) highlighted the differences between reformers' views of girls' and boys' misbehavior in 1912:

[The delinquent girl] is in peril which threatens the ruin of her whole life, and the situation demands immediate action; her only hope of rescue seems to lie in prompt removal from her old surroundings and associates. The delinquent boy, on the other hand, is frequently only a troublesome nuisance who needs discipline but who, as the probation officer so often says, is 'not really a bad boy' and 'with a little watching he is sure to come out all right.'³⁸

Boys, in Progressive Era science were meant to misbehave and were "sure to come out right", while misbehaving girls risked their futures and needed rescuing.

³⁶ Girls who learned independence would not feel satisfied in their true calling as mothers according to Hall, *Adolescence*, ii, chpt. xvii; Tomboy literature, on the other hand, was a 'mainstream phenomenon' by the latter half of the nineteenth century, although almost all tomboys turned to marriage and motherhood on reaching adolescence. See Elliott, Mary, 'When Girls Will Be Boys: "Bad" Endings and Subversive Middles in Nineteenth-Century Tomboy Narratives and Twentieth-Century Lesbian Pulp Novels', *Legacy* 15:1 (1998), 92-97; Habegger, Alfred, *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature* (New York, 1982).

³⁷ Brace, Charles Loring, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years of Work Among Them* (New York, 1872), 114-115.

³⁸ Breckinridge and Abbott, *The Delinquent Child*, 41.

Children of color, both boys and girls, also remained outside the typical idealized misbehavior narrative, and especially, the recapitulation theory that “scientifically” justified white boys’ “savagery”. Only white boys, in G. Stanley Hall’s model, could pass through the “primitive stages” to achieved civilized manhood. Black boys, or Native American boys, could never enter the civilized state thus their “savagery” was not to be valued as a developmental stage. The racism of the recapitulation theory was not subtle. Swift, for example, compared white children’s behavior at length to the “animalistic” morality of indigenous peoples, writing: “the morality of primitive savages is wholly animal”.³⁹ Due to the supposed inability of boys and girls of color to advance through the stages of recapitulation, white Americans basing reform on the recapitulation theory sought to repress the misbehavior or childhood “savagery” of children of color rather than encourage it. Thus, just as white children were encouraged to embrace their inner “savage” and hold mock “powwows” and “to play Indian”, Progressive reformers confined Native American children to “civilizing” boarding schools, forbidding the use of native languages and names, and forcibly removing children from their families.⁴⁰

Recapitulation theory may not have extended to Native American or African-American children, but it did have room for the inclusion of European immigrants. Although Europeans immigrants like the Irish, Italians, Greeks, and Bohemians that filled Chicago’s neighborhoods in the 1890s suffered from prejudice and discrimination based on their “race”, they found inclusion in the broader “white” race. As historian Thomas Guglielmo has demonstrated, new European immigrants like Italians may have been racially undesirable, but their “color” status as white men and women remained largely

³⁹ Swift, ‘Some Criminal Tendencies’, 78.

⁴⁰ Armitage, Kevin C., “The Child Is Born a Naturalist”: Nature Study, Woodcraft Indians, and the Theory of Recapitulation’, *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 6:1 (Jan., 2007), 43-70; Adams, David Wallace, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence, 1995)

secure.⁴¹ However, in the eyes of white middle-class Americans, the children of European immigrants posed perhaps the greatest threat to American democracy. These white boys were the citizens of the future, and their supposed miseducation on the streets of the city with its moral and physical corruption, scared many middle-class observers at the end of the nineteenth century.

These middle-class child-savers looked upon the masses of children on the streets and saw swarms. Although children didn't suddenly appear on the streets of Chicago in the 1890s, they emerged at that time as one of the most pressing urban problem facing reformers. New groups of reform-minded individuals formed in the late nineteenth century produced and consumed endless images of poor, endangered urban children. Moreover, theories of child development and crime, most importantly recapitulation, suggested that future citizens growing up in the middle of urban vice threatened the future of the country. Yet recapitulation also offered an optimistic alternative future by pathologizing the city rather than white boys' delinquency. To solve the problem of juvenile delinquency, Progressive Era child-savers set about trying to move children off the streets and into supervised, child-centered spaces where delinquency would once again become mischief. Only by changing the environment of urban childhood could reformers hope to break the flow of children from street habit, to delinquency, to adult crime.

Dealing with Delinquents

Chicago's reform-minded middle-class in the 1890s increasingly believed any child would become a criminal if he or she grew up in the wrong environment. Undergoing formative experiences, child-savers believed urban children needed protection from the

⁴¹ Guglielmo, Thomas A, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York, 2003). For more on whiteness, see chapter 4.

corrupting influences of the city but they also worried that the city was placing delinquent children in deleterious environments.

In the 1890s, the city lagged behind the rest of the country when it came to treatment of child criminals. On the East Coast, Boston boasted numerous reformatories separating juveniles from adult criminals, and a system of probation aimed at supervising and reforming wayward youth.⁴² New York, likewise, separated delinquent children from adult offenders. In addition, philanthropist Charles Loring Brace had created the system of orphan trains in New York in the 1850s. These trains took vagrant children away from the adult prisons, reformatories and corrupting streets of the city, out to familial, rural, supposedly idyllic settings in the West.⁴³

Unlike Boston and New York, Illinois had no system for dealing separately with delinquent or vagrant children in the 1890s. Indeed, in 1890, Illinois had no reformatory schools at all.⁴⁴ Delinquent boys ended up rubbing shoulders with adults in the county jail or, more commonly, released without supervision to the corrupting influences of the streets, while delinquent girls joined adult women in the Erring Women's Refuge.⁴⁵ With no probation system, no way to monitor let alone end recidivism, and no rehabilitation programs, reformers worried this system did nothing to prevent delinquent children progressing to criminality.

In the late 1880s, the Chicago Women's Club commissioned an investigation into the conditions of women and children in the Illinois justice system.⁴⁶ On finding young

⁴² Schneider, Eric C., *In the Web of Class: Delinquents and Reformers in Boston, 1810s-1930s* (New York, 1993).

⁴³ Of course, the reality was far harsher than Brace's vision. Many children who rode the orphan trains were exploited, abused, and forgotten. O'Connor, Stephen, *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed* (Chicago, 2004).

⁴⁴ Mennel, *Thorns and Thistles*, 127

⁴⁵ *Erring Women's Refuge of Chicago Annual Reports*, (1896 to 1906)

⁴⁶ Lathrop, 'The Background of the Juvenile Court', 290-299

boys confined with murderers and anarchists, the CWC expressed fears that the influences of jail inevitably transformed redeemable delinquent children into hardened, life-long criminals.⁴⁷ Attempting to provide children in jails with good influences and an education, the CWC maintained a school at the county jail from 1892. Yet the women of the CWC themselves saw the school as a temporary solution; their ultimate goal was the complete separation of adult and child criminals and the creation of a totally separate juvenile justice system. In 1892, the Jail Committee of the CWC concluded that Chicago needed a separate juvenile court where delinquent children would not be treated as criminals, but rather as individual cases in need of protection and rehabilitation.⁴⁸

After almost a decade of work by the CWC, and with the support of a wide-ranging group of reformers including judges, physicians, lawyers, clergymen, the settlement houses, and the State Board of Charities, the Illinois legislature passed “an act to regulate the treatment and control of dependent, neglected and delinquent children” or the Juvenile Court Law of 1899.⁴⁹ As the CWC had hoped, the Juvenile Court Law transformed the way children were treated by the justice system in Chicago. Children would not face a jury, nor have a lawyer. Children would not be convicted of crimes, or sentenced, and the court would not have to adhere to strict rules of evidence. Instead, the judge functioned as a surrogate parent who acted in the child’s “best interest”. A trained probation officer brought the child before a judge. If found dependent, delinquent, or truant, or just in danger of becoming so, the child faced a range of court-determined options.⁵⁰ The court kept cases of the children they released open, thus monitoring recidivism and aiming to never release repeat offenders back onto the streets without supervision. Most famously,

⁴⁷ Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*, 28

⁴⁸ Lathrop, ‘The Background of the Juvenile Court’, 292

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 293

⁵⁰ Hurley, T. D., *Origin of the Illinois Juvenile Court Law: Juvenile Courts and What they have Accomplished* (Chicago, 1907), 23

the new law provided for the separate detention of children and prohibited the detention of children under twelve in the common jail.⁵¹ Protected from adult criminals and guided by the parental judge, the court aimed explicitly to transform the delinquent child into “a worthy citizen”.⁵²

The social reformers of Chicago and the press greeted the opening of the Juvenile Court, on July 3rd 1899, with a fanfare. Packed with spectators and reporters, the first case of the Juvenile Court of Cook County got underway on July 3rd 1899. It concerned one Henry Campbell, an eleven-year-old boy from Chicago. Henry’s parents themselves had brought forward the petition, after they caught Henry stealing. The Campbells asked the state, in the form of Judge Tuthill, not to send their son to “any of the institutions”, but rather, to live with his grandmother in rural New York. Tuthill agreed and released Henry to the care of his grandmother in the small town of Rome, New York.⁵³

Henry’s case demonstrated the aims and the flexibility of the new court, and indeed the methods of the child-saving movement as a whole. As reformers had hoped, in Henry’s case, juvenile justice officials and working-class parents worked together in the “best interests” of the child to save him from a life of delinquency.⁵⁴ Henry’s sentence also showed the flexibility of the new court: the law did not require Judge Tuthill to either release Henry or send him to the “institutions”; Tuthill could send Henry in exile from the city. After all, child-savers like Tuthill and the women of the CWC believed familiarity with

⁵¹ Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*

⁵² The first Chicago Juvenile Court judge, Richard Tuthill, cited in Ward, *The Black Child Savers*, 32

⁵³ “New Court Begins Work,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 4, 1899; “Case in Juvenile Court – Judge Tuthill Listened to the first Complaint Filed under the New Enactment,” *Chicago Daily News* July 3, 1899; Tanenhaus, *Juvenile Justice*.

⁵⁴ Since Anthony Platt’s *The Child Savers*, historians like Elizabeth Clapp, Mary Odem, and Barbara Brenzel have been keen to demonstrate that immigrant parents were able to use the new juvenile justice system for their own ends. See Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*; Brenzel, Barbara M., *Daughters of the State: A Social Portrait of the First Reform School for Girls in North America, 1856-1905* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); Odem, Mary E., *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States* (Chapel Hill, 1995).

the city streets caused Henry's delinquency, only in small town New York could he "escape the surroundings which caused his mischief."⁵⁵ Like Brace's Orphan Trains, the new court believed in the premise that sending the child out of the city, to a rural or small-town environment, would stop Henry's journey to criminality or pauperism.

The resolution of Henry's case may have been the ideal of the new court, but it was certainly not typical. Sending children away from the influence of the streets to relatives in a rural, small-town setting, wasn't a realistic option for most young offenders, whose relatives tended to live either in Chicago or in distant European lands.⁵⁶ Moreover, unlike Brace who had sought to remove street-frequenting children from the influence of their families, Chicago's juvenile court reformers hoped, in the majority of cases, to support the family in reforming the erring child. The new court provided personnel to perform this function: six new probation officers who received salaries from private sources such as the CWC and "one colored woman", unpaid, who performed the role of probation officer for the African-American children of the court. In addition, the Chicago Police Department assigned sixteen police officers as probation officers to support the general probation officers in their work.⁵⁷ Around sixty percent of all boys charged with delinquency in the Juvenile Court, were released under the supervision of a probation officer.⁵⁸ Tuthill tended only to commit delinquent children to institutional homes if they fell into one of two categories: recidivists, or female.

⁵⁵ "New Court Begins Work," *Chicago Tribune*, July 4, 1899; "Case in Juvenile Court – Judge Tuthill Listened to the first Complaint Filed under the New Enactment," *Chicago Daily News* July 3, 1899; Tannenhaus, *Juvenile Justice*.

⁵⁶ Four-fifths of the children who came before the early Juvenile Court came from immigrant families. See Jones, Kathleen, *Taming the Troublesome Child: American Families, Child Guidance, and the Limits of Psychiatric Authority* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

⁵⁷ Hurley, Timothy D., *First Annual Report of the Cook County Juvenile Court* (1900) excerpted in Platt, *The Child Savers*, 140

⁵⁸ See, for example, Finley, Laura L., *Juvenile Justice* (Santa Barbara, 2007); Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*; Circuit Court of Cook County, Juvenile Division, Annual Report, 1907-1909.

Girls made up a small fraction of the delinquent cases brought before the Juvenile Court. In 1904, for example, just three hundred and fifty-four delinquent girls appeared in the court compared to over fifteen hundred delinquent boys.⁵⁹ However, while only a third of delinquent boys ended up in state or local institutions or had their cases held to grand jury, two-thirds of the girls did.⁶⁰ Girls who came before the court tended to appear on immorality charges, and reformers often deemed the “girl problem” of sexual misconduct far more serious than typical charges against boys of larceny, truancy, and incorrigibility. Girls received longer sentences than boys and were more likely to be removed from their homes and could be detained in institutional homes “for their own good” until the age of twenty-one or, in special cases, even older.⁶¹

African-American girls and boys also made up a minority of cases appearing before the Juvenile Court in the early twentieth century, yet the court had far fewer resources to use when it came to black dependent and delinquent children. The court relied primarily on privately-run institutions for the care of dependent children, and almost none of these accepted black children. Even in 1927, the Juvenile Court had almost no institutions to which to send dependent black children.⁶² Black dependent and delinquent youth were thus more often sent to state-run institutional homes meant for serious offenders, such as St. Charles. African-American youth also spent considerably more time in the county jail. The Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago (JPA), which provided the first probation officers for the court and promoted delinquency research, reported in 1913 that despite African-Americans comprising just one-fortieth of the population of Chicago, one-eighth

⁵⁹ Cook County Juvenile Court Annual Report extracted in Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance*, 186.

⁶⁰ Platt, *The Child Savers* 141.

⁶¹ Abrams, Laura S., ‘Guardians of Virtue: The Social Reformers and the ‘Girl Problem,’ 1890-1920,’ *Social Service Review* 74:3 (Sept. 2000), 436-452.

⁶² For decades creating and maintaining homes for dependent black children had been a priority of black child-savers in Chicago. See, for example, Crawley, Charlotte Ashby, ‘Dependent Negro Children in Chicago in 1926’, unpublished master’s thesis, University of Chicago (1927).

of the boys and young men and nearly one-third of the girls and young women confined in the county jail in that year were black.⁶³ Even in the institutions that did take black children, such as the State Industrial School for Girls at Geneva, institutional officials sometimes segregated the children, putting African-American and white girls in different cottages.⁶⁴ Not all state-run institutions for delinquent children followed this pattern. In the equivalent of the Geneva school for boys, Illinois State Home for Delinquent Boys at St. Charles, for example, black and white boys lived side-by-side.

St. Charles, which opened in 1901, was the first dedicated institution for delinquent boys in Illinois. There was no equivalent to the Erring Women's Refuge for delinquent boys before the establishment of the Juvenile Court: only release or the county jail. After pressure from child-savers and the support of the governor, the state founded the Illinois State Home for Delinquent Boys at St. Charles in 1901 as an institutional home for delinquent boys aged between ten and seventeen. Situated outside of St. Charles, a small town some forty miles west of Chicago, the school had attractive rural grounds, shown in figure 10. Furthermore, the school was built along the "cottage plan"; the boys were separated into small "cottages" where they lived and worked. Each cottage was organized somewhat like a family with a house mother and a house father. Here, officials hoped, boys would receive a rural, familial upbringing ideal for the creation of worthy citizens and a far cry from the swarming children on the streets of Chicago.⁶⁵

⁶³ See Ward, *The Black Child Savers*, 111.

⁶⁴ Earl Myers, 'Juvenile Delinquency', EBP b.10, fol.1.

⁶⁵ Ibid.



Figure 10: 'Young Men Walking Towards and Across A Bridge At St Charles School For Boys', *Chicago Daily News* (1925).

The creation of Chicago's juvenile justice system at the turn of the century thus transformed the institutions of youthful offenders. No longer would judges send malleable delinquent children to the corrupting environments of adult jails, but nor would they release them back to the streets without supervision. Instead the new reform institutions for child offenders, like St. Charles, supposedly offered a familial setting where delinquent boys could benefit from a rural upbringing. Those delinquent children the court did release, the judge placed under the watchful eye of a probation officer whose supervision would ostensibly help to mediate the bad influences of children's home settings. Child-savers who created this third way in juvenile justice in Illinois believed they could stop street-frequenting, delinquent children on the route to a life of crime.

Just as child-savers were transforming the juvenile justice system to relocate or supervise delinquent children, they were also working to extend regulations that governed

children's use of the city. While the original Juvenile Court Law in 1899 had simply defined a delinquent child as someone under the age of sixteen who violated any law or city ordinance in the state, the Illinois legislature dramatically expanded the definition with a new bill passed in 1907 as part of a new push to professionalize and standardize the work of the Juvenile Court. Among other things, the new law defined a delinquent child as a boy under the age of seventeen or a girl under the age of eighteen who:

is incorrigible... without just cause and without the consent of its parents, guardian or custodian absents itself from its home or place of abode... knowingly frequents a house of ill-repute; or knowingly frequents any policy shop or place where any gaming device is operated; or frequents any saloon or dram shop... or patronizes or visits any public pool room or bucket shop; or wanders about the streets in the night time without being on any lawful business or lawful occupations; or habitually wanders about any railroad yards... or uses vile, obscene, vulgar, profane or indecent language in any public place or about any school house...⁶⁶

As historian Anthony Platt first noted in 1969, this new law "went far beyond humanitarian concern for the special treatment of adolescents. It brought within the ambit of governmental control a set of youthful activities that had been previously ignored or handled informally."⁶⁷ By supposedly acting in the child's best interests rather than as a criminal court, juvenile court officials had dramatically expanded their remit, seeking to control all sorts of behaviors that may not have been strictly criminal but, in reformers' eyes at least, were not in a child's best interest.

Platt continued, arguing that it was no coincidence the new law brought about by middle-class reformers criminalized much of working-class children's behaviors.⁶⁸ Certainly, the majority of the children who appeared in the new juvenile court under these charges were working-class, often the sons and daughters of immigrants. But, it was also

⁶⁶ 1907 amendment to the Juvenile Court Law extracted in Hurley, *Origin of the Illinois Juvenile Court Law*.

⁶⁷ Platt, *The Child Savers*, 139

⁶⁸ Historians since Platt have demonstrated that juvenile justice institutions often worked in tandem with working-class parents who hoped to control their children rather than against parents' wishes. See, for example, Brenzel, *Daughters of the State*; Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*.

no coincidence the new law targeted children's street culture. For boys in particular, the new law sought to control and limit their use of the outdoor city. Of the fifteen new ways a child could become delinquent, over half referred specifically to where children's activities took place. Children's, even working-class children's, home activities escaped restrictions whereas simply wandering around railroad yards, or being out at night, or even just being away from home without permission suddenly came under the remit of delinquent behavior.

The officials of the juvenile court recognized that the new law targeted behaviors specifically because of where they took place. As the first chief probation officer of the juvenile court reflected in 1907, most of the boys brought before the juvenile court from urban areas had committed "hoodlum acts which in the country would not be considered crime."⁶⁹ While girls tended to appear in the juvenile court on immorality charges (or under the broad catch-all of incorrigibility), boys appeared for a wide range of activities. Jane Addams listed some of the charges upon which boys were brought into the Juvenile Court of Chicago, in her 1909 book *The Spirit of Youth in The City Streets*. The charges included building fires along the railroad tracks; throwing stones at moving train windows; shooting at the actors in the Olympic Theatre with sling shots; breaking signal lights on the railroad; stealing linseed oil barrels from the railroad to make a fire; turning a switch and running a street car off the track; staying away from home to sleep in barns; setting fire to a barn in order to see the fire engines come up the street; loafing on the docks; "sleeping out" nights; and even simply getting "wandering spells."⁷⁰ Of course boys did often appear in court for the more mundane crimes of larceny and burglary, but it's clear that the juvenile court was

⁶⁹ Hurley, *Origin of the Illinois Juvenile Court Law*, 69

⁷⁰ Addams, *The Spirit of Youth*

also trying to control some of the less obviously criminal street behaviors and boundary transgressions of the swarm.

As child-savers blamed childhood crime on the urban environment, it made sense for them to attempt to undermine children's presence on the streets. Through expanding the definition of delinquency as well as creating the probation system and tracking recidivists, child-savers built a juvenile justice system designed to reform children before the city corrupted them. But targeting children only after they appeared in the juvenile court could never truly solve the problems the swarm posed for American society; it was a reactionary method of reforming delinquency rather than a preventative one. Child-savers believed they needed to break children's relationship to the streets before children became delinquent, not just afterwards. In the decade after the passage of the Juvenile Court Law, child-savers in Illinois and across the nation began tackling children's activities that tied them to the streets and supposedly led them into crime. First and foremost on the list was child street labor.

Child Labor

The State Factory Inspection Bill, passed in 1893, had prohibited factories and workshops from employing children under the age of fourteen. In these industrial settings, child labor opponents feared children faced physical dangers but also curbed mental development from the monotony of industrial labor.⁷¹ To ensure employers followed the new regulations, the state appointed Florence Kelley, a prominent Chicago reformer, as a factory inspector.⁷² Reformers lauded Kelley's appointment, and hoped the new regulations would keep children out of work and in school. The new law did nothing to

⁷¹ Kubie, Oenone, 'Reading Lewis Hine's Child Street Labor Photography, 1906-1918', *Journal of American Studies* 50:4 (Nov., 2016), 873-897

⁷² Gordon, Lynn 'Women and the Anti-Child Labor Movement in Illinois, 1890-1920' *Social Service Review* 51:2 (1977), 228-248; see also Bernheimer, *The Russian Jew*, 141.

limit children's labor on the street; if anything, the law encouraged street labor as it forced children out of factory-based work.

It was the passage of the Illinois Juvenile Court Law in 1899 that began regulation of child street labor in Chicago. The law included in its definition of a dependent child "any child under the age of eight years, who is found peddling or selling any article or singing or playing any musical instrument upon the street."⁷³ The 1907 amendment extended the definition further to include children up to the age of ten. Classified as dependent children, if brought before the court, the judge could remove these children from the custody of their parents and place them in institutional homes.⁷⁴ Despite this regulation, limiting child street labor was certainly not one of the primary goals of the court, especially in the early years, and the new regulation received little recognition even among anti-child labor reformers.

Some reformers, like Jane Addams, tried to extend child labor regulations to street laborers in Illinois in the early 1900s. Following the example of New York and Rochester, in 1903 Jane Addams proposed a system whereby newsboys, by far the largest group of street laborers, would require a badge in order to sell papers. Only boys over the age of ten and girls over sixteen could apply for a badge and even those with a badge could not legally sell after 9pm and before 5am.⁷⁵ The badge system was a failure, however. While both New York and Rochester reported that initially the boys took to the badges and many were seen wearing them, within a just few weeks, interest over the badges faded and they gradually disappeared. The newsboys remained.

Nationwide child-savers failed to pass any meaningful regulation of street laborers in the 1890s and early 1900s. In these early years of child labor reform, street labor remained peripheral and only a secondary concern, both in Illinois and nationally. As with all

⁷³ See Hurley, *Origin of the Illinois Juvenile Court Law*.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Addams, *Newsboy Conditions*.

Progressive Era child-saving projects, many Illinois reformers held prominent positions in the national movement. Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and Lillian Wald, for example, all joined the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) after its formation in 1904.⁷⁶ Initially, like in Illinois, the NCLC primarily concerned itself with children who worked in factories, workshops, and mines.⁷⁷ Not until several years into the 1900s, nearly two decades after the State Factory Inspection Bill of Illinois, did child-savers in the NCLC seriously turn their attention to child street labor.⁷⁸

Once it began the anti-child street labor movement quickly became central to the NCLC and child-saving more broadly. By 1910, the NCLC was arguing that the risk to street traders was perhaps more serious than any other form of juvenile labor.⁷⁹ Unlike factory or mine laborers, the NCLC framed street labor as part of an anti-delinquency program. After all, child-savers feared that street laborers grew up delinquent, and morally if not physically scarred. Reformers believed that through their acquaintance with the street, not just through the work itself, newsboys, boot-blacks, and other street laborers would learn criminal behaviors. The NCLC created posters such as figure 11 and figure 12 which articulated the environmental dangers of children's work as newsboys, bootblack, and messengers. Posters like these framed street trading as a uniquely dangerous form of child labor likely to end in delinquency. As Lewis Hine, the creator of these posters, highlighted: "The majority of boys who come before the juvenile court have been street workers."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ James H. Blenk, 'The Child in the Street', *Child Labor Bulletin: Child Labor: A National Problem, Proceedings of the 10th Annual Conference on Child Labor Held at New Orleans, La., March 15-18, 1914: Published by the NCLC* (New York, 1914), 52-55.

⁷⁷ Clopper, *Child Labor*.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Presentation by George A. Hall at the NCLC annual meeting (1911) extracted at Joseph H. Manning, 'The Lewis Hine Project', <http://sevensteeples.com/> (accessed 07/05/2014).

⁸⁰ Lewis Hine, 'Juvenile Crime', Exhibit panel (1913 or 1914) Library of Congress (LOC) Prints and Photographs accessed at <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclc/> (13/05/2014). Lewis Hine's photographs reached a wide audience, appearing in magazines, exhibitions, and lectures. Posters like these would have been shown at exhibitions such as the Child Welfare Exhibit in Chicago in

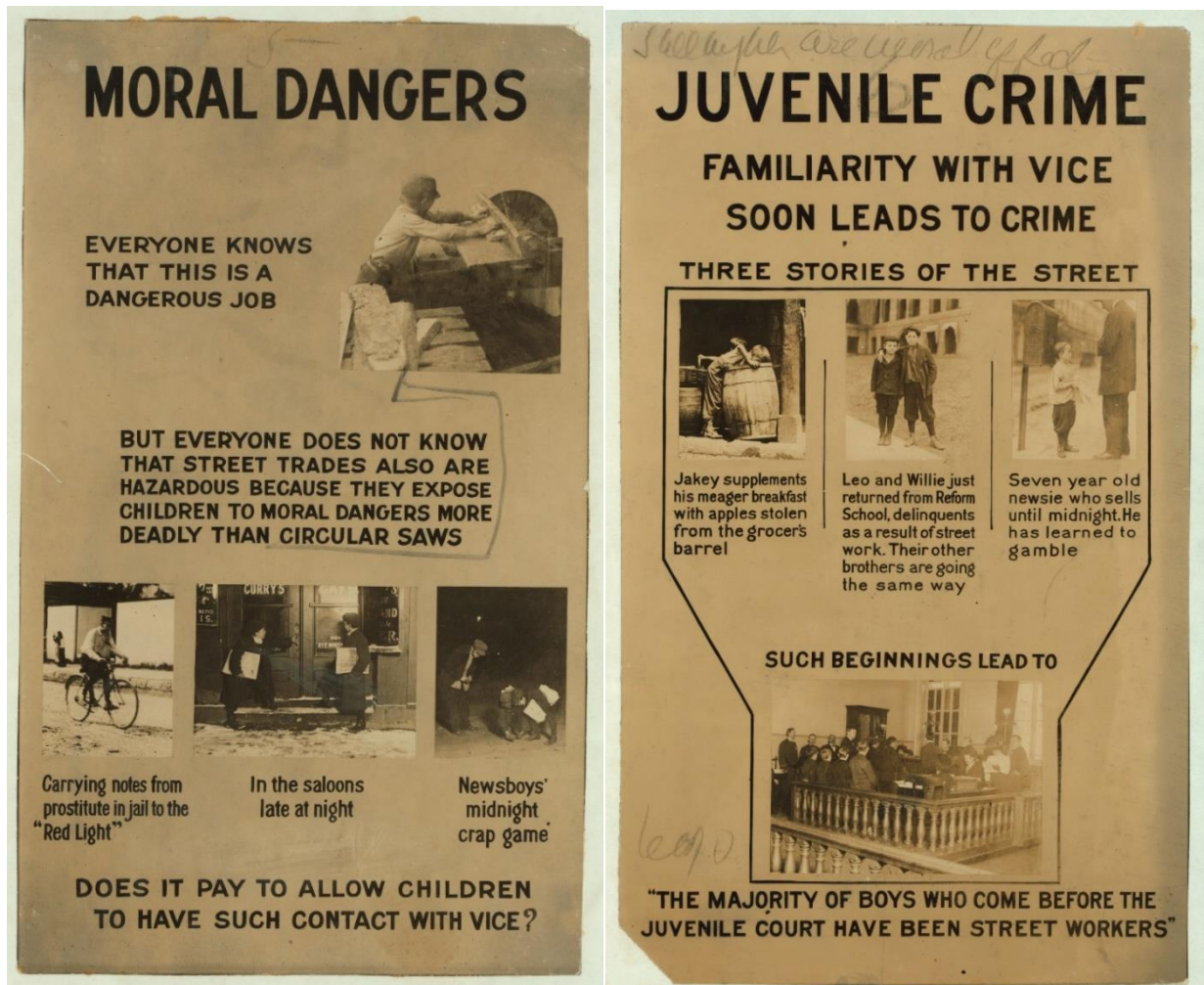


Figure 11. (left) Lewis Hine, 'Moral Dangers' reproduced in 'The High Cost of Child Labor', in NCLC, *The Child Labor Bulletin*, 3:4 (Feb., 1915), 17

Figure 12. (right) Lewis Hine, 'Juvenile Crime', Exhibit panel (1913 or 1914), National Child Labor Committee Collection, Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

Despite the sustained focus on child street labor by the early 1910s, reformers still struggled to regulate it both nationally and in Chicago. All previous child labor legislation targeted employers not laborers themselves. When it came to child street labor, however, employers as such rarely existed. The iconic image of a newsboy as a self-employed little hustler was fairly accurate: newspapers did not hire newsboys directly, however much they

1911. CCWE, b.2-3. For more on the circulation of Lewis Hine's images of street laborers see my article: Kubie, 'Reading Lewis Hine's Child Street Labor Photography'.

relied on the young laborers to ensure circulation.⁸¹ The badge system, which had targeted the traders themselves rather than employers, also failed, as children simply ignored the requirements.

Street trading proved hard to regulate, in part because street traders were everything Progressive Era reformers feared: unsupervised, independent, and vastly knowledgeable of the street. In addition, they were flexible workers, who put their goods down to avoid interfering adults or to play. Child labor opponents viewed these moments of recreation at least as dangerous as the work itself, for they exposed the children to “abnormal excitements” and drew them into the dark corrupting influence of the street.⁸²

In fact, all anti-child labor reform, not just anti-child street labor reform was about regulating childhood leisure, for many children kept some, if not all, of their earnings and used this money in new commercial amusement places in the city.⁸³ Among the leisure spaces that urban reformers considered “directly tributary” to the increase in vice among children were “amusement parks; dance halls... saloons; candy, ice cream and fruit stores used as pleasure resorts; theatre plays and moving pictures,” all of which child laborers frequented.⁸⁴ In these spaces, alcohol was readily available and boys and girls mingled without adult supervision.⁸⁵ Thus, just as child labor opponents worked to control and limit child street labor, a group of reformers also formed a movement to reform children’s play within the city, specifically to provide children with alternative play-spaces to the new commercial amusements and, ultimately, the streets.

⁸¹ ‘Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Conference on Child Labor under the Auspices of the National Child Labor Committee. Chicago Ill., January 21, 22, 23, 1909’ *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 33 (Mar 1909), 207-244.

⁸² Letter to the editor by Grace M. Lichten, *The Survey*, 34, (1915), 267.

⁸³ For the development of urban commercial amusement at this time see Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, and McBee, Randy D., *Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-class Immigrants in the United States* (New York, 2000).

⁸⁴ Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil*, 230.

⁸⁵ Addams, *The Spirit of Youth*, 12-15.

Play

Child-savers believed the first step on the road to delinquency was unsupervised street play. In 1901, Jacob Riis, by then one of the most prominent urban reformers in the nation directly linked street play to delinquency: “a community that does not give the children a chance to play will have overfilled jails and no reason to complain. Play is the child’s pursuit of happiness, but the street is not the proper place for it.”⁸⁶ His words echoed among child-savers who believed cities needed “moral quarantines” where children could play, separated and sheltered from urban vice.⁸⁷ The explicit aims of playgrounds, according to the largest of the Chicago park commissions, was “to take children from the streets and alleys and give them a better environment and safer place in which to play.”⁸⁸

Most cities, including Chicago had public recreation grounds by the turn of the twentieth century in the form of the city parks. Typically large, bucolic oases in the middle of a city, one would assume that child-savers, with their romanticized views of rural childhood, would have cherished nineteenth century city parks. Yet, while child-savers did support large nineteenth-century parks, they preferred their own creations: playgrounds.

In theory and construction, parks and playgrounds were quite different. Figure 13 is a drawing of Central Park, New York from 1862. The park was designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, who also did the landscaping at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Olmstead influenced park design for a century, and in figure 13 we see his vision of an ideal, urban, nineteenth-century park. Firstly, it had to be large, certainly large enough so the park-goers felt away from the city, in a tranquil, spacious setting. Next, it should be a refuge for all city dwellers. The majority of the park goers in the picture below were middle-class adults, but nineteenth century park designers intended parks for all: the

⁸⁶ Riis, Jacob, ‘The Rights of Children’, *Charities and Commons* 7:2 (13 July, 1901), 47-49.

⁸⁷ Hilles, ‘Treatment of the Criminal’, 245.

⁸⁸ Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report of the South Park Commissioners of Chicago* (1905)

rich and the poor, the old and the young. Finally, nineteenth century parks needed beautiful, naturalistic landscaping. Park-goers, like those in figure 13, would passively receive the benefits of nature by viewing the beautiful vistas and engaging in light exercise such as strolling and riding. To protect the beauty of the gardens, fences and keep off the grass signs would restrict park-goers to certain paths that wound their way through the landscape.⁸⁹ Children could use parks but, like the children in figure 13, calmly and under the close supervision of nannies and parents.



Figure 13: 'Central Park, the Drive. [New York]: Currier & Ives, 1862'. Popular Graphic Arts. Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress

The Olmsteadian park became a popular type of park in Chicago in the 1890s.⁹⁰ The Chicago South Parks Commission (CSPC), one of Chicago's three bodies in charge of the municipal parks, often contracted out landscaping to Olmstead's firm.⁹¹ But with the turn

⁸⁹ Rosenzweig, Roy, and Blackmar, Elizabeth, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, 1992)

⁹⁰ Special Parks Commission, *Report of the Special Park Commission to the City Council of Chicago on the Subject of a Metropolitan Park System* (Chicago, 1905).

⁹¹ CSPC, *Annual Report of the South Park Commissioners of Chicago* (1894-1915).

of the century, attitudes changed within the CSPC. For the first time, in the 1901 annual report, the General Superintendent, J. Frank Foster, wrote of the need for small parks.⁹²

The small parks movement did not aim to do what its name suggested. On the whole, the leaders of the small parks movement did not aspire to recreate the Olmsteadian park on a smaller scale. Instead, leaders like the CSPC athletics director, E. B. DeGroot, suggested that without the proper organization and methods, small parks would “turn out products no better than have been turned out by the street and alley playgrounds since the beginning of the city”.⁹³ Playgrounds needed planning and organization, just importing the countryside into the city would not transform urban childhood.

The model small park, as created by the CSPC, was smaller than ten acres in size, with one located within easy walking distance of each neighborhood, particularly crowded, immigrant neighborhoods. Whereas commissioners designed parks for all city dwellers, the playground movement intended to provide recreation spaces primarily for children and young people. The model park had several age- and gender-segregated areas. A small children’s playground provided space for children under the age of ten, ideally containing a paddling pool and sandpit. For those older than ten, the parks provided sex-segregated indoor and outdoor gymnasiums, although in practice older girls often had to share park space with the younger children.⁹⁴ Many parks would also contain a swimming pool. In these areas, children, youths, and for that matter, adults, could take part in structured, organized recreation.⁹⁵

⁹² CSPC, *Annual Report*, 1901-1902.

⁹³ E. B. De Groot, ‘Recent Playground Development in Chicago’, (1908), 104 CHy 7, RSFM, RAC.

⁹⁴ See ‘Report of the Committee on Equipment’ *The Playground* 4:8 (November 1910), 270-284. Gagen, Elizabeth A., ‘Too Good to Be True: Representing Children’s Agency in the Archives of Playground Reform’, *Historical Geography* 29 (2015), 53-64.

⁹⁵ CSPC ‘Annual Report’, (1905-1915), Lorna H. Leland, ‘Playground Construction: An Ideal Development for a Playground on an Irregular Tract of Land Between Five and Six Acres in Extent’, (1909), 104 CHy 49, RSFM.

In contrast to the Olmsteadian parks, small parks encouraged children in active, even vigorous recreation. Keep off the grass signs, which abounded in the larger parks, became a particular hate of Progressive reformers, and at least one Progressive mayor, Tom L. Johnson of Cleveland, made tearing up these signs part of his platform.⁹⁶ In Chicago, J. Frank Foster, advocated the removal of 'Keep Off the Grass' signs and even fences, for although he admitted that they kept lawns tidy and beautiful, he condemned them for restricting the recreation of park users.⁹⁷ In the new small parks and playgrounds, the CSPC hoped to encourage children to run around, to use specially designed gymnastic equipment, and to partake in organized games like baseball for boys and dances for girls.⁹⁸

Structuring recreation and ordering use of the playground was the job of the most important feature of the small park: the play organizers. Play reformers deemed proper, adult supervision the key to the success of the new play environment. These play organizers needed to maintain the equipment and the order of the playground. Ideally, the play organizer had to determine which children could use the space of the playground and how they interacted with the environment.⁹⁹ Thus, while reformers idealized rural childhood, rather than attempting to recreate the countryside within the city, leading play reformers such as De Groot, set about creating ideal urban play-spaces: orderly, supervised, and dedicated solely to proper recreation.

In fact, De Groot's own position was a result of the changing aims of the South Park Commission. The CSPC only created his position as the Director of Gymnastics and

⁹⁶ Pursell, Carroll, *From Playgrounds to Play Stations: The Interaction of Technology and Play* (Baltimore, 2015), 38.

⁹⁷ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1908-1909).

⁹⁸ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1905-1915). Many of the folk dances girls learnt on playgrounds like the 'Inverness Reel' and the 'Dutch Dance' could be practiced and performed without male partners. See for example CSPC, 'Program of the First Annual Festival of Play and Sport of the Playground Association of America', Annual Report of the South Park Commissioners (1907).

⁹⁹ Arthur Leland, 'Winter Organization of Playgrounds', (1908), 104 CHy 6, RSFM.

Athletics in 1905.¹⁰⁰ This appointment, and the lengthy reports De Groot provided, dramatically changed the nature of the commission's annual reports. Whereas, in the late 1890s, the reports had mainly focused on landscaping and aesthetics, now the reports centered around activities, games, programs and, above all, children.¹⁰¹

The small parks movement grew rapidly in Chicago with the CSPC, the largest of its three park commissions, at the forefront. The legislature passed an act in 1902 allowing the CSPC one million dollars for the creation of small parks in congested neighborhoods.¹⁰² By 1905, the commission had acquired fourteen new parks and squares, with a median size of sixteen acres.¹⁰³ Two years later, in 1907, the CSPC had created an extensive system of small parks based on the ideology of the new playground movement, with a global reputation and a large budget to match. That year the city offered the two other park commissions in Chicago, the West Chicago Park Commission and the Lincoln Park Commission, a total of one and a half million dollars for the creation of new playgrounds and small parks, while it gave the South Parks Commission a budget of three million dollars to further expand its small park model.¹⁰⁴ Those interested in playground reform ventured to Chicago from around the world, taking home the methods and organization of the CSPC. In fact, President Roosevelt himself urged delegates from larger cities to visit the

¹⁰⁰ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1905).

¹⁰¹ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1894-1915).

¹⁰² CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1902-1903).

¹⁰³ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1905).

¹⁰⁴ De Groot, 'Recent Playground Development in Chicago'; There was also a Special Parks Commission in Chicago – created by the city council to investigate the need for a municipal system of parks and playgrounds. By the time of the publication of the report of its findings in 1905, the Special Parks Commission equipped and maintained nine playgrounds throughout Chicago. Special Parks Commission, *Report of the Special Park Commission to the City Council of Chicago on the Subject of a Metropolitan Park System* (Chicago, 1905).

South Parks system in 1907, calling the parks and playgrounds there “one of the most notable civic achievements of any American city.”¹⁰⁵

Theodore Roosevelt was a great supporter of the small parks movement, recognizing its use in the creation of a new generation of Americans capable of bearing the responsibility of self-government. Roosevelt even acted as honorary president of a new organization of playground reformers. Formed in 1906, the Playground Association of America worked to spread the small parks ideal across the country. Cities around America began to invest in municipal playgrounds and hire experts to run them. The Playground Association of America also oversaw the professionalization of play organizers, attempting to register and keep account of trained playground workers.¹⁰⁶

Play workers didn’t just provide supervision for new playgrounds, they also ran new organized recreation clubs. Athletic leagues, Scout Troops, Camp Fire Girls, and a variety of other boys’ and girls’ clubs sprang up around the city during the Progressive Era. The settlement houses, in particular, provided recreational clubs for children (usually gender segregated). Some clubs tried expressly to give city children access to a rural childhood. The Bowen Country Club at Hull House, for example, took city children for trips into the countryside where they could engage in rural play. The Woodcraft Indians, a club that brought “nature-study” to boys, derived its mission from the recapitulation theory. The founder, Ernest Thompson Seton, believed boys must relive the race’s “savagery” through exposure to nature in order to grow up into virtuous citizens.¹⁰⁷ Clubs like the Camp Fire Girls extended this vision to young women, dressing white girls up as

¹⁰⁵ Graham Taylor, ‘Recreation Developments in Chicago’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 35:2 (1910), 88-105.

¹⁰⁶ ‘The Playground’ v.1-2 (Apr. 1907-Mar. 1909).

¹⁰⁷ JRP, b.4, fol.7-10, and b.5 fol.17; CCWE, b.2-3; CCC, b.1 fol.1-2;; The Neighbor, Newsletter of the NUSA, 1899-1903, Northwestern University Library; Armitage, Kevin C., Bowen Club, HHC b.53, fol.614; Armitage, ‘The Child Is Born a Naturalist’, 43-70.

“Indians” and giving them the experience of “a ceremonial fire”. But the Camp Fire Girls’ aims were explicitly gendered, namely to prepare girls to be satisfied with domestic life when they grew up.¹⁰⁸

Most clubs hoped to replace unsupervised urban recreation with a permanent urban solution, not just an occasional exposure to rural life. Many settlements and recreation centers set up dance clubs, hoping to replace the commercial dance halls where adolescents’ morals faced corruption. Even the most simple athletics club, child-savers hoped, would replace street play. The Special Parks Commission in Chicago, which investigated the need for municipal playgrounds in 1905, reported optimistically:

The corner gangs, through the influence of the playgrounds, have become the athletic gangs of the neighborhood. The surplus of animal spirits is not as it was before, apparent in juvenile turbulence, vandalism, and petty thefts, but in athletic and gymnastic competition.¹⁰⁹

The organized recreation in the playgrounds, at least in the view of the commissioners, thus effectively replaced unsupervised street play and channeled boyish spirits into sport, not delinquency.

But playground reformers envisioned playgrounds transforming whole communities, not just children. Like schools and settlement houses, Progressives believed playgrounds and organized recreation helped to foster the Americanization of immigrant communities.¹¹⁰ Unquestioned, accepted as “common sense”, the need to Americanize immigrants and their children lay at the heart of the playground movement. According to DeGroot at the CSPC:

Late arrivals to our shores, and the first generation of foreigners of almost every country, are meeting on common ground in the new parks and are having America interpreted to them in a helpful manner, either directly or through their children’s

¹⁰⁸ See Gulick, Luther Halsey, ‘Camp Fire Girls’ *The Playground*, 6:6 (September 1912), 209-216.

¹⁰⁹ Special Parks Commission of Chicago, (1905), 28.

¹¹⁰ Gerstle, Gary, ‘Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans’, *Journal of American History* 84:2 (Sep., 1997), 524–58.

relation to the organized work in which they are involved. If the work of the playgrounds, ball fields and gymnasiums is observed for any length of time, one cannot escape the conviction that the young folks engaged therein are training for good and useful citizenship.¹¹¹

The playground movement thus proposed small parks and playgrounds as the fundamental tool in the creation of good, American citizens. If child-savers could replace street play with organized, supervised, and active recreation within dedicated play-spaces, they would solve the joint problems of delinquency and Americanizing immigrant communities.

As African-Americans lay outside the civic nationalism of much of the play movement, it is unsurprising that reformers provided far fewer recreation opportunities for black children. Within the traditional African-American neighborhood, the Black Belt, the city opened just one playground, Beutner, before 1931 and it had poor facilities compared to the modern, well-equipped playgrounds in white immigrant areas.¹¹² White scouting troops also barred African-American children and in 1910 the Cook County Baseball League expelled black teams.¹¹³ African-American leaders, like Ida B. Wells, fiercely campaigned to end the inequality in recreation opportunities for black children. This was especially the case after the Chicago Race Riot in 1919, the worst racial violence of the city's history which left thirty-eight people dead and hundreds without homes.¹¹⁴ Yet, it was not until 1931 that the city opened a second park within the Black Belt.

But even as black child-savers sought to extend new programs like organized recreation to children of color, many Americans remained indifferent, or even actively opposed, to child-saving.

¹¹¹ CSPP, Annual Report, (1908-1909), 111.

¹¹² See Fisher, *Urban Green*. For more on this see Chapter 4.

¹¹³ Fisher, *Urban Green*, 96.

¹¹⁴ For more on African-American recreation and the Chicago Race Riot see Chapter 4.

Backlash

If the swarming children of working-class immigrants endangered the future of the country as they grew up physically and morally weakened, middle-class Americans also feared for their own children. As historians Gail Bederman and David MacLeod have demonstrated, the decline of middle-class self-employment and the closing of the frontier made early-twentieth century middle-class Americans reassess what it was to be a man.¹¹⁵ The concepts of “overcivilization” or “overdevelopment of the mind” emerged at this time, along with new words to describe effeminate middle-class men such as “sissy” and “pussy-foot”.¹¹⁶ Linked to the recapitulation theory, the idea of “overcivilization” was also based in scientific language. The central concept was that in a highly civilized society, men became effeminate and weak. Their nerves taxed by the pressures of civilization, highly-civilized men eventually became ill, developing a newly discovered condition known as neurasthenia. A nervous condition supposedly caused by overworking the brain, neurasthenia stripped men of the virility and vitality of more “primitive” peoples. Unchecked, overcivilization would lead to the collapse of the very civilizations that caused it: neurasthenia meant race suicide.¹¹⁷

If middle-class men feared for their own masculinity, the masculinity of middle-class boys seemed even more at risk. Juxtaposed to the rough, untamed masculinity of the swarm, the effeminacy of the next generation of middle-class men represented a growing

¹¹⁵ D.I. Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy : The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison, 1983); G. Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization : A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, 1995); J. Grant, 'A "Real Boy" and Not a Sissy: Gender, Childhood, and Masculinity, 1890-1940', *Journal of Social History*, 37:4 (Summer, 2004), 829-851.

¹¹⁶ Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 17. The fear of overcivilization went hand in hand with a growing fear of homosexuality. While the heterosexual/homosexual binary of the United States' current sexual regime had not emerged in this period, a new anxiety about sexually “degenerate” men seized the nation. Correspondingly, prosecutions for sodomy increased dramatically in the United States from the 1890s through the 1920s. See Chauncey, George, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York, 1994).

¹¹⁷ Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*.

threat. France Hodgson Burnett's character Little Lord Fauntleroy came to epitomize overcivilized, effeminate boys, afraid to play in case he got his clothes dirty. Figure 14 is a typical illustration of Fauntleroy from 1911. This cartoon came from a strip Frank King drew for the *Tribune* asking various fictional boys their opinions on the Chicago Child Welfare Exhibit of 1911. While the bad boys worried that child-savers would limit their fun, Fauntleroy was concerned that child-savers would force him to play.



Figure 14: Frank King, 'Bad Boys of All Ages', *Chicago Tribune* (May 7, 1911), 12.

Yet Fauntleroy was not always such a problematic character. First published as a novel in 1886, by Frances Hodgson Burnett, Fauntleroy as he appeared in the book wasn't particularly fussy about his clothes nor afraid to join in with play. Burnett even described Fauntleroy as physically strong as well as "manly". And, initially the book was hugely popular. By 1893, the only book libraries were more likely to hold was *Ben Hur*.¹¹⁸ As Fauntleroy grew in popularity, with play and eventually film adaptations reaching an ever greater audience, the Fauntleroy suit became a very popular outfit for boys. A black velvet

¹¹⁸ Katherine L. Carlson, 'Little Lord Fauntleroy and the Evolution of American Boyhood,' *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 3:1 (Winter 2010) 39-64.

suit with a lace collar and short pants combined with long flowing curls formed the typical Fauntleroy look.

As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, however, American culture began to vilify and even pathologize the Fauntleroy figure. As early as 1897, to describe a boy as “no Fauntleroy” was a compliment.¹¹⁹ The Fauntleroy suit fell out of fashion as adults linked it to an effeminate desire to remain clean and tidy. An article on children’s fashion appearing in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1907 described how the change in fashion reflected a change in ideal boyhood:

The Lord Fauntleroy boy – that untouchable lad who was afraid to play lest he might get spots on his velvet knickerbockers or smears on his fluted linen collar – has gone from the streets and there has come to fill his place the sturdy boy of today, barelegged and hardy, with his hair cut short, his shirt made loose and his trousers wide and short, so that he can move easily and run fast, so that he can give full play to all his muscles and grow.¹²⁰

The article continued that clothes reflected character, and the Fauntleroy suit only created underdeveloped men, while the clothes of the playing boy of 1907 would “send civilization onward at a quickstep.”¹²¹

Those who decried the Fauntleroy type blamed the “sissification” of middle-class American boyhood on middle-class mothers. It was Fauntleroy’s relationship with his mother, whom the reader only knew by Fauntleroy’s saccharine nickname for her, Dearest, that prompted him to behave so perfectly. Furthermore, critics came to see the Fauntleroy suit as a style imposed on unwilling boys by overbearing mothers.¹²² Distanced from the process of raising children and projecting their own masculine anxieties onto their sons, middle-class American fathers worried about the effects of “a mother-love so selfish, so

¹¹⁹ ‘Willie Was Strong For His Age’, *Chicago Tribune* (30 May 1897), 34.

¹²⁰ ‘The Changing Fashion in Children’, *Chicago Tribune* (15 September, 1907).

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² See for example *Our Gang* (1922), produced by Hal Roach [Film], USA: Pathé Exchange.

exclusive” upon their sons.¹²³ Furthermore, if mothers caused the effeminacy of their own sons, maternalists endangered the masculinity of all boys. Anti-maternalism created considerable problems for the child-saving movement in the early twentieth century.

As the article on children’s fashion showed, the opposite to the “Fauntleroy” was the sturdy street-frequenting boy, who cared little for clothes and simply wanted to run and play. Like popular fictional characters such as Tom Sawyer and the heroes of Horatio Alger’s novels, the ideal masculine boy did not behave perfectly. Even child-savers, particularly male child-savers, grappled with tensions over wanting to control children, but also celebrating white boys’ mischievousness. To completely tame a boy of mischief would, in the words of the influential Denver Juvenile Court Judge, Ben Lindsey, “develop a mollycoddle or a milksop.”¹²⁴ Both mollycoddle and milksop contained important developmental connotations. A mollycoddle described a pampered (coddled), effeminate (molly) boy; a milksop, on the other hand, referred to bread dipped in milk, the diet of babies, hence condemning the infantilization of children. Girlish or childish, the boy whose mischief adults tamed could never grow into a true man.

Child labor reformers faced accusations of “mollycoddling” when they tried to control street labor. When the NCLC tried to push for stricter laws controlling street labor in the District of Columbia, for example, an article from the Washington Post deemed the attempt “mollycoddling” which would “unduly restrict [newsboys’] opportunity to rise above the mediocre class”.¹²⁵ Indeed, some middle-class men even advocated labor to improve the manliness of their own sons. William James, a pragmatist philosopher and

¹²³ F.H. Richardson, *Parenthood and the Newer Psychology* (New York, 1926), 20-21.

¹²⁴ Ben B. Lindsey, ‘Public Playgrounds and Juvenile Delinquency’, (1908), 104 CHy 21, RSFM.

¹²⁵ ‘The District Dawg’, *The Washington Post* (April 14, 1912) extracted at Joseph H. Manning, ‘The Lewis Hine Project’, <http://sevensteeples.com/> (accessed 10/05/2014).

psychologist, for example, proposed sending middle-class boys “to coal and iron mines, to freight trains, to fishing fleets in December” to “get the childishness out of them.”¹²⁶

Concerns over masculinity directly interfered with reform attempts and thus the struggle to regulate child street labor was often played out in the struggle to control the newsboy image in American culture. Indeed, perhaps more than any other child laborer, newsboys symbolized masculine independence and an admirable “go-getter” attitude in American culture. Newsboys appeared in popular culture as “little businessmen”: Alger-esque boys whose plucky spirit would ensure their success in a capitalist society.¹²⁷ Though the “little businessman” may have played tricks and been involved in petty crimes, at heart the boy was good-natured and good-humored. While assertive and willing to fight if necessary, he was also generous and kind. Instead of being molly-coddled by overbearing mothers, the little businessman generally worked to support widowed mothers and poor sisters.¹²⁸ The newsboys were also a far cry from the exploited wage-earning factory children – an important distinction in understanding opposition to child street labor reform. In contrast to factory children exploited by greedy employers, boy street vendors were entrepreneurs and self-employed.¹²⁹ Even anti-child labor organizations, such as the Illinois Child Labor Committee, sometimes argued that street selling, if properly regulated, was “highly beneficial and profitable as a business training for boys.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ William James cited in Macleod, *Building Character*, 45.

¹²⁷ In fact, several of Alger’s characters were street traders. See for example, Alger, Horatio, *Ragged Dick, Or, Street Life in New York with Boot Blacks* (New York, 1868), and Alger, Horatio, *Rough and Ready; Or, Life Among the New York Newsboys* (New York, 1868). Street traders were also sometimes compared to Tom Sawyer and his entrepreneurial spirit in white-washing his fence. See the Annual Report of the Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago, 1927, JPAR, b.1 fol.13.

¹²⁸ Clopper, *Child Labor*; Alger, *Rough and Ready*; A reporter for the *Hartford Courant*, cited in Baldwin, *Domesticating the Street*, 97.

¹²⁹ Clopper, *Child Labor*; Unknown Author, ‘Newsboys Will Make Practical Business Men’, *New Castle News* (Jul. 29, 1924) extracted at Joseph H. Manning, ‘The Lewis Hine Project’, <http://sevensteeples.com/> (accessed 07/05/2014).

¹³⁰ JPAR, b5, fol.86.

The NCLC explicitly positioned themselves in opposition to this understanding of child street labor and sought “to disprove once and for all the idea that the boy who sells papers today is on the straight road to the White House.”¹³¹ Lewis Hine tackled the little businessman image directly by accompanying the pictures of street traders with the captions like “You Expect Him To Be President: Most Delinquent Boys Come From Street Trades”.¹³² However, the “little businessman” was so ingrained in the American ethos that Myron Adams, a prominent New York social worker, lamented that child labor reformers seemed like “iconoclasts” when they worked to undermine the “little businessman” character.¹³³

Despite continued opposition to regulation, in 1911, child-savers gained two substantial victories in undermining support for child street laborers. Firstly, Mother’s Pensions, which Illinois provided to the destitute parents of dependent children from 1911 onward, were, at least in part, intended to replace income from child labor. Furthermore, the aid-to-mothers undermined the claims of those opposed to child labor reform that children had to work to support destitute mothers and siblings.¹³⁴ Secondly, the publication in 1911 of the report of the Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil in Chicago*, helped to demonstrate to the public the moral dangers street traders faced.¹³⁵ Appointed to investigate segregated vice districts, the commissioners’ highly influential and damning report also condemned the city’s toleration of boys’ street labor:

¹³¹ ‘The Newsboys of Dallas’ *The American City and County*, 12 (1915) extracted at Joseph H. Manning, ‘The Lewis Hine Project’, <http://sevensteeples.com/> (accessed 07/05/2014); Clopper, *Child Labor*.

¹³² Lewis Hine, ‘At the University of Experience’.

¹³³ Adams, ‘Children in American Street Trades’, 24.

¹³⁴ Abbott, Edith, and Breckinridge, Sophonisba Preston, *The Administration of the Aid-To-Mothers Law in Illinois* (Washington, D.C., 1921).

¹³⁵ Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil*; For the importance of the CVC and more on segregated vice districts see Keire, Mara, *For Business and Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933*, (Baltimore, 1910).

The investigations by the Commission show that messengers and newsboys have an intimate knowledge of the ways of the underworld. Their moral sense is so blunted as to be absolutely blind to the degradation of women and the vile influence of vicious men. Thus early in life they become diseased both in body and soul and grow up to enter upon a career of crime and lust.¹³⁶

The chapter on street traders and messenger boys proved a particularly powerful part of the report. Following the publication, vice districting fell out of favor and authorities gradually dismantled (at least officially) segregated vice districts across the United States.¹³⁷

Following in the wake of *The Social Evil in Chicago* and the passage of the mother's pensions, child-savers' major victory against child street labor in Chicago came in 1912, with the passage of a new city ordinance regulating the street trades. Still, the 1912 city ordinance only prohibited boys under fourteen from selling on the streets between 8pm and 5am. A boy between the ages of fourteen and sixteen had to obtain a school certificate but, if he did, he could sell any time he liked. Child-savers feared the new regulation did not go far enough, setting no minimum age for boys selling during the day and allowing fourteen- to sixteen-year-olds to sell all night. On the other hand, considering the substantial opposition to child street labor regulation, the combination of laws and ordinances since 1899 were quite a substantial achievement. From no regulation whatsoever, the city could now police a large portion of child street traders.¹³⁸

Unsurprisingly, considering that support for child street labor was grounded in masculinity, regulating girls' street labor was never as contentious or as difficult to achieve. While a 1903 article in the *Juvenile Court Record* spent several paragraphs dispelling the

¹³⁶ Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil*, 36.

¹³⁷ Keire, *For Business and Pleasure*, 21.

¹³⁸ F. Zeta Youmans, 'Street Trades in Chicago, JPAR, b.5 fol.82; Carmichael, Lillian Hope, 'Street Trading in Relation to Juvenile Delinquency in Chicago', unpublished master's thesis, University of Chicago (1926).

myth that newsboys were little businessmen, it had little to say on the subject of girls' street labor:

As to that section of the law prohibiting girls under the age of 16 from selling newspapers on the street, little needs to be said. It is well known that street work for small girls leads to ultimate prostitution, and any law that will keep them off the streets is, in its very nature a good law.¹³⁹

Passing laws to regulate girls' street work thus proved to be a much simpler task for child labor reformers. In Chicago, the 1903 ordinance that prohibited boys under ten from selling newspapers, forbade street trading for all girls up to the age of sixteen.¹⁴⁰ The situation was similar around the country. In Bridgeport, Connecticut, for example, the Police Commissioner who explicitly opposed controlling newsboys on the grounds of making men out of them, argued for the introduction of licensing in order to "get rid of the newsgirls."¹⁴¹ Back in Chicago, the *Chicago Daily News* relied heavily on newsboys' labor in the early twentieth century but wrote of the newsgirls: "We do everything we can to discourage them [and] see no good reason why the girls should not be prohibited by law from selling on the street."¹⁴² Predictably, therefore, the 1912 law in Chicago heavily circumscribed girls' street labor, with a clear-cut, blanket ban: "No girl under eighteen may at any time sell anything on the streets or in public spaces."¹⁴³ Any fears of mollycoddling girls clearly did not affect that aspect of child labor legislation.

One area of child-saving remained insulated from the anti-maternalist backlash. The play movement received support from maternalists and anti-maternalists alike. Perhaps this insulation was due to the numbers of men involved. While women were certainly involved in the recreation movement and, in particular, girls' play; men

¹³⁹ 'The Agnew Bill', *Juvenile Court Record* 4:9 (September 1903), 9.

¹⁴⁰ Addams, *Newsboy Conditions*.

¹⁴¹ Police Commissioner Kershaw cited in an article in *The Bridgeport Herald* extracted at Joseph H. Manning, 'The Lewis Hine Project', <http://sevensteeples.com/> (accessed 07/05/2017)

¹⁴² 'Memo' from the *Chicago Daily News* cited in Nasaw, *Children of the City*, p. 103.

¹⁴³ Youmans, 'Street Trades in Chicago'.

dominated the field of boys' work. In fact, employing men to lead boys' recreation was the deliberate policy of the playground movement. Not just any men were wanted, either. The playground movement needed, according to Howard S. Braucher, the secretary of the Playground Association of America, "men with red blood which flows not too slowly, men who like men [and] understand men."¹⁴⁴ Unlike settlement house work, child labor reform, and the juvenile court movement, the playground movement explicitly courted masculine men and the man's man image and even referred to themselves as "an antidote to civilization."¹⁴⁵

It also helped the play movement that the archetypal Progressive Era man's man, Theodore Roosevelt, strongly supported the movement and served as the honorary president of the Playground Association of America.¹⁴⁶ The famous advocate of "the Strenuous Life" believed that playgrounds were necessary for "the development of wholesome citizenship in modern cities" and called the Chicago playground system "the greatest civic achievement in the world."¹⁴⁷ Wholesome citizenship meant saving children from delinquency, but also providing children with correct gendered development: the country needed strong, domestic women and manly, independent men.

Playground advocates weren't averse to using fears of "sissified" boys to their advantage, even pitting themselves against other child welfare initiatives, especially increased schooling. If the city streets were the wrong place for children's play, by 1908 experts like Dr. Woods Hutchinson were arguing that schools were little better. If anything,

¹⁴⁴ Howard S. Braucher, 'What is Fundamental to a Neighborhood Center', *The Playground* (September, 1916), 210.

¹⁴⁵ Joseph Lee, 'Play As An Antidote to Civilization', *The Playground* (July, 1911), 110-127.

¹⁴⁶ Roosevelt did not begin his career as a man's man. In contrast, in the 1880s he was considered somewhat effeminate. But, by the end of the 1890s, Roosevelt had completely masculinized his image. See Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, esp. ch.5.

¹⁴⁷ Theodore Roosevelt quoted in 'Suggestions for Posters', *The Playground* 3:6 (September, 1909), 20; H. S. Braucher, 'Theodore Roosevelt: A Man Who Played', *The Playground* (March 1919), 527.

as Hutchinson opined, children should spend less time in schools. “We have not improved matters,” Hutchinson asserted, “by substituting the school for the yard, the field, and the shop. We have simply attempted to correct the underdevelopment of the child’s body by overdevelopment of his mind.”¹⁴⁸ According to reformers like Hutchinson, too much schooling produced effeminate boys who were as much, if not more, of a threat to American civilization than delinquents. Hutchinson concluded with a rhetorical flourish, one which playground advocates would often quote afterwards, “better a playground without a schoolhouse, than a schoolhouse without a playground.”¹⁴⁹ Judge Ben Lindsey agreed. He contended that rather than a criminal educated on the streets or a mollycoddle locked up in the schoolhouse, playgrounds would create “wholesome, vigorous citizens, with rich, red blood in their veins.”¹⁵⁰

Protected from the criticisms of mollycoddling that hampered child labor reformers, the play movement went from strength to strength in the early twentieth century both in Chicago and across the country. By 1915, the city of Chicago ran sixty-six recreation centres in addition to the schoolyards and private playgrounds in the city.¹⁵¹ By 1921, almost 200 cities employed a total of over eleven thousand men and women as year-round playground workers.¹⁵² If nation was divided on whether children should work or not, most Americans agreed that clubs, camps, and playgrounds were the right places for urban children.

Conclusion

Despite the anti-maternalist backlash, child-savers were remarkably successful in reforming urban childhood at the turn of the twentieth century, at least on a legislative

¹⁴⁸ Woods Hutchinson, ‘Can the Child Survive Civilization?’, Proceedings of the Second Annual Playground Congress (1908), 104 Chy 11, RSFM.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Lindsey, ‘Public Playgrounds and Juvenile Delinquency’

¹⁵¹ ‘Which Cities Played’, *The Playground: The Year Book* 9:11 (February, 1916), 402.

¹⁵² ‘The Playground’ (Mar., 1922), s.3, subseries 4, b.17, fol.182, LSRM.

level. Starting in the 1890s, in just twenty years child-savers created an array of institutions and regulations that controlled and undermined children's use of street space. To do so, Progressives essentially criminalized much of children's use of the city. New definitions of delinquency and new regulations of child street labor limited lawful ways children could use the city streets. Yet, even as child-savers condemned juvenile delinquency, American culture valorized children's, especially boys', misbehavior. A normal boy misbehaved, only a sissy was perfectly good. As child-savers at the turn of the century normalized boys' misbehavior, they pathologized urban childhood, blaming the city environment for juvenile crime.

To counter juvenile crime, reformers did not seek to completely tame the troublesome child, instead they sought to provide the working-class, immigrant child with supervised, orderly places where the misbehaving instinct could safely play out. In Chicago, this meant the creation of a separate juvenile justice system, stronger truancy laws, and child street labor regulation. It also meant the construction of a host of new institutional homes for delinquent and dependent children including St. Charles School, the Chicago and Cook County School for Boys, the Geneva School for Girls, the Juvenile Detention Home, and the Chicago Parental School, a home for habitual truants. First and foremost, however, the desire to save but not tame the troublesome child meant the development of the world's first municipal playground system. Preventative not reactionary, manly not molly-coddling, playgrounds and organized recreation soon became the centerpiece of anti-delinquency. In fact, play reformers were even happy to condone street play, as long as it was contained, organized, and under adult supervision.¹⁵³

But celebrations of the successes of the child-saving movement could not last long. If creating new institutions had been difficult, running them proved harder. As reformers

¹⁵³ The Neighbor, Northwestern University Settlement, b.2, Northwestern University Library.

quickly discovered, the biggest obstacle to anti-delinquency programs came not from anti-maternalists but, rather, from children themselves.

Chapter 3:

“The Gang Fairly Ran Things”

The Everyday Practice of Juvenile-Centered Institutions in the 1910s and 1920s

As a “small boy” in the early 1920s, Eddie S. used to visit Jefferson Park with his friends.¹ The park, an acquisition of the newly formed Chicago’s Jefferson Park Commission, had opened in 1921. A typical small park, it was only seven acres in size and designed to provide recreation to the largely immigrant neighborhood. Although the rules officially forbade it, Eddie and his friends used to swim in the pond at the park. The park policeman, a German, would attempt to stop them, standing on the shore and throwing things at the children to get them out of the water. The boys, out of reach of the policeman while they swam, would return fire and shout insults at him: “you old sauerkraut” or “you pot-bellied elephant”. Thus antagonized, the policeman would finally leap, fully clothed, into the water, and, cursing, give chase to the gang. But the boys always proved too quick for him, and would beat him to the boundaries of the park every time. Here, at the edge of the institution, the policeman would stop, his jurisdiction bounded by the fences and gate of the park. The boys, however, would run on, free from the authority of the park policeman, only to return, once the policeman wasn’t watching, to repeat the scene again.²

Learning that Eddie and his friends enjoyed using park spaces would have pleased park and playground advocates. Indeed, as playground organizers hoped, the gang often chose to leave the streets of Chicago to return again and again to the recreational

¹ “small boy” is the term Eddie used to describe his own age at this time. ‘The Life History of Eddie S.’ LHC, b.52, fol.11-9(64). This life history was compiled in 1930 while Eddie was still incarcerated in a juvenile justice institution, the incident took place many years before, probably in the early to mid-1920s.

² Ibid.

temptations of the park. Yet, what happened once Eddie's gang entered the park deviated from the theories of park and playground reformers. Despite the supervising eye of the policeman, or even because of it, Eddie and his friends took over the park and used the space in unintended, and undesirable, ways. Rather than conforming to the recreational plans of playground leaders, the children used the park to create conflict with adult authority.³ Moreover, in their ability to ignore the boundaries of the institution, they could avoid the consequences of this conflict. The rigidity of the park institution proved no match for the flexibility of the children's use of urban space, the park fence confining adult authority but not Eddie who came and went as he pleased.

In creating child-saving institutions, Progressive Era child-savers had conceptualized children as passive, completely molded by their corrupting environments. Thus, according to reformers, if cities could change the spaces of childhood, working-class and immigrant children would transform almost automatically into upright citizens. But children, like Eddie, were never the passive objects of reform. Destructive and mobile, new institutions struggled to transform the swarm into productive children. Children's ability to disrupt the official plans of Progressive Era juvenile-centered institution building had repercussions for the everyday practice and shape of child-saving institutions in Chicago. As child-savers quickly learnt, children didn't always respond in ways reformers anticipated when they created new institutions like Eddie S.'s Jefferson Park.⁴

³ Cary Goodman in his account of organized recreation in New York's Lower East Side, *Choosing Sides*, argued that any resistance by children to organized recreational institutions like playgrounds was a result of class conflict. However, while the leaders of the playground movement certainly hailed from middle-class and even upper-class backgrounds (see Chapter 2), Chicago's park policemen, like the one from this vignette and like Chicago's police more generally, tended to be first- or second-generation immigrants, and working-class. Children, it seemed, did not like them any more for their common class background. For more on Chicago's policemen see Wolcott, *Cops and Kids*; Goodman, *Choosing Sides*; Mark H. Haller, *Illegal Enterprise: The Work of Historian Mark Haller* (Lanham, 2013).

⁴ In keeping with the historiography of childhood in this period, I am using institution to mean the public and private, formal organizations which were explicitly created or developed in this period

It would be naïve to think conflict between children and adults in new spaces always played out in the slapstick manner of Eddie's encounter with the Officer Krupke-esque park policeman.⁵ As it became clearer to child-savers that simply providing alternative play spaces to the streets would not transform children's behaviors, reformers reverted to forceful methods to control children's use of urban spaces. And when voluntary institutions failed to control children, the coercive arm of the state intervened. Violence bubbled under the surface of interactions between children and new institutions, and when it erupted, the effects could prove fatal.

This chapter deals with the ways children used, appropriated, challenged, and evaded child-centered institutions from the opening of new institutions in the early 1900s through the first few decades of their existence.⁶ The chapter begins with playgrounds and organized recreation. Only schools aimed to reach as many children as new play organizations, but unlike with playgrounds, child-savers didn't try to use schools to break the street habit. Playground reformers imagined new play spaces as the frontline in taming the swarm and keeping children off the street. And sometimes they worked. Especially

to "improve" the lives of children. This includes institutions such as reform schools, playgrounds, and organized clubs. (see, for example, Platt, *The Child Savers*) While child-savers occasionally did refer to other social institutions such as "marriage" and the "family" as "institutions", they primarily used it to mean the institutions I discuss. As discussed in the previous chapter, grouping the public and private, formal organizations under the title "juvenile-centered institutions" highlights the way child-savers envisioned organizations from municipal playgrounds to cottage schools as part of a broad child-saving, anti-delinquency movement.

⁵ Officer Krupke is the somewhat slapstick policeman from *West Side Story*. The Jets sing a number entitled "Gee, Officer Krupke" which captured many of the difficulties the police and juvenile centered institutions faced and how the teenagers exploited these difficulties. *West Side Story* (1961), directed by Wise, Robert and Robbins, Jerome [film] USA: United Artists.

⁶ Notably, I have not included a section on children's "resistance". Children certainly resisted adult authority in juvenile-centered institutions, particularly in presumably closed institutions like reformatories. However, this material is well-trodden. Furthermore, resistance implies an adult-centric imbalance of power which I fail to see in institutions for juveniles outside of reformatories, asylums, and schools. Instead, it is adults' resistance and reaction to children's actions which has framed this chapter. For excellent analysis of children's resistance to adult authority in reformatories see Rembis, *Defining Deviance*; Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance*; Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*.

when new playgrounds opened, they often managed to tempt children away from the streets.

Child's Play

The opening of a new playground was a community event. When the Mary MacDowell Settlement House playground opened in the early 1900s, it attracted a large crowd.⁷ Children and adults attended, lecturers spoke on the benefits of play, and the boys and girls of the neighborhood clambered on the new equipment. Boys and girls alike, it seemed, chose to make use of new recreational opportunities some Progressive Era institutions offered. Many grew up to have fond memories of the recreational opportunities provided by Progressive Era child-savers. Stanley T., who later ended up arrested and detained in the Juvenile Detention Home, reminisced to his life history interviewer about happy times he had at Hull House in the late 1920s where he and his friends would go almost every day after school.⁸ Photographs, such as in figure 15, a playground at a school on the Near West Side in 1910, show boys and girls happily gathered to play and race, safe, in the mind of reformers at least, from the corruption of the street.

⁷ Photograph of playground opening, MMSHR, b.5 fol.1.

⁸ 'The Life History of Stanley T.' LHC, b.54, fol.13-4 (77a).



Figure 15: 'Boys racing between two groups of children at the Dante School Playground in the Near West Side community area of Chicago, Illinois', *Chicago Daily News*, (1910).

Both boys and girls were clearly keen to make use of the new spaces. Children attended "small children's playgrounds" in the South Park system of Chicago, aimed at those under ten years of age, seven hundred thousand times in 1911. This number climbed to over one million in 1916 and stayed around that level into the 1920s.⁹ Outdoor gymnasium use was also high, well over one million uses in 1911, although numbers fell in the early 1920s to around three-quarters of a million. Unlike swimming-pools where male attendance vastly outnumbered female attendance, male and female usage of the outdoor gymnasiums between 1911 and 1922 was far more even, with girls outnumbering boys during the First World War.¹⁰

⁹ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1911-22).

¹⁰ This was mainly due to male attendance decreasing rather than any increase in female usage, probably due to the United States entry into the First World War. CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1911-22).

Yet, although children used Chicago's new play spaces in the 1910s, playgrounds supplemented rather than replaced street play. Stanley T. was as faithful an attendee as Hull House could have wished for; almost every day after school he chose to play there rather than hang about on the streets. But even Stanley engaged in street play. When he wasn't at Hull House, Stanley spent time with a gang of other boys, loitering on the street corner and breaking windows at the local school.¹¹ For Stanley, Hull House provided recreation, but it didn't replace the fun and destructive excitement he had with his friends on the street.

In addition, children like Stanley increasingly opted to take part in new commercial leisure that was booming in urban America. Every day in 1909, an estimated 32000 children attended five- and ten-cent theatres.¹² Children also spent time in dance halls, candy, ice-cream, and fruit stores, and early movie theatres. From 1905, children could spend their money at the White City, an amusement park on the South Side which claimed to be the largest in the US.¹³ Reformers considered unsupervised commercial amusements "directly tributary" to juvenile delinquency and urban vice.¹⁴

Thus, despite seemingly high attendance rates, play organizers constantly worried about attracting more children, and keeping children in play spaces for longer, both in terms of more hours in the day and of more years of their lives. The ways reformers talked about attracting children were particularly gendered. Acknowledging that boys would leave institutional recreation if it was too "dry", many play reformers, like Cleveland

¹¹ 'The Life History of Stanley T.' Stanley later became involved with the Chicago Area Project, a creation of one of the most prolific life history interviewers, and potentially even Stanley's interviewer, Clifford Shaw.

¹² 'Five and Ten Cent Theatres', CCWE.

¹³ Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil*, 230; Barker, Stan, 'Paradises Lost' *Chicago History* 22:1 (March 1993), 26-49.

¹⁴ Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil*, 230.

probation officer and social worker Henry W. Thurston, recognized the need for compromise with boys' play desires and to compete with the excitement of the street:

It becomes plain that a spare-time program of a wholesome sort that will compete at all successfully with present wasteful and unsafe uses of spare time must not be confined to sand-piles, see-saws, and other playground attractions that are too tame. There must be, for the bolder spirits that "just ache for adventure", some stunts that tax their growing bodily and imaginative powers to the limit. Otherwise some of the strongest and most daring will snap the tether and pioneer for themselves beyond the circumference of supervision and into conditions that are dangerous to character and good citizenship.¹⁵

According to Thurston, playgrounds and boys' clubs competed directly with the streets for children's attention. The recognition of children's ability to choose whether or not to attend shaped the spaces of playgrounds. Reformers found that they had to make playgrounds and recreational clubs attractive to children, both in terms of activities and equipment.

In 1906, De Groot, who as the CSPC Director of Athletics oversaw the commission's playgrounds, argued that playground equipment must address the desires of the boys. Explicitly trying to replace boys' dangerous street play De Groot wrote: "if the playground does not contain something to "flip", the streetcars will be used to practice on."¹⁶ Organizers were not ignorant of the dangers some apparatus posed, the popular "teeter ladder", for example, was well known for injuring playing children.¹⁷ Yet, asking adults to put aside their fears for children's injuries, De Groot strongly recommended apparatus on which boys could climb and from which they could jump. With the backing of influential movement leaders, equipment that adults later in the century would deem too dangerous, like sixteen feet high steel frames, teeter ladders, shown in figure 16, and giant strides, shown in figure 17, filled playgrounds of the early twentieth century. After all, without the

¹⁵ Thurston, Henry W., *Delinquency and spare time: a study of a few stories written into the court records of the City of Cleveland* (Philadelphia, 1918), 136-137

¹⁶ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1906), 55

¹⁷ See, for example, Henry S. Curtis, 'Playground Equipment', *The Playground* 7:8 (November, 1913), 301-329.

thrill of walking along a steel beam sixteen feet in the air, reformers wondered what was to keep little boys in playgrounds and out of juvenile courts.¹⁸



Figure 16: Girls playing on teeter ladders. If one girl lets go, the other will fall. Lewis Hine, 'The Dumps Turned into a Playground, Massachusetts, Boston, 1909', Boston 1915 Exhibition, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Collection.



Figure 17: Playing a Game of the Giant Stride, *The Playground* 4:8 (November, 1910), 271.

¹⁸ This was the completely un-ironic argument of play movement leader Joseph Lee. Lee, 'Play as an Antidote to Civilization', 110-126.

Playground organizers also believed that they should not strictly control children's activities within the playground. Acknowledging the voluntary, conditional nature of children's attendance at playgrounds, an article in *The Playground* on the correct administration of a small park reminded play leaders not to enforce "such prohibitive rules" that would "drive away rather than draw patronage."¹⁹ Thus, even though adults created formal playgrounds, the activities of boys outside of playground spaces, as well as their ability to return to street space and delinquent activities if recreational institutions did not fit their leisure requirements, shaped new institutional spaces.

Play organizers paid much less attention to the problem of tempting girls into supervised play spaces, but when they did, organizers had very different ideas of what would entice girls compared to boys. Rather than dangerous apparatus, "something to flip", reformers believed activities like dancing and sewing would tempt girls into the "enchanted play castle" of organized recreation.²⁰ Play organizers thought providing opportunities for wholesome dancing was a particularly important part of their mission as it would keep girls out of the morally suspect dance halls.²¹

Often child-savers' attempts to tempt children into organized, supervised recreation proved futile. When Hull House tried to host a "clean" movie night in 1907, for example, children didn't respond with enthusiasm. Believing children simply wanted to see movies regardless of the type of movie, Hull House chose to show "educational" films. It was a not a success. Twelve-year-old Jimmy Flaherty, who was interviewed after the movie, summed up the children's complaints: "Things has got ter have some hustle. I don't

¹⁹ Ashe, W. F., 'The Administration of An Individual Playground', *The Playground* 7:5 (August, 1912), 166

²⁰ Beulah Kennard, 'What the Playground Can Do For Girls', *Proceedings of the Second Annual Congress* (1908), microfiche 104 CHy 4, RSFM.

²¹ Elizabeth I. Perry, "'The General Motherhood of the Commonwealth': Dance Hall Reform in the Progressive Era', *American Quarterly* 37:5 (Winter, 1985), 719-73.

say it's right, but people likes to see fights, 'n' fellows getting hurt, 'n' love makin', 'n' robbers, and all that stuff. I like to myself, even. This here show ain't even funny, unless those big lizards from Java was funny."²² Jimmy continued, "But, say, youse ought to see one dat dey's got sout' o' Twelfth street. Gee whiz!"²³ For children like Jimmy, educational films at Hull House failed to tempt them away from the unsupervised, uneducational experience of commercial leisure.

Sometimes organized recreation did compete successfully with street play. In the early 1920s, Carlo D. and his friends got bored of playing street games and decided to head to the park, which they deemed more exciting. There they rode on the swings and the "ringers" and stayed there till it was late.²⁴ In Carlo's case, the temptations of the playground proved stronger than the draw of the street.

At the other end of the spectrum, play spaces could become too attractive to children. Laddie P. told his life history interviewer that sometimes he didn't go to school because it was so tempting to go and hang out in the park.²⁵ In other cases, groups of children fought to maintain control of certain desirable play areas and to keep other groups out of institutional spaces. Frequently gangs of adolescent boys "owned" play spaces, and restricted other children's use of the playgrounds.²⁶ In particular, playground reformers noted with concern that playgrounds that appealed too much to gangs of older children could effectively exclude younger boys and girls. As John H. Chase, a leader of the

²² Jimmy cited in Nasaw, David, 'Children and Commercial Culture: Moving Pictures in the Early Twentieth Century' in Petrik, Paula, and West, Elliott, *Small Worlds: Childhood and Adolescence in America* (Lawrence, 1992), 14-26.

²³ Jimmy Flaherty cited in *Moving Picture World*, 1, (22nd June, 1907), 263.

²⁴ Life History of Carlo D., LHC, b.46, fol.(5-2).

²⁵ Life History of Laddie P., LHC, b.51, fol.58.

²⁶ Thrasher, *The Gang*; Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago's Near North Side* (Chicago, 1929), 31. For how the boys organized themselves into groups, the role of ethnicity, and territoriality see Chapter 4. See also Fisher, *Urban Green*.

playground movement, wrote in the American Playground Association monthly journal, *The Playground*:

The great danger with every playground everywhere in the world is that a few of the big boys of the neighborhood (the gang) will appropriate everything to themselves, playing just long enough to scare off all the little folks, then get tired themselves and walk off, leaving the place barren.²⁷

Chase feared that older boys would force younger children out of play spaces. After all, older boys' ability to take control of playground spaces was already well documented. Henry S. Curtis, the director of the Washington D.C. playground system, tied older boys' control of playgrounds to too-attractive equipment. According to Curtis, playgrounds built swings too high, making them too exciting and drawing the attention of older boys. The appropriation of swings by older boys, who "ought to be doing something else", drove away the younger children who were the swing sets' "rightful possessors".²⁸ As Curtis feared, children ignored the child-savers' ordering of age appropriate equipment and spaces.

As well as conflict between different age groups, conflict between black and white children over the use of recreational facilities could be particularly intense. Gangs frequently saw themselves as the rightful possessors of valuable playgrounds and they fought to maintain their rights. The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, which was created after the 1919 Race Riot to investigate race relations in the city, wrote in 1922, "it is no new thing for youthful white and negro groups to come to violence. For years, ... there have been clashes over baseball grounds, [and] swimming pools in the parks..."²⁹ But race was not the only dividing line in Chicago's playgrounds. Frank E.'s gang beat up any kid they simply didn't like who dared to come to their park. Soon the gang's control of the park

²⁷ *The Playground*, December 1908, No. 21; See also Luther H. Gulick, 'The Doctrine of Hands Off in Play', *Proceedings of the Third Annual Playground Congress* (1909), 104 CHy 33, RSFM.

²⁸ Curtis, 'Playground Equipment', 301-329, quotation p. 321.

²⁹ For more on children, race, and violence see Chapter 4. CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*.

was so notorious that parents in the neighborhood refused to let their children go to the park.³⁰ Clearly, when gangs of children valued new recreational spaces that playground organizers had provided, they sought, and indeed managed, to exclude outsiders.

New recreational spaces had proved popular in the first few decades of their existence, but their very popularity could undermine reformers' control. Older children forced younger peers and those they deemed undesirable out of playgrounds. In an effort to maintain control of new play spaces, and keep older children from dominating small parks, playground organizers turned to the construction of physical boundaries. Playground fencing became indispensable.

Fencing

When the photograph in figure 18 was taken in 1909, playground organizers at the Northwestern University Settlement House had evidently managed to capture the attention of the neighborhood's children. The small children, who belonged to the settlement kindergarten, played in the settlement playground's sand pit. Outside the playground, kept out by large wire fences, an assortment of boys looked in, some climbing on the fence, their noses up against the wire. Whether they were just intrigued by the photographer, or not, these boys felt drawn to the playground. But, the fence kept out the older boys, and unmolested by the gang, the young children could play.

³⁰ 'Life History of Frank E.', LHC, b.46, fol.31.



Figure 18: 'The playground at the Northwestern University Settlement, Chicago', (1909), Northwestern University Settlement Photographs, Series 41/6, b.3, fol.3, Northwestern University Archives, Northwestern University Library.

Fences didn't simply provide a physical barrier at the boundary of the institution. Playground organizers expected fencing to transform the whole institution, particularly through the improvement of playground discipline. Articles encouraging fencing which appeared in *The Playground* often cited improvements in discipline as a reason for installing fences.³¹ Without fencing, and thus without order or discipline, reformers could not hope to change children's behaviors. As Jacob Riis explained: "In a crowded city district, we believe that the temptations of the street are a bad thing for the boys. Playgrounds unfenced and poorly supervised simply make the bad things of the street more extensive."³² Indeed, play movement leader, Joseph Lee even argued that the fence itself transformed playgrounds into institutions, to which children would feel they could

³¹ Joseph Lee, 'Organization of Playgrounds', *The Playground*, 3:11 (Feb. 1910), 2-11; E. B. De Groot, 'Playground Equipment', *The Playground* (August 1911), 153; John H. Chase, 'Should a Playground Be Fenced?', *The Playground*, 20 (November 1908), 11-12.

³² Riis cited in Chase, 'Should Playgrounds Be Fenced?' (Nov. 1908), 12

belong.³³ Primarily, therefore, playground organizers hoped fences would change the behavior of all children within the play spaces. Fences were a tool adults employed in the battle for control of institutional space.

Despite their widespread use today, fenced playgrounds were not always a certainty. In 1908, an article appeared in *The Playground*, entitled 'Should a Playground Be Fenced?', encouraging play organizers in urban areas all over the country to adopt fencing. Using the example of an unfenced Philadelphia playground that closed because gangs of adolescents kept coming in at night and destroying the apparatus, the author argued that cities must introduce fencing to keep out destructive gangs of boys.³⁴

The CSPC had used fences at their larger parks for years before 1908. These fences, like the one installed at Washington Park in 1901, usually functioned to prevent people upsetting the landscape gardening by walking on the grass or "the making of unsightly paths into the park".³⁵ With the rise of the small park movement, the South Park Commission's policy on fencing changed. When the General Superintendent J. Frank Foster visited the parks and playgrounds of Europe in 1909, he acknowledged that the park fences and 'Keep Off the Grass Signs' which abounded in French and British parks made the lawns tidy, even beautiful, yet he condemned them for restricting the recreation of park-users.³⁶ By 1911, however, all new small parks in the Chicago South Park system automatically included iron fencing.³⁷

Playground fences, unlike the older- or European-style fences, did not function primarily to protect the lawns and gardens of the park. Instead, play organizers in the early

³³ *The Playground* (April, 1927), 60.

³⁴ Chase, 'Should a Playground Be Fenced?', (Nov. 1908), 11-12. Chase published a second article the following month, again advocating fencing of small parks, John H. Chase, 'Should a Playground Be Fenced?', *The Playground*, 21 (Dec. 1908), pp. 19-20.

³⁵ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1901).

³⁶ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1909)

³⁷ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1911-12).)

twentieth century, used the fences of small parks and playgrounds to cultivate active recreation. This meant keeping out the gang and enforcing age- and gender-segregation. The 1908 article in *The Playground* advocating fencing of playgrounds particularly praised the Chicago system for it not only fenced the whole institution but also put fences between the different age- and gender-segregated parts of the play space.³⁸ These fences supposedly allowed small children to play without being bothered by older boys, and allowed girls at play to “feel perfectly secure from any intrusion by boys or men.”³⁹ According to one advertisement, fences kept out the three biggest dangers to play: speeding cars, snapping dogs, and neighborhood bullies.⁴⁰

But small park fences not only had to keep out destructive and unwanted visitors. Equally important was their role in keeping children in playground spaces. Businesses quickly acknowledged the profit-making potential of playground fencing. In publications such as *The Playground*, advertisements for new play equipment appeared alongside spreads advertising the latest fences.⁴¹ Capitalizing on playground organizers’ fears of the streets, companies like Anchor Fences boasted that their products could “Keep children on the playground” away from “the forbidden street where danger lurks”.⁴² Fences may have protected children from traffic and the moral dangers of the street, but they also helped reformers in their constant battle for the attention of children. Unfenced playgrounds, play advocate Joseph Lee argued, constantly lost children to the allure of the street. “Without a fence,” Lee said, “they will all run to watch every fire engine that goes by.”⁴³ Child-savers

³⁸ Chase, ‘Should a Playground Be Fenced?’, (Nov.1908), 11-12

³⁹ De Groot, ‘Playground Equipment’, 153.

⁴⁰ ‘*The Playground*’ (April, 1927), 60.

⁴¹ Several issues are kept by the Rockefeller Archive Center. LSRM Series 3 Subseries 4, b.17. For examples of fence advertisements see *The Playground* (March, 1923) p. 55; *The Playground* (April, 1924) p. 55; *The Playground* (April, 1927) p. 60; *The Playground* (May, 1929), p. 139 LSRM, Series 3, Subseries 4, b.17, fol.183-184.

⁴² ‘*The Playground*’ (May, 1929), 139.

⁴³ ‘*The Playground*’ (April, 1927), 60.

acknowledged children's mobility; the swarm's lack of respect for urban boundaries had, in part, fueled the movement to get children off the streets. In fencing playgrounds, play organizers thus sought to limit this mobility and force children to abide by official definitions of urban space.

In reality, however, fencing did little to keep children within institutional boundaries, or to keep undesirable children out, especially when clubs like the Boy Scouts trained boys in skills like fence climbing, as shown in figure 19.



Figure 19: 'Boy Scouts on a Hike Under Frank Carter', (1912), OSCR, s.1, b.7, fol.66a.

To get children into new institutions, young park-goers had forced reformers to compromise. Children's ability to leave institutions if they became too dull or adult control became too severe, led to more dangerous play equipment, to frustrated play organizers, and to the building of seven-foot fences, as reformers sought to get children to conform to their ordering of the city environment.

With fencing, however, child-savers had already diverged from the rural ideal on which they had based the playground movement; a fact that some reformers lamented. Some organizers, like Gerald Stanley Lee, managed to romanticize fences by linking them to a Tom Sawyer-esque ideal boyhood. In a 1909 article in *The Playground*, Lee urged playground reformers to provide:

...a good reasonable boy-fence of rough old boards, in which they can carve their names and whittle out jack-knife tokens of their destinies – for the boy who has not whittled (and who has not whittled where he ought not) I despair of, and he won't ever amount to anything in this country. Put a fence around in which the fellows can tear out a board occasionally ... A fence in which they can make gaps to crawl through for balls in the flower-bed of their neighbors.⁴⁴

Despite Lee's recommendation, playground fences tended to be chicken wire not wooden. After all, they had to be cheap, let light in, hard to climb, and actually restrict mobility. Chicken wire fences couldn't be whittled. They were designed explicitly so that children couldn't take out a board and climb through. What sort of a substitute, one article in *The Playground* asked, was a square lot with a chicken-wire fence for the freedom of rural childhood. To make the best of a bad situation, the author contended that playground organizers should try to plant vines and other plants to cover the unsightly wires.⁴⁵ In the fight to control park space, fences, regardless of their off-putting appearance, were a necessity. Yet, even with the introduction of fences, children continued to appropriate play spaces and disregard the boundaries imposed on the city by Progressive reformers.

Appropriation

Fences were a testament to playground organizers' dissatisfaction with how children used new play spaces. Children's appropriation of the new institutional spaces in the first decades of their existence troubled Progressive Era child-savers. Appropriation

⁴⁴ Gerald Stanley Lee, 'In Behalf of the Boys', *The Playground* 3:3 (June, 1909), 14.

⁴⁵ J. G. Seupelt, 'The Playground, Its Location and Its Surroundings', *The Playground*, 3:7 (October 1909), 6-8.

undermined reformers' plans, challenged the notion of juvenile-centered reform, and physically and symbolically changed the new spaces of the city. Despite new physical boundaries, children refused to comply with adults' plans for the urban environment. Ironically, fences themselves could be appropriated and put to use by children for unintended and undesirable activities. Fences provided boys and girls with dark and out of the way corners. When a girl and a boy at Eddie S.'s school wanted to share pornographic pictures in the playground, Eddie explained that they "walked against the back fence made of stained wood and capable of keeping prying eyes away."⁴⁶ Although child-savers had intended fences to keep out undesirable behavior, in practice children used the new boundaries as secluded places to keep out of adult sight.

Even with fences, playgrounds often became, as Joseph Lee had feared, an extension of the "bad things" of the street. Children brought undesirable street behaviors like gambling, fighting and loitering directly into recreational institutions. Louis B. and his "bunch", for example, used to go to the nearby playground and fight in the sand piles, the swimming pool or out on the street.⁴⁷ In the early 1930s, R. H. Sayler, visited Seward Park and commented on the activities of the boys who attended:

The worker was impressed by the number of young boys who use Seward Park as a "hang out" where they smoke, talk filthy and, when the officer is not around, roughhouse... On one occasion a group of negro boys had a big "crap" game in the lobby of one of the gyms.⁴⁸

In this instance, the presence of the park officer affected some of the boys' more boisterous behaviors, but they did not always succeed. When, in 1918, the African-American newspaper, the Chicago Defender, complained of gangs of boys in playgrounds "disgracing the race" by playing dice, the newspaper reported that "persons in charge of

⁴⁶ 'The Life History of Eddie S.' This incident probably occurred in the mid-1920s.

⁴⁷ Janusch, Josie E., "The Life History of Louis B.," (unpublished manuscript, undated) for Sociology 373, Delinquency, EBP, b.132, fol.7. Louis and his friends were around the age of six.

⁴⁸ Raymond Sayler, Playground and neighborhood material on clubs and gangs, EBP, b.136, fol.6.

the playground are absolutely helpless” when it came to stopping boys’ misbehavior.⁴⁹ Boys spent a considerable amount of their time in recreational institutions engaged in what child-savers deemed less desirable activities. One study from the early 1930s discovered that boys spent half of their time in institutional spaces “loitering”.⁵⁰ Boys, both black and white, thus co-opted playgrounds intended for “wholesome”, “productive” recreation into spaces for undesirable activities.

Girls also failed to participate in the sort of playground activities that playground organizers sought to promote.⁵¹ Even when they did play, Pittsburgh play leader Beulah Kennard lamented, the girls weren’t interested in running or jumping, thinking it improper and ungraceful. “Her nearest approach to activity is the basket swing, which is about as exciting as a rocking chair.”⁵² Other girls, however, rather than being too constrained by propriety, failed to obey the gendered rules of etiquette child-savers imposed. In contrast to reformer attempts to control boys, playground organizers sought to control girls’ bodies and impose modesty. Henry S. Curtis, felt it prudent to explain in his article on playground equipment that play organizers should stop girls from standing up on swings unless they wore bloomers or were in yards entirely by themselves. In Cleveland, one playground instructor became so frustrated that girls in her playground wouldn’t “wear certain articles of lingerie in hot weather” that she bought 1,600 yards of gingham to make bloomers to supply the playground attendees.⁵³ Girls, Curtis complained, also disregarded rules for using the teeter ladders, ignoring organizer’s pleas that they pin or put a rubber band

⁴⁹ ‘Ain’t This A Shame’, *The Chicago Defender* (24 Aug, 1918), 13

⁵⁰ Delinquency Study [some research items], EBP, b.7, fol.6.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Gagen’s work on the playground movement has examined the gendered expectations of children’s play behaviors as well as the way girls subverted reformers’ aims. See Gagen, ‘Too Good to Be True’, 53-64.

⁵² Kennard, ‘What the Playground Can Do For Girls’

⁵³ ‘Girls to Wear Bloomers’, *The Chicago Defender* (July 13, 1912), 5

around their dresses before use.⁵⁴ Thus whether too tame or not tame enough, reformers and play organizers were often unsatisfied with how girls behaved in play spaces.

It was frequently the very activities that reformers disdained that maintained children's interest in play spaces. Carlo D., whose friends got bored of playing street games and so went to hang out at the park, only stayed so long because they got talking to some girls. The boys spotted the girls playing on the swings and interrupted their play. Carlo had never spoken to "strange girls" before, but soon the park became his favorite place to meet girls. Eventually Carlo used the playground for an activity which would have outraged child-savers: sex.⁵⁵

Children, like Carlo, appropriated shaded corners, bushes, and bathrooms in parks and playgrounds for sexual activities. Boys and girls, as young as twelve-year-old James P., would meet in parks and playgrounds and go to the locker-rooms, the bathrooms, or even, in the case of fourteen-year-old Nick Y., boat out to an island in the middle of Garfield Park, in order to find a quiet place to have sex.⁵⁶ In September 1925, the Juvenile Protective Association received numerous complaints about children's uses of public school playgrounds.⁵⁷ An officer sent to investigate conditions at two playgrounds discovered boys under the age of fourteen, smoking, swearing, and betting on the color of the garters of girls who passed by. Girls and boys also engaged in petting and necking in darkened corners of the parks.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Curtis, 'Playground Equipment'.

⁵⁵ Life History of Carlo D.

⁵⁶ Both incidents took place in 1928. "The Life History of James P.', LHC, b.51, fol.10-3; 'The Life History of Nick Y.', LHC, b.56, fol.85.

⁵⁷ JPA received complaints from a variety of sources including JPA officials, public school officials, relatives and neighbors: adults of all types who wanted help in controlling the behavior of children. Paul Cressey, 'Report on Summer Work with the Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago', (1925), EBP, b.130, fol.5.

⁵⁸ Cressey, 'Report on Summer Work with the JPA'.

When it came to sex, girls as well as boys decided to appropriate park spaces.⁵⁹ When Nick and his friend treated a couple of girls to boating in Garfield Park and stopped on a little island, it was Nick's date, Jeannette who asked him to "screw" her. They laid down in the grass and had sex.⁶⁰ Not all sexual activities in parks and playgrounds were consensual, however. Angelo M. met a girl on the street and asked her "for sex relations". When she screamed for help, Angelo punched her repeatedly in the stomach. Angelo then took her to a school playground, where he and his three friends all took turns raping her.⁶¹ African-American girls were particularly vulnerable to the danger of sexual assault when they ventured into park spaces used by gangs of white boys. Park policemen did little or nothing to protect black girls and could even be complicit in this violence.⁶² For both white and black girls, boys' appropriation of playgrounds and parks for the purpose of sexual assault, could transform play spaces into dangerous places.

Chicago's playground leaders sought to stop contact, sexual or otherwise, between boys and girls through the segregation of boys' and girls' areas. Small parks in Chicago were divided into separate men's and women's gymnasiums, explicitly to allow girls to play without interference from men and boys.⁶³ Play organizers also attempted to separate boys and girls through timetabling. Playground swimming pools dedicated certain days to

⁵⁹ For other examples see 'The Life History of John R.', LHC, b.52, fol.62; 'The Life History of Philip M.'; 'The Life History of Ernie O.'.

⁶⁰ Of course, the narrator of this story was Nick, as he told a potentially-hostile adult, and many of the life history boys seem to have no understanding of consent. However, Nick himself had just told the story of "kidnapping" two girls, "screwing" them and then making them swear they would tell nobody. His unashamed explanation of coercing girls into sex (a common trend among a cohort of boys who sometimes bragged about gang rapes) make it more unlikely that he would have lied about Jeannette's proposition. For more on gangs and rape see chapter 5. 'The Life History of Nick Y.'.

⁶¹ 'The Life History of Angelo M.', LHC b.49 fol.8-8 (57). This occurred in 1931 when Angelo was 16 or 17.

⁶² 'Race Girls Brutally Assaulted by Whites in Washington Park', *The Chicago Defender* (8th June 1918), 11.

⁶³ De Groot, 'Playground Equipment'; See for example of the model small park CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1905), xvi.

girls when boys were forbidden to attend.⁶⁴ Play workers created or adopted specific clubs for boys and girls where single-sex groups could meet under the supervision of an expert in boys' or girls' work. These groups included scouting, various boys' and girls' clubs, and, increasingly, organized sports.

Teams, Clubs, and Organization

Athletics leagues, Scout troops, Camp Fire Girls, and a variety of other boys' and girls' clubs sprang up around the city during the Progressive Era. Schools, playgrounds, and the settlement houses provided recreational clubs for children in single-sex groups. Bringing children together in recreational institutions forged friendships between the young people. Unfortunately for the child-savers, who hoped to encourage fraternal, respectable, uplifting friendship bonds, in practice, friendships forged in single-sex organized recreation could lead to further delinquencies.

Child-savers themselves were keenly aware that single-sex institutions might encourage same-sex experiences among boys. A paper researched under Ernest Burgess on the problems of counselling boys at the YMCA acknowledged that boys as young as nine-years-old engaged in homosexual sex at the institution.⁶⁵ One of the boys from the life history cohort, Raymond A., appeared in the study because of his homosexual delinquencies. He left the Illinois Children's Home in the early 1900s and moved to a middle-class foster family from rural Illinois. His same-sex experiences did not begin until he joined the Boy Scouts. In the Scouts, Raymond would meet boys who would gather after meetings to engage in mutual masturbation.⁶⁶ The bonds Raymond created through

⁶⁴ CSPC, 'Annual Report', (1911-12).

⁶⁵ Author unknown, 'YMCA paper on Counselling Boys', EBP, b.140, fol.4.

⁶⁶ 'The Life History of Raymond A.' LHC, b.42, fol.8-9. Raymond was born in 1905. He was a member of the Boy Scouts in the late 1910s.

scouting were hardly the sort of friendships recreation movement leaders sought to promote.

For Bentley S., joining the Scouts in the late 1920s didn't prompt homosexual behavior, but it did start his career as a delinquent. In 1927, when Bentley was twelve-years-old he joined his local troop. He told his life history interviewer:

I joined the Boy Scouts and started staying out late at nights, I'd go to the scout meetings and then after the meetings I'd go roaming around the streets doing many things for instance putting tappers on windows, and waking up people by scaring them, or go around finding some broods.⁶⁷

Far from controlling or curtailing Bentley's use of street space, joining the Boy Scouts actually prompted Bentley to stay out later wandering the streets. Even when the desire of children like Bentley to access recreation opportunities coincided with reformers' attempts to place children's leisure within a supervised institutional setting, children's ability to attend institutions on their own terms disrupted adult plans.

Children's ability to pick and choose how and when to attend clubs could dramatically affect the very running of the institutions. When the "Bureau Corner" gang wanted to join the local Scout troop, for example, they insisted on all being in the same patrol. This would have meant a patrol of more than twice the regular size. The scoutmaster refused and the boys acquiesced on the condition that they could choose which boys would be in which patrol. Both parties agreed upon the compromise, and the troop admitted the gang. The boys were in the troop for two years during which the scoutmaster said:

The gang fairly ran things, in spite of all the scoutmasters could do... if some enterprise was undertaken, the gang as a whole would enter enthusiastically upon it or withhold their entire support. Eventually when some of the gang disobeyed orders at the summer camp, the whole gang bolted.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ 'The Life History of Bentley S.' LHC, b.53, fol.12-9.

⁶⁸ Scoutmaster's account extracted in Thrasher, *The Gang*, 280. Incident probably happened in the early 1920s and certainly prior to the first publication of *The Gang* in 1927.

In another case in the early twenties, when a neighborhood recreational center advertised for boys to play on its baseball team, the Flannigan gang came along to play but only allowed gang members on their team. When the boys' worker remonstrated with the leader, one Edward Flannigan, Edward replied that "if the social center was not satisfied with his players, the whole gang would quit."⁶⁹ Knowing well that adults wanted to keep them in institutional spaces, boys used their ability to choose whether to attend organized recreation or not as a bargaining chip, forcing play organizers to negotiate and compromise.⁷⁰

Children's capacity to attend institutions on their own terms frustrated reformers and boys' workers. Father Louis of St. Philips' Church set up a Boy Scout troop and a baseball team with the aim of preventing delinquency in his neighborhood. Talking to Ernest Burgess's student, Raymond Sayler, Father Louis revealed his disappointment in the failures of the clubs:

I have done everything to try to help these boys but have always failed. You may not believe it, but I have spent hundreds of dollars for them but it was all money wasted. We started a Boy Scout Troop and the suits cost us over a hundred dollars. It lasted as long as we catered to them and kept giving them something but when we quit that, they lost interest in it. We did the same thing with the Ball team – bought suits and took them all over the city but then the ball season was over, they all went back to their gangs.⁷¹

The boys whom Father Louis set out to help had disrupted his plans for ending gang behavior. According to Father Louis, the boys' behavior was tantamount to stealing. They

⁶⁹ Boys' worker's account, cited in Thrasher, *The Gang*, 279.

⁷⁰ If girls employed the same tactics when they engaged with new girls' clubs, I have not found examples in my research. There seems to be no reason they would not, except that boys' attendance at clubs tended to be a priority for play organizers and that workers may have viewed boys' negotiation tactics in a more positive light than girls', i.e. boys who bartered and misbehaved were showing typically "masculine" behaviors. For more on boyhood and what makes a "good" boy see Kenneth B. Kidd, *Making American Boys: Boyology and the Feral Tale* (Minneapolis, 2004) and Grant, 'A "Real Boy" and Not a Sissy', 829-851.

⁷¹ Raymond Sayler, "A Study of Behavior Problems of Boys in the Lower North Community", unpublished, typed paper n.d. (c.1934) EBP, b.136, fol.4.

used the opportunities offered to them, took the things Father Louis gave them, but, like the Bureau Corner Scouts, when they became bored or the attempts of adults to control them became too severe, they simply left the institution.

Other children far more overtly used new institutional spaces and opportunities to plan and perform thefts. In places like school yards, playgrounds, and the YMCA, children met and planned misdemeanors, or gathered after them in order to count takings, or to reconvene after splitting up to avoid the police.⁷² Even when adults were present and meant to be supervising, children were able to evade control and appropriate the space for delinquent uses. One boy told an interviewer how he would meet his friend in the mornings in the playground near his house. One morning, he recalled, there was a “pop” truck by the playground so the two boys decided not to go to school and to steal “pop” instead. “That morning we didn’t go to school. The playground director did not see anything. He never does,” the boy said in his interview. The playground director’s indifference or ineptitude made the playground a desirable place for the boys to spend their time, and also provided them with a meeting place, a place to stay away from school, and a place to plan and perform delinquencies.⁷³ In creating spaces where children were to be expected and encouraged, child-savers had inadvertently given delinquents places where they were at once seen but unobserved.

Parks, playgrounds, and other new institutions could also offer particular opportunities for theft on-site. Life history interviewees remembered the opportunities for stealing at settlement houses and the YMCA. Eddie S. told his interviewer that he and his

⁷² See for example, ‘The Life History of Charlie B.’.

⁷³ Case history cited in John Landesco, Manuscript of ‘The 42 Gang’, The history would have been taken in the mid-1920s and the event presumably happened around the same time. John Landesco, Manuscript of ‘The 42 Gang’, JLP, b.1, fol.3.

friends even learned to steal at the YMCA, by practicing breaking into locked drawers.⁷⁴ Swimming pool lockers, in particular, seem to have appealed to children as good hunting grounds.⁷⁵ One gang stole so many towels for use in their “clubhouse” that the infuriated playground director insisted that all children be searched when exiting the pool. This didn’t stop the boys though, who simply used the unattended side entrance.⁷⁶ Children’s knowledge of institutional spaces enabled them to circumvent attempts to control their behavior and allowed them to adapt spaces for their delinquent ends.

This was certainly the case at the Northwestern University Settlement. The settlement house served as a meeting place for boys and their probation officers, but they also hosted a variety of other visitors, rich and poor. One evening in 1908, A. K. Maynard, a long-time resident, held a dinner for several prominent university professors and their wives when they were interrupted by a loud noise coming from upstairs. Returning from his investigations, Maynard informed his guests: “It was just a lot of boys, a lot of probation boys. They have, ah, been upstairs in the rooms where your wraps were stored. I am afraid, ah, that some of you may miss small articles which you have left there.”⁷⁷ The probation boys had clearly planned their theft and, using their knowledge of the settlement building and the guests who were coming, had seized the opportunity the institution provided them.

Children’s appropriation of institutional spaces and organized recreation often disturbed play workers and adult officials like Maynard. In official reports of new recreational institutions in the 1910s and 1920s, the tone was normally one of optimism and

⁷⁴ Eddie, for example, stole from the YMCA, ‘The Life History of Eddie S.’; see also, ‘The Life History of Peter S.’, LHC, b.53, fol.(12-6).

⁷⁵ See for example, ‘The Life History of Laddie P.’; ‘The Life History of John R.’; ‘The Life History of James P.’.

⁷⁶ ‘The Life History of Laddie P.’

⁷⁷ A. K. Maynard cited in Wukas, Mark, *The Worn Doorstep: Informal History of the Northwestern University Settlement Association 1891-1991* (Chicago, 1991), 23.

self-congratulation. Understandably, settlement houses and playgrounds wished to demonstrate the positives and improvements rather than the difficulties they faced in their work, especially in publications intended for donors. Nonetheless, one does find hints at the difficulties the child-savers faced in maintaining discipline. The 1915-1916 Annual Report of the Northwestern University Settlement was largely optimistic. The report talked of the love the boys of the boys' clubs had for the settlement and the men who worked with them. The report also commented that, due to reduced club size, marked improvements in discipline had been made. However, previous reports had never made any mention of disciplinary problems. Furthermore, despite this "improvement" Mr. Mortensen, head of Boys' Work, had "found the work more difficult than he had imagined" and left the job in less than a year.⁷⁸

Mr. Mortensen was certainly not the only recreation worker to find the job more challenging than he had anticipated. When play workers grew frustrated with the challenges of organizing children's recreation, some, like Mr. Mortensen, simply gave up and moved on. In other cases, however, workers persevered, grew ever more frustrated, and even fought back against the disruption of the children.

Escalating Conflict

In 1930, an ex-cop in Chicago decided to become a park manager.⁷⁹ The Visiting Supervisor of Small Parks for the Lincoln Park System, Sergeant Leonard, told the story of

⁷⁸ Annual Report of the Northwestern University Settlement (1915-1916), NUSAR, Series 41/1, b.4, fol.5.

⁷⁹ It was unusual for children's play workers to be ex-police officers. Usually play workers were middle-class professionals with relevant higher education. On the other hand, police officers, on the other hand, tended to be more working-class, first- or second-generation immigrants. See advertisements in *The Playground*. May 1913, 79-84. See also Clark W. Hetherington, 'Playground Directors – Sources From Which They May Be Procured' *The Playground* 5:7 (October, 1911), 225-231. For information of police officers' backgrounds see Wolcott, *Cops and Kids*; Haller, *Illegal Enterprise*.

the policeman's involvement with Seward Park to Ernest Burgess's student Raymond Sayler:

When he came he was going to give the kids everything they wanted and hoped to be popular with them. Well, you know how they will take advantage of anything like that – they ran it into the ground in short order. When they abused the privileges he had given them, he took them away and even ran the kids out of the park. It got worse until one night last winter – around Christmas – they broke several hundred dollars' worth of glass out of the park. They also threatened to 'get' the manager...⁸⁰

Well-intentioned adults, like this ex-policeman, arrived in new play spaces with certain expectations about how children would receive them. Usually, as in this example, they believed their work would be well received by the children, who would listen to them, happily attend the institution, and transform morally and physically for the better. In practice, however, adults often failed to control children's behavior, even within institutional space. As in the case of this ex-policemen, children's use of institutional spaces in ways adults didn't like could result in escalating conflict. When the children's use of the park got out of control, the play worker tried to regain control by taking away children's privileges and even forcing them out of the institution. The children pushed back against this measure and destroyed the furniture and broke windows in the park. Eventually, the children's behavior forced the park manager to empty the furniture out of the "loafing room" and, finally, locked up all the club rooms. The confrontation with real children so dramatically altered the ideas and plans of the ex-cop that he gave up on the whole institutional project.

Play movement leaders expected playground organizers like the ex-policeman to have to deal with all sorts of appropriations, intrusions, and unwanted behaviors by children in playground spaces. Recreation leader, Howard Bradstreet told the Second Annual Playground Congress that what made a good play leader was to ensure "that the

⁸⁰ R. H. Sayler, Playground and neighborhood material on clubs and gangs, EBP, b.136, fol.6.

boys do not invade the territory of the girls, that girls do not ‘pump’ on the swings, that rebellions are subdued, that invasions of older youths are repelled, [and] that the grounds close promptly.”⁸¹ Bradstreet’s use of “rebellions” and “invasions” may have been tongue-in-cheek, but it appears that play organizers had to deal with these sorts of conflicts quite literally.

Some boys seemed to have enjoyed the thrill of winding up recreation workers. Ten-year-old Peter S. and his friends used to hang out at the YMCA and when they got bored they would tear up the place, breaking pool cues, throwing balls and beating up other kids. Peter said they were kicked out of the YMCA and “from then on every time we came there we were thrown out but that was all the more good to us as we got a kick out of it.”⁸² Escalating conflict was sometimes the very result children wanted. While boys like Peter antagonized child-savers for fun, others did so to maintain their control of the place. A group of white youths attacked the black park manager with brass knuckles at Ogden Park, in 1914, because he tried to let African-American children use the showers.⁸³ The playground manager took the boys to court, but they were let go with a reprimand.

Even very minor appropriations, like the use of out-of-bounds grass for play sometimes resulted in serious clashes between children and officials. In 1927, a group of well-off eleven- to fifteen-year-old boys were sitting on the golf course at Jackson Park when two park policemen approached them. They accused the boys of damaging the green and one pulled his gun on the group and took them to a boiler room. There the policemen forced the boys to undress and, using a strap, beat them severely. The parents of the children went to the park superintendent and complained. The superintendent suspended

⁸¹ Howard Bradstreet, ‘The Need of a Play Organiser’ (1909), 104 CHy 5, RSFM.

⁸² ‘The Life History of Peter S.’.

⁸³ For more on white and black clashes over recreational space, see Chapter 4. CCRR, *Negro in Chicago*, 289.

the two policemen who explained “that they thought it was the custom to beat all boys who played on the golf greens.”⁸⁴ In this case, class certainly played a part in the outcome of the case. It is unlikely the incident would even have been recorded if the boys’ middle-class parents had not intervened. Indeed, it appears from the policemen’s comments that they had beaten other boys for the same offence many times before.

Children’s unexpected use of institutional space, like the boys sitting on the golf green, led to attempts by adult officials to regain control of recreational spaces. Children’s appropriation of small parks prompted Chicago’s chief probation officer, Timothy D. Hurley, to arrange a meeting of the Cook County Child Saving Conference to discuss improvements to park supervision as early as 1906. As they were currently being run, Hurley argued, the playgrounds and parks were “as productive of evil as the public dance halls”. It is not incidental that Hurley compared parks and playgrounds to public dance halls, where reformers feared the sexual morality of young people faced irredeemable corruption.⁸⁵

But improvements in supervision did not necessarily mean adults regained control of institutional spaces. When the Juvenile Protective Association investigated conditions in several school playgrounds after receiving complaints about the sexual behavior of children there, the investigator discovered children simply ignored the play workers. When the investigator intervened to stop the sexual activities of a group of teenage boys and pre-teen girls, and suggested the girls go home, the girls “sassed” him and returned to their activities.⁸⁶ A far cry from the ideal places of recreation child-savers had envisioned, children transformed institutional spaces into places to fit their own needs and desires:

⁸⁴ ‘Accuse two cops of beating fifteen boys in park’, *Chicago Daily Tribune* (May 7 1927), 1.

⁸⁵ See, for example Perry, “‘The General Motherhood of the Commonwealth’”, 719-73; ‘Sees Peril in the Park’, *Chicago Daily Tribune* (May 3 1906), 1.

⁸⁶ Cressey, ‘Report on the Summer Work with the Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago’.

places for stealing, places for hiding, and places for sex. And as playground organizers were to discover, faced with disorderly and disruptive boys and girls, adults had few recourses to which to turn.

Increasingly, undesirable behaviors resulted in children being barred from institutional settings.⁸⁷ Chicago School sociologist, John Landesco, and his student, Corrado De Sylvester, investigated gang culture on the West Side of Chicago during the 1920s. They discovered that very few boys belonged to boys' clubs:

The boys of the neighborhood, with few exceptions, do not belong to any clubs... Some boys living on Flourney Street, join[ed] the YMCA, but in a short time the boys were all thrown out for breaking into lockers. A few boys on Bishop Street also join[ed] the YMCA and 'Off-The-Street-Club', but they were thrown out for stealing. The Madonna Centre is now offering its services to the area but few are the boys who attend any of their functions. The boys who accept the Center's services are boys that do not mingle with the boys in the street ... I have asked many of the boys what is the reason for their not going to the Center. Their reply is that you must not make too much noise.

Throwing out the boys is the method used in the district. Professor Landesco and I [Corrado De Sylvester] called on a church official in the area. He explained that one time he opened a truant school for boys but the boys nearly wrecked the place. He was forced to throw them out. The public school has always been in the habit of throwing out the boys when they get too rough.⁸⁸

Like the boys who terrorized the optimistic ex-cop, children that Landesco encountered on the West Side challenged adult control of institutions. Faced with children stealing and a lack of discipline, adults had little recourse in their attempts to regain control except excluding children from institutional spaces or even closing them down.

Not everyone agreed that playground organizers had the right to throw out misbehaving children. When the organizer of a school playground caught Philip M. and

⁸⁷ I have found only one mention of girls being barred from institutional play spaces. This is from a Juvenile Protective Association survey of the Lincoln Park System in Chicago in 1913. At one park "in the vicinity of the "famous" car barn bandits ... the [park] Director saw none but good boys at his place. If a bad girl accidently came there "he chased her away"." 'A survey of the Lincoln Park, March 1910-November 1913', JPA, b.1, fol.4.

⁸⁸ Landesco, Manuscript of 'The 42 Gang'.

his friends playing cards on the grounds in the mid-1920s, the principal ordered them to stay out of the yard. Philip refused, arguing that as his parents paid taxes, he had every right to use the park. The principal threatened to call the police. A crowd of the neighboring Polish community gathered, and angrily demanded that the boys be let in. One particularly angry Polish woman insisted that as all the people paid taxes for the park, they didn't need permission to use the playground.⁸⁹ The principal must have given in, for Philip returned the next day. In Philip's case, the community had rallied around the boys' use of the playground and questioned the playground organizer's right to control who used the space and how. Furthermore, they delegitimized one of the few tools child-savers had for control over recreational institutions: exclusion.

Even when successful, exclusion normally did not end conflict. In addition to attacking play leaders, excluded boys destroyed or stole equipment in retaliation. Most institutions recorded that children stole desirable equipment and games. While the prospect of selling equipment motivated some children to steal from clubs and other institutions, others simply wished to use games and equipment in spaces of their choosing, with friends who had been barred from institutional spaces, and away from adult efforts to control activities and minimize noise.⁹⁰ One gang that Thrasher cited stole an entire collection of games like cards, dominoes, and checkers from a settlement house to play in their clubhouse under a sidewalk.⁹¹ In another case, some members of a gang of fifteen twelve- to fifteen-year-olds, stole games from a settlement house to play in an alley with their friends whom the police had banned from the settlement.⁹² Sometimes anything connected with the settlement could become the focus of children's hatred. One day, Thrasher observed a boy discovering that the cards he and his friends were playing with

⁸⁹ Life History of Philip M.

⁹⁰ Landesco, Manuscript of 'The 42 Gang'.

⁹¹ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 89

⁹² Thrasher, *The Gang*, 316

belonged to the local settlement house: “He started to burn them one by one in a little bonfire of matches which he had made on the sidewalk.”⁹³ Evidently children enjoyed the activities offered by these institutions, yet the institutional space, and the rules and supervision that existed there, deterred would-be members.

Conflict between boys and institutional officials thus undermined the reformers’ projects. In creating boys’ clubs, supervised recreation and even compulsory schooling, child-savers sought to transform “bad boys” into upright citizens by getting them off the streets and into supervised, productive play spaces. When they discovered these bad boys had, and often put to use, the power to damage and disrupt institutional spaces, adults frequently resorted to throwing out the very boys they had deemed most in need of wholesome recreation. In excluding children, adults usually didn’t succeed in regaining control. Barring certain children could lead to escalating conflict and could motivate theft. Furthermore, even from outside institutional space, children like the boys that Frederic Thrasher encountered pushed back against reformers’ attempts to control their behavior.

Enter the State

Faced with children vandalizing property, destroying club rooms, and having sex in park bushes, exasperated reformers, who had tried less coercive methods to control children, turned to the state for help. When a boy known only as “T.” and his group of seven or eight friends started to appropriate a small playground in their neighborhood and to “interfere” with the play of younger children, the policeman “on the beat” became

⁹³ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 95. Historian Cary Goodman is one of the few to discuss children’s antagonistic relationship with settlement houses. Goodman characterizes this relationship as a form of class conflict with boys’ vandalism a class-driven resistance to middle-class intrusion into their lives. While the boys may have been motivated to some extent by a class-consciousness, I am wary to read class-based resistance too strongly into children’s actions as I believe this implies a level of planning and intention I do not believe these children were expressing. Instead, I would characterize this behavior much more specific: a reaction to their own day-to-day experiences and knowledge of specific adults’ attempts to control their lives and behavior. Goodman, *Choosing Sides*.

involved. He chased the boys away, but these boys, like so many others, found the chase amusing and began to wind up the policeman on a regular basis. The policeman eventually brandished his club at them which resulted in him being beaten up by the gang. The case appeared before the Boys' Court and the boys were sent, as a group, to St. Charles School for Boys for delinquency.⁹⁴

It was fairly uncommon in the 1910s and 1920s for a conflict between policemen on the beat and delinquent children to end up before the Juvenile Court.⁹⁵ Children used their mobility and knowledge of the streets to keep out of the policemen's grasp. As one life history interviewee described, "we knew the streets like a book." If they were chased after a robbery, the gang "would run through the alley like lightening, or over the fence into the open lot and were gone."⁹⁶ Catching young delinquents proved challenging for police.

According to the Chicago School sociologist Everett Hughes, who studied policing, most police officers did not bother to arrest young offenders even when they caught them. Instead they preferred to give them "a cuff on the ear, a stroke or two with a little switch ... reprimand [them] and let [them] go".⁹⁷ When park policeman Gus Okon, caught a juvenile thief, he would give him a beating then let him go:

I went down and I said, 'Mike, did you take these things from that garage?' And he knew I had the goods on him, so he admitted it. Then, bang, I socked him with my fist behind the ear. 'What did you take them for?' and bang, I socked him behind the other ear. I just kept on beating the stuffing out of him, then I said, "Mike, you know me better than that. You got a good father and mother, good Polish people. Don't let me catch you taking anything again; if you do, what you got now will be nothing to what you'll get then" Then I took him to the captain and said, "This boy has learned a good lesson." The captain let him go. The boy is a good boy now, and every time he sees me, he says, "Gus, I want to thank you for that trimming you gave me. It made a man out

⁹⁴ Case cited in Thrasher, *The Gang*, 358.

⁹⁵ See Wolcott, *Cops and Kids*.

⁹⁶ Life History of An Original Member fo the 42 Gang, JLP, b.1, fol.1.

⁹⁷ Everett Hughes, 'The Policeman as a Person', (typescript, 1925), cited in Wolcott, *Cops and Kids*, 101.

of me.” That’s my motto, scare ‘em to death and knock the hell out of them, and then let them go. I’ve set dozens of them right that way.⁹⁸

Police officers like Gus Okon often preferred immediate physical punishment of delinquent boys or relying on community ties to parents rather than the long-term involvement of the juvenile court that child-savers advocated. But, as in the case of the policemen who beat the middle-class boys for sitting on the golf green, the differences in strategies for dealing with delinquent youths could cause tension between the middle-class play movement leaders and the generally working-class police officers. Child-savers, like Louise De Koven Bowen, president of Chicago’s Juvenile Protective Association, were consistently critical of Chicago policing. Yet women like Bowen were also aware of their dependence on police officers’ co-operation as almost all the children who appeared before the juvenile court were referred there by police probation officers.⁹⁹

Of those children who did appear before the Juvenile Court in Chicago, most, especially the boys, were sent home under the supervision of a probation officer.¹⁰⁰ But even state-backed attempts at controlling urban childhood seldom ran smoothly. Children placed under the supervision of probation officers in the early twentieth century probably found evasion laughably easy. Despite continual calls for more staff, probation officers into the late 1920s were overburdened with cases. The average caseload of the thirty-eight probation officers affiliated with the Cook County Juvenile Court was thirty-four percent higher than the maximum decreed by the federal Children’s Bureau. With so many cases, the ability of probation officers to supervise their charges remained limited. According to

⁹⁸ Gus Okon, cited by Hughes, ‘The Policeman as a Person’, (typescript, 1925), extracted in Wolcott, *Cops and Kids*, 101-102.

⁹⁹ Wolcott, *Cops and Kids*.

¹⁰⁰ Far fewer delinquent girls than delinquent boys were brought before the Cook County Juvenile Court between 1904 and 1927. Proportionally, girls were far more likely to be placed in institutions than on probation, the opposite was the case for boys. Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance*.

a 1928 study, in the average boy's case dealt with by a juvenile court probation officer, the initial visit didn't take place until a whole month after the judge assigned the case.¹⁰¹

Thus, although child-savers designed probation to give street-frequenting boys supervision, in practice it had little impact on the boys' lives. The judge turned Joe N. over to probation after his first appearance in the Juvenile Court, but when his life history interviewer asked about it, Joe couldn't even remember what it meant: "it had no effect on me", he said. Joe carried on junking and hanging around unsupervised on the streets.¹⁰² Joe was no exception. In Laddie P.'s case, the probation officer visited his home twelve times, but never once saw Laddie.¹⁰³ Not actually meeting probationary boys impaired the officers' ability to prevent delinquency and provide supervision.

The situation was similar for truant officers. The city of Chicago employed truant officers from the early 1890s to enforce their compulsory school attendance laws. By 1917, after repeated acknowledgements that the anti-truancy system in place was completely ineffective, Chicago still maintained only fifty-three truant officers, just one per 8,419 children.¹⁰⁴ Thus children like Matthew B., who habitually skipped school in Chicago from the mid-1910s to the mid-1920s and was asked by his life history interviewer how he managed to avoid going to school for so long, replied simply: "no truant officer came to my house, so I played hookey right along."¹⁰⁵ Over a third of the life history interviewees explicitly talked about their truancy, but in contrast to Matthew B., many of these boys did encounter truant officers. Indeed, the life history interviews were among the children most likely to have been caught by truant officers as a large number were brought into contact

¹⁰¹ Earl D. Myers, "Juvenile Delinquents" Part 1, Illinois Association for Criminal Justice c.1929, EBP, b.10, fol.1.

¹⁰² Life History of Joe N.

¹⁰³ Life History of Laddie P.

¹⁰⁴ London at that time had 1 truant officer per 1,900 children while New York in 1913 had 1 per 7,000 children. Abbot and Breckinridge, *Truancy and Non-Attendance*, 226.

¹⁰⁵ 'Life History of Matthew B.' LHC, b.43, fol. Unnumbered.

with the juvenile court as they were habitual truants, and thus, became subjects for research. Nonetheless, even children that did come into contact with truant officers were able to evade their control. John R., a habitual truant, told his life history interviewer “I was always chased by the truant officer and never was caught by him.”¹⁰⁶

In their efforts to control truants, officers could accomplish more when parents worked with them. Many working-class parents disapproved of truancy, and children like Laddie P., Alfred S., and David D. hid their truancy from their parents or risked a beating. Anthony M.’s mother actually approached the truant officer herself for help in keeping her son in school.¹⁰⁷ Eventually Anthony’s mother grew so frustrated with Anthony skipping school that she allowed him to leave age fourteen, on the understanding he would start work. Subsequently, without his mother’s insistence, no truant officer came after Anthony, and he never went back to school.¹⁰⁸

Truant and probation officers were also on the front line in enforcing anti-child labor regulations, yet children in Chicago continued to work long after laws and city ordinances forbade it. At least twenty of the life history boys mentioned working illegally in the street trades in the 1920s.¹⁰⁹ Such work was easy to come by and flexible, even for very young children. Gino P., for example, started selling newspapers aged just seven years old in 1924.¹¹⁰ The mobility and flexibility of street labor allowed boys to easily avoid

¹⁰⁶ ‘Life History of John R.’.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Life History of Laddie P.’; ‘Life History of Anthony M.’ LHC b.49 fol.51a (8-4); ‘Life History of David D.’, LHC b.46, fol.29 (5-7); ‘Life History of Alfred S.’, LHC b.54 fol.74 (13-1).

¹⁰⁸ ‘Life History of Anthony M.’.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, ‘Life History of Laddie P.’; ‘Life History of Stanley T.’; ‘Life History of Andrew H.’; ‘Life History of Angelo M.’; ‘Life History of Joseph P.’ LHC, b.51, fol.59 (10-7).

¹¹⁰ ‘Life History of Gino P.’, LHC, b.61, fol. 59.

regulations and the fact that police officers seldom enforced street labor law only worsened matters.¹¹¹

Boys even used child street labor as a way to evade the enquiries of the adults. One morning in the mid-1920s, on their way to steal a breakfast of milk and cakes, Laddie P. and his friend Sunny were stopped by the police.¹¹² The policeman asked the boys what they were doing up and about so early: "I told him that Sunny and I were delivering the morning paper, so they left us alone".¹¹³ Another life history interviewee remembered that he and his friends used to carry papers with them when they went stealing, "as an alibi".¹¹⁴ Boys also used child street labor as a way to justify the acquisition of money through theft to suspicious parents, demonstrating that government employees were not the only adults whose supervision and control children hoped to circumvent.¹¹⁵

Even those children most directly involved with the justice system, those sentenced to the reformatory institutions, proved able to evade adult control. Children who escaped reformatory institutions had to stay out of the reach of the police and probation officers. Like those children who were released on probation, for some escapees, particularly those with parents who were happy to impede state officials, evasion came remarkably easily. Eddie S. did not remember a single one of the "juvenile people" coming to his home and enquiring of him after his numerous escapes from reform institutions.¹¹⁶ Even when adults knew that children were at home, children could be very successful at evasion; a fact which

¹¹¹ For the struggle to enforce child street labor regulations see Chapter 2. See also Carmichael, Lillian Hope, 'Street Trading in Relation to Juvenile Delinquency in Chicago', unpublished master's thesis, University of Chicago (1926).

¹¹² At this time Laddie was somewhere between the ages of ten, when his story begins (1924), and thirteen, when he was first committed to the Parental School, (1927), 'The Life History of Laddie P'.

¹¹³ 'Life History of Laddie P.'.

¹¹⁴ 'Unidentified Life History' LHC, b.56, fol.15-13. This incident happened around 1927. Other examples of using street labor to justify street presence to the police are 'The Life History of John R.'; 'Life History of Alfred S.', LHC, b.54, fol.13-1 (74).

¹¹⁵ 'Life History of John R'.

¹¹⁶ 'Life History of Eddie S.'.

institution officials found frustrating. Fifteen-year-old, James T., who had escaped during his very first night at the Chicago and Cook County School, caused the superintendent of the school to write to the juvenile court:

[James T.] has been at large from this school for four months. The parents have explained to our officer that James is not at home. I hear from the principal of the local public school that the boys are seen around the home every day. If James is at home, it is a reflection upon all of us, our school, our officer, and the police district, if he is not picked up.¹¹⁷

Despite the official frustration, James remained at large for more than six months until he was arrested for burglarizing a chain store.

For other children, returning home after an escape was not an option. When James later escaped from Cook County again, he felt he couldn't return home because the police would be looking for him there.¹¹⁸ Sometimes parents sided with the court and returned boys to reform institutions if they made their way home after an escape.¹¹⁹ For children who could not go home, the streets offered places to hide, unseen by juvenile justice officials. As sociologist Frederic Thrasher noted when visiting a newsboys' alley in Chicago in the mid-1920s: "Abandoned space under the sidewalk and the opportunities for eluding capture offered by adjoining low buildings made this "port of missing boys" a natural refuge for those who wished to escape the inquiries of their relatives, the truant officers, or the police."¹²⁰ The newspaper alleys of Chicago were well suited to children's evasion of adult authorities. Children could sleep there, among the other newsies waiting for the morning papers, and they could earn an income to feed and support themselves, while the adults who ran the newspaper depots had an interest in keeping underage children hidden from the eyes of the police and probation officers. Unsurprisingly, when Alfred S. escaped from

¹¹⁷ 'Life History of James T.' LHC, b.54, fol.13-3.

¹¹⁸ 'Life History of James T.'; see also David J. Talbot reminiscences, CHM.

¹¹⁹ Life History of Cuno C.; Life History in Chicago Area Project Records, b.5, fol.11, CHM.

¹²⁰ Thrasher, *The Gang*, p.141; See also Carmichael, 'Street Trading'; 'Investigation into Street Trades at Night', JPA annual report 1915-16, JPA, b.9, fol.125c.

Cook County in the late 1920s, he went to the newspaper alley. As he put it “When [a] kid run[s] away from home or Parental or Cook County or St. Charles, they hang around there. They sleep in the r—room or ... in the receiving dept. behind boxes.”¹²¹ Escapees like Alfred thus used their knowledge of the city to hide from police and probation officers.

Other children used the very institutions created to aid juvenile justice, the parks and playgrounds, to avoid recapture, although this strategy was much more weather-dependent. When it became too difficult for James T. to live at home, for example, he moved to the park with some of his fellow gang members. “It happened to be summertime. I hanged around the park... we stayed in the park all summer.”¹²² There James lived happily with his friends, one, a runaway from an abusive father and, another, an escapee from St. Charles School for Boys.¹²³

Escaping was not, as one might imagine, an unusual way to leave institutional homes for children. Even in the most secure institutions, such as reformatories for delinquent children, adults were sometimes at a loss as to how to keep children where the juvenile court sent them. In 1909, five years after the St. Charles School for Boys opened, the annual report recorded almost the same number of boys were leaving the school through escape (225) as by release on parole (237). In subsequent reports (when it was reported at all) this number decreased significantly but, escape remained an ever-present problem.

Girls also escaped the Juvenile Detention Home and other institutional homes for delinquent girls.¹²⁴ But for girls, escape carried more risks. More so than boys, girls in reform institutions were estranged from their families, so returning home was often not an

¹²¹ ‘Life History of Alfred S.’ Alfred would have been between the ages of 13 and 15.

¹²² ‘Life History of James T.’

¹²³ The escapee here is Cuno, ‘Life History of Cuno C.’.

¹²⁴ By 1917, sixty-seven girls had escaped the Juvenile Detention Home. Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance*, 102, 139.

option. Living on the streets, on the other hand, made girls particularly vulnerable to sexual and physical violence, while stricter laws concerning girls working on the streets made it harder for female escapees to support themselves through labor such as newspaper selling.¹²⁵ Girls, like Nellie and her friends who escaped the Illinois State Industrial School for Delinquent Girls at Geneva, turned to prostitution to support themselves after escapes, fueling child-savers fears of white slavery.¹²⁶ At least one girl dressed as a boy and used the freight train network to escape from three separate reform institutions.¹²⁷ Dressing as a boy may have served as a disguise, but also probably enabled “Helen” to more easily and more safely use the same escape techniques as boys.

Apprehending and returning all these children to institutional homes “absorb[ed] a great deal of time and effort on the part of parole officers, police, Juvenile Detention Home officials” according to University of Chicago researcher Earl D. Myers.¹²⁸ Adults involved in the reform of delinquents put so much effort into stopping runaways for a number of reasons. Firstly, delinquent children outside of institutions were a danger to society. Not only did they commit new offenses while at large, but they remained out of reach of the rehabilitative machine. With no rehabilitation or supervision, and let loose back into the corruption of the streets, according to Progressive Era experts, delinquent children carried on their path to criminality.

Secondly, the juvenile justice system struggled to cope with the large numbers of escapees. Although the St Charles School annual report statistics from 1909, which named

¹²⁵ Newsboys greatly outnumbered newsgirls. In Chicago in 1905, newsgirls were thought to be just 5% of all newsies Peter C. Baldwin, “‘Nocturnal Habits and Dark Wisdom’: The American Response to Children in the Streets at Night, 1880-1930”, *Journal of Social History* 35:3 (Spring, 2002), 593-611. See also Clement, *Growing Pains*, 142-143; Macleod, *The Age of the Child*, 112.

¹²⁶ Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance*, 139.

¹²⁷ Thomas, William I., and Thomas, Dorothy Swaine, *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs* (New York, 1928), 113.

¹²⁸ Myers, ‘Juvenile Delinquents’.

escape as the way almost half of the boys left the institution, are not matched elsewhere in the sources, escaping remained high throughout the 1910s and 1920s. At the Geneva girls' school, in 1926 and 1927, 108 out of 826 departures from the school were escapes.¹²⁹ When University of Chicago researcher Earl D. Myers visited the Cook County School for Boys in 1926, he found that two-fifths of commitments to the school ended in, what he euphemistically called, "informal departure".¹³⁰ A student at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, Elizabeth Hirsch, conducted a more detailed breakdown of departures. Hirsch examined the records of ninety-nine boys resident at the Chicago and Cook County School for Boys on September 1st, 1923. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Recorded Departures of 99 Boys from the Chicago and Cook County School for Boys, By Cause¹³¹

<i>Total</i>	319
<i>Ran Away *</i>	53
<i>'At large' *</i>	50
<i>Not Reported **</i>	88
<i>Placed on Farms</i>	3
<i>Sent to Camps</i>	1
<i>Paroled</i>	119
<i>Released by Juvenile Court</i>	4
<i>Released by Cook County School for Boys</i>	1

*The items "at large" and "ran away" both indicate absence from the school without permission.

**Probably most of the 88 departures listed here were runaways

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Elizabeth Frances Hirsch, 'A Study of the Chicago and Cook County School for Boys', unpublished master's thesis, University of Chicago, (1926).

Many of the “informal departures” listed above would have been committed by repeat escapees. Not every child ran away, but those who did often escaped several times. Of ninety-nine runaways Hirsch researched, almost three quarters had run away more than once. The median number of escapes per runaway was three, but some eight boys had escaped seven or more times.¹³² Stories of multiple escapes frequently appear in qualitative sources as well. Among the life history interviewees collected by the Institute of Juvenile Research, around one third talked about running away from institutional homes.¹³³ Within just one week, fourteen-year-old, James P. was sent to the Chicago Parental School for truancy and escaped three times; while fifteen-year-old James T. stayed at Cook County School for Boys just one night before he and his friend ran away.¹³⁴ The notes from fourteen-year-old Joseph P.’s time in Cook County are yet more staggering:

[Joseph] was sent to the Chicago and Cook County School For Boys. He was received there that same morning at ten o’clock. At ten-fifteen [Joseph] escaped but was apprehended and returned at ten-forty. [Joseph] stayed for lunch and then escaped again at one-thirty.¹³⁵

This time Joseph got away. Reading the notes, one can feel the exasperation officials felt over escapees like Joseph.

Escape caused such an issue for reformatories that it was considered among the most serious offences and, as such, carried the heaviest punishments.¹³⁶ As one life history interviewee put it about his time in the Chicago Parental School soon after the First World

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ See, for example, ‘Life history of Bill C.’; ‘Life History of Angelo T.’, LHC b.57, fol.16-1; ‘Life History of Harry R.’ LHC b.57, fol.16-6; ‘Life History of James P.’; ‘Life History of Cuno C.’; ‘Life History of Robert E.’, LHC b.46, fol.32; ‘Life History of Angelo F.’; ‘Life History of Nathan W.’; ‘Life History of Tony D.’ LHC b.46, fol.5-1; ‘Life History of David D.’; ‘Life History of Ray M.’; ‘Life History of Alfred S.’ and ‘Life History of Eddie H.’, LHC, b.48 fol.46 (7-2). Eddie ran away seven times. See also, ‘Boy Escapes the Juvenile Officers for Fourth Time’, *Chicago Tribune* (November 17, 1901), 1; and ‘Reform School ‘Truants’ Taken’, *Chicago Tribune* (November 29, 1923), 1 which reported that 26 boys escaped from St. Charles in one night.

¹³⁴ ‘Life History of James P.’; ‘Life History of James T.’.

¹³⁵ ‘Life History of Joseph P.’.

¹³⁶ Myers, ‘Juvenile Delinquents’.

War: "It was fair to do anything at all to a runaway."¹³⁷ Even as Progressive ideals ostensibly moved prisons and other reform institutions further from the punishment of the body to the treatment of the individual's soul, in practice, reformatory officials often resorted to physical punishments for the treatment of runaways.¹³⁸ Beatings were a common punishment for escapees.¹³⁹ Just the rumor of escape could result in a beating. One inmate of the Chicago Parental School was beaten with a hammer because the house officer believed he was planning to run away. As she beat him, the house officer said: "Don't let me hear you say run away."¹⁴⁰ Other punishments for running away included wearing heavy iron studded shoes, being placed in a tub of ice water, being caged, and being hung by the wrists.¹⁴¹

In response to repeat escapes, officials escalated punishments. The first time Eddie H. escaped he was forced to sit on a stool for hours on end. The next time, however, the house father forced Eddie and his fellow escapees to squat for fifteen minutes at a time, kneel on the cement floor with their hands above their heads, and beat them with a broomstick. But in Eddie's opinion, the worst punishment the house master devised involved standing with just your toes on the edge of a bench and bending over. If a boy

¹³⁷ 'Life History of Kenneth B.' LHC, b.56 fol.15-11.

¹³⁸ In Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, he argued that from the eighteenth century society moved from the public spectacle of punishment inflicted on the criminal's body towards the secretive punishment of imprisonment, surveillance and reformation where punishment was put to work upon the criminal's soul. Historians of Progressive Era juvenile justice, such as Miroslava Chavez-Garcia have used the Foucauldian model to describe the changes brought about in early twentieth century juvenile justice. In her book, *Delinquent States* from 2012, Chavez-Garcia argued that, while escaping did carry the worse punishments, as the Progressive reform movement continued, especially at its height in the 1910s and 1920s, these punishments were increasingly Foucauldian, less beating and whipping and more solitary confinement and 'lost privilege' cottages. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1977); Chavez-Garcia, *States of Delinquency*.

¹³⁹ Myers, 'Juvenile Delinquents'.

¹⁴⁰ 'Life History of Harry T.' LHC, b. 52, fol. 77. Life history taken in around 1936. This incident happened between 1929 and 1930 while Harry was around thirteen-years-old.

¹⁴¹ A Case History extracted in Clifford R. Shaw and Frederick Zorbaugh, *Delinquency Areas; A study of the Geographical Distribution of School Truants, Juvenile Delinquents and Adult Offenders in Chicago* (Chicago, 1929), 41; 'Life History of Kenneth B.'; 'Life history of Charlie B.'.

fell, the house father beat him. The punishments lasted eight days and demonstrate the imaginative, sadistic lengths officials went to, to devise punishments for escapees.¹⁴²

Although not all house parents were sadistic, few were schooled in the Progressive ideals which reformers had envisioned when creating the schools. Often house-fathers were chosen for their skill at plumbing or carpentry rather than training in social work or experience working with children. They brought their wives who automatically became the house mothers.¹⁴³ The girls' reform schools had predominantly female staffs, but who were likewise largely untrained in Progressive methods and often at odds with the reformers based in the city.¹⁴⁴ Even into the 1930s, reformers were complaining of the lack of training or qualifications needed by reform institution workers.¹⁴⁵

In 1928, decades after "progressive" reforms were first implemented, Earl Myers visited St Charles School for Boys and described some of the punishments he discovered there:

The half basement under the bakery has been made into a guard house, or 'jail'... In the larger jail room were about fourteen or fifteen boys. Neither cots nor mattresses are provided.... To make identification easy in case of escape, two swaths had been cut with barber's clippers through each boy's hair... Most of the boys had been strapped before being locked up ...

Within the small[er] room mentioned above, - a room probably 6 by 9 feet - four boys were confined. They were said to be particularly vicious, had been immoral, had run away, assaulted guards, etc. In each corner of the room is an iron pipe attached to the floor and ceiling. These boys were handcuffed to the pipes and were kept thus manacled day and night.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² 'Life History of Eddie H.'.

¹⁴³ Thomas, and Thomas, *The Child in America*, 120-121; Illinois State Home for Boys at St. Charles, Biennial Reports (1906/08).

¹⁴⁴ Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance*.

¹⁴⁵ Warner, Florence M., *Juvenile Detention in the United States: Report of a Field Survey of the National Probation Association* (Chicago, 1933)

¹⁴⁶ Myers, 'Juvenile Delinquents'; Charlie B remembered being handcuffed to a bed for two weeks after escaping from St. Charles School. He told how he had to go to the toilet on the floor as he wasn't able to drag the bed to the bathroom. 'Life History of Charlie B.'.

Institutional officials thus beat and marked the bodies of runaway children. While cutting hair made escapees easier to identify on the streets, it also served as a lesson for other inmates. The boys' fellow inmates could read their specific crime in the cut of their hair and see the consequences of escape in the bruises and stripes on their bodies.¹⁴⁷ One official purposely made the boys in his cottage at St. Charles look at the beaten bodies of children who had run away, promising them the same if they ever tried it.¹⁴⁸ The punishment for running away was a lesson for all the inmates in which they could explicitly see the power of the reformatory officials.

For non-delinquent children, escape from institutional homes also had consequences and could lead to the escalating criminalization. Charlie B., a life history interviewee, remembered appearing before the juvenile court as a dependent child in the early 1920s. His mother could no longer afford to support him or his brother. Charlie remembered missing his mother and his home in Chicago and determined, aged eleven, to escape the orphanage.¹⁴⁹ His many escapes were documented in the official report from the orphanage: "The boy is unbearable. He ran away from the institution three times in one week".¹⁵⁰ The orphanage returned Charlie to the juvenile court, this time as a delinquent. Instead of the orphanage, the court sent Charlie to the Juvenile Detention Home, where they hoped the high stone wall and barred windows would put an end to his escapes.

So many escapes required skills and children had an arsenal, carefully honed after years of playing on the streets and railroad yards. Jumping on freight trains, a common game among working-class and immigrant boys in Chicago, became a tool which boys –

¹⁴⁷ For hair cutting as a punishment for escape see also 'Life History of Eddie H.'; 'Life History of Cuno C.'.

¹⁴⁸ 'Life History of Charlie B.'.

¹⁴⁹ 'Life History of Charlie B.' This incident happened prior to 1924 while Charlie was around eleven years old.

¹⁵⁰ Files from 'Life History of Charlie B.'

and girls like Helen who had dressed as a boy – could employ to quickly and easily return to their neighborhoods.¹⁵¹ Once in the city, children used their knowledge of the streets to evade the authorities. As Albert J. told his interviewer about his neighborhood: “it was hard to get caught on that corner because there was so many ways to get away close by.”¹⁵² As young delinquents, running from the police, many children had thus learnt how to use the urban environment to avoid capture.

Children managed to use the rural environment to escape juvenile justice authorities by running through fields under the cover of crops, yet their techniques of escape were much more suited to city spaces.¹⁵³ Charlie B., by then a seasoned escapee, ran away from St Charles School for Boys in the mid-1920s by jumping out of a window which “had no bars, only a heavy screen”.¹⁵⁴ With two other boys, he ran for the highway where they tried to steal a car, but were spotted. Charlie lamented the small town environment of St Charles: “If it was more populated and built like a city in that district, I could have gotten away, but the houses were few and far between.”¹⁵⁵

In planning juvenile institutional homes like the JDH reformers had set out to create in architecture “a monument typifying the community’s ideal for the care of childhood.”¹⁵⁶ As early as 1880 penal reformers like G. E. Howe, argued prison discipline was an “outrage [to] the nature of child life” and, particularly, that the prison’s “bolted door, barred window, walled yard, shadowy cell, [and] brute force” were antagonistic to children’s

¹⁵¹ For example, ‘Life History of Charlie B.’; ‘Life History of Matthew B.’; ‘Life History of Eddie S.’.

¹⁵² ‘Life History of Albert J.’ LHC b.52 fol.75 (13-2). Albert hung out at the corner between 1922 and 1926 while he was still of juvenile court age.

¹⁵³ Over half of St Charles inmates were from Chicago. See ‘The St. Charles Study’, *Bulletins of the Department of Public Welfare*, vol 2, no. 1, Chicago History Museum. For escapees who hid in fields etc. see, for example, ‘Life History of Glenn O.’; ‘Life History of Albert J.’.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Life History of Charlie B.’.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* This incident happened in the mid-1920s while Charlie was sixteen-years-old.

¹⁵⁶ Chief Probation Officer of the Cook County Juvenile Court, *Annual Report of the Cook County Juvenile Court and Detention Home*, (1919), 7.

reform. When Howe was criticized for suggesting the open plan, because it meant boys could escape, Howe noted “a wise liberty becomes its own defender”. If the boys enjoyed and found love in homes they wouldn’t escape. Howe continued “But suppose that if even five or ten per cent of the worst boys should irretrievably run away, should the remaining percentage never be trusted to the beneficence of freedom?”¹⁵⁷ Yet, with escape an ever-present problem, homes for delinquent children, particularly city-based homes like the JDH, increasingly resembled adult prisons. The bars on the windows and the walls surrounding the JDH were designed specifically to prevent children escaping. In the case of reform schools like St. Charles School for Boys, reformers had removed the institutional home from the city to create a romantic, rural idyll: the ideal space of childhood. One wonders, however, whether removing the home from the city served a practical as well as an ideological purpose, since a rural location made escape more difficult.

The barred windows, the beatings, and the high fences that continued to characterize juvenile reform institutions long after the Progressive Era were not an inevitable, planned part of the juvenile justice system. Instead they were pragmatic responses to the problem of controlling children and keeping them in institutional spaces.¹⁵⁸ It was directly a result of the confrontation with real children that the new juvenile institutions of the early twentieth-century differed so wildly in practice from their conception in theory. As Earl Myers concluded after his investigation into conditions at the Cook County School for Boys: “[the school] is not the sort of institution which the people who planned it intended it should be.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Howe, G. E., ‘The Family System’, in *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections*, (Cleveland, 1880), 209-26.

¹⁵⁸ By pragmatic, I certainly do not mean commendable or effective.

¹⁵⁹ Myers, *Juvenile Delinquents*.

Conclusion

When child-savers imagined the institutions they created to get children off the streets of Chicago, they believed that the new spaces would transform children into upright citizens. But child-saving institutions didn't stop children's use of the streets much less solve the problem of juvenile delinquency. Children's street habit continued well after the establishment of Progressive Era institutions and regulations; new recreational opportunities supplemented rather than replaced street play, while new regulations and juvenile justice affected only a fraction of street-frequenting youths. Furthermore, the very behaviors of swarming children child-savers had found so disturbing on the streets – children's mobility, violence, and destructive capabilities – continued in new spaces and even shaped them.

At the center of the problem was the whole premise of the institutions. Progressives who believed children were formed by the environment failed to see children as people whose actions and choices would determine the success of new institutions. When faced with this reality, institutional leaders either failed, were forced to compromise, or had to turn to increasingly coercive methods and even to the state to get children to act in the way they wanted. The consequences of children's actions marked the spaces of Chicago. Despite the best intentions of the juvenile justice reformers, their system came, very early on to resemble adult prisons rather than the idyllic, rural, and familial institutions they had tried to create. As early as 1909, playground reformers were lamenting that the necessity for fencing made city playgrounds a poor substitute for what rural boys enjoyed.¹⁶⁰

Children's behaviors also encoded new spaces with gendered and racialized meanings. When boys shouted obscenities at any girls walking passed, when white children assaulted African-American users of park spaces, when children engaged in

¹⁶⁰ Seupelt, 'The Playground', 6-8.

sexual activity in playground bushes and toilets, they changed the intended purposes of the new institutional spaces. Also violence that began with children in recreational spaces could spill out of institutional boundaries and consume the whole city.

For some who encountered new juvenile institutions, their stories ended sadly. Children faced serious abuse in institutional settings which for many had long-term consequences. Others left institutional homes clamoring for revenge on the adults who had sent them there. When the juvenile court sent T. and his friends to St. Charles for beating up a policeman in a playground, they left vowing to punish the officer. Soon after, the policeman was found dead with his head crushed by a heavy club and his body covered in bruises. In the course of the resulting investigation, the boys confessed they had murdered him.¹⁶¹ The conflict that had begun over the appropriation of playground space had come to a brutal, violent, and emphatic conclusion: the children imprisoned, the adult dead.

¹⁶¹ Case, cited in Thrasher, *The Gang*, 358

Chapter 4:

Boundaries

Children and Segregation in Chicago in the 1910s and 1920s

One day in the late summer of 1919, placards started appearing on the streets of a South Side neighborhood known as the Back of the Yards. The signs read: “The Murderers, 10,000 Strong, 48th and Ada”, something of an exaggeration. The group of predominantly Polish elementary-school-age boys who called themselves “the Murderers” only had around thirty members but they did spend their time hanging around on street corners around 48th and Ada, engaging in various delinquent activities.¹

The Murderers were, in many ways, a typical Chicago gang in the early twentieth century.² They were a group of boys in their early to mid-teens, the sons of European immigrants. They had brief encounters with juvenile institutions. They rarely went to school and, while they occasionally were sent to the juvenile court and the Chicago Parental School, the city’s reform school for truants, their stays seldom lasted long and even became a source of status within the gang.³ Despite the institutional developments and new regulations of the Progressive Era, children, like the boys who belonged to the Murderers, still had a substantial street culture at the start of the 1920s. The series of child-saving reforms may have undermined the swarm, but it had survived, crossing institutional

¹ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 62. Thrasher referred to the boys as “habitual truants”. A truant was defined as a child under 15 who was not in school (there were some exceptions to this, and children under 16 were required either to be in work or in school). Abbott, and Breckinridge, *Truancy and Non-Attendance*.

² One might assume gangs were typically older than the Murderers. Andrew Diamond, for example, has argued that the most influential gangs in this period consisted of boys from 16 to 25. I contend here that younger children played a very important role in youth gang culture. For more on age, growing up, and street gangs see Chapter 5. Diamond, *Mean Streets*.

³ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 62.

boundaries almost as easily as it had crossed urban borders in the 1890s. After all, as the Judge Manley Hudson put it in 1923, how could these “little barbarians” be expected to understand let alone follow the “civilized concept” of adult geography.⁴

Yet, if children did not necessarily adhere to the official geography of the city, they certainly understood the concept of urban boundaries. In fact, children drew their own borderlines in the city, and forced Chicagoans, young and old, to recognize these boundaries. Street gangs, in particular, created territories, drawing edges around their patches. The placards the Murderers posted in 1919, for example, laid a claim to their territory of 48th and Ada, the area where the boys spent their time hanging around, smoking, and shooting craps. According to the Chicago School criminologist who researched them, Frederic Thrasher, The Murderers’ main rivals were “the Aberdeens”, a gang of white youths whose name and identity derived from their common home of South Aberdeen Street.⁵ The Murderers restricted the incursions of the Aberdeens and defended their prize possession: a sandpile on the railway tracks where the Murderers played and gathered coal.⁶ Through their street presence, gangs like the Murderers thus created and defended urban boundaries.

The most notable and long-lasting boundary youth street gangs maintained in this period was not between the different territories of white gangs or between various white ethnic communities. Throughout the early twentieth century, Wentworth Avenue – known locally as the gang line, dead line, or color line – marked the western edge of Chicago’s largest African-American neighborhood, The Black Belt.⁷ Gangs of white teenagers

⁴ Hudson, ‘The Turntable Cases’, 826-857.

⁵ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 63.

⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁷ This chapter builds on the work of ghetto formation and black community scholars. Like Allan Spear and others, I consider that Chicagoans had created an almost all-black enclave on the South Side of Chicago by the 1920s. However, by focusing on the color line boundary, I am examining the formation of exclusively-white neighborhoods as much, if not more, than considering the

enforced this racialized boundary with violence. The Murderers, whose very name was a boastful claim that they had “killed negroes” during the Chicago Race Riot of 1919, routinely attacked African-Americans who crossed Wentworth Avenue to get to work at the stockyards. “They used to ‘get’ the ‘niggers’,” wrote Thrasher, “as they came from the stock yards at Forty-seventh and Racine. ‘We would hit them and knock them out of cars.’”⁸

The Wentworth Avenue color line governed how African-Americans moved around the city, circumscribed mobility, and reinforced lasting patterns of segregation and inequality within the city. That this swarm-enforced urban boundary existed does not diminish recent scholarly arguments emphasizing the role of various levels of government and regulation in creating segregation.⁹ Nor does working-class and immigrant children’s violence lessen the violence of middle-class housing associations which, in Chicago as elsewhere, used bombs to maintain white neighborhood boundaries. Indeed, the state’s tolerance of white gang violence further confirms the government’s role in segregating

creation of black ‘ghettos’. Furthermore, looking at boundary crossing behaviors as well as boundary formation reveals the permeability or lack of permeability of neighborhood edges. See for example, Osofsky, Gilbert, *Harlem, The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York, 1966); Spear, Allan H., *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago, 1967); Katzman, David M., *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, 1975); Gerber, David A., *Black Ohio and the Color Line, 1860-1915*, (Urbana, 1976); Kusmer, Kenneth L, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana, 1976); Reed, Christopher Robert, *The Rise of Chicago’s Black Metropolis*; Hirsch, Arnold R., *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Urbana, 1983); Thomas, Richard W., *Life For Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington, 1992); Giffin, William W., *African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio, 1915-1930* (Columbus, 2005).

⁸ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 62

⁹ See for example Connolly, N.D.B., *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago, 2014); Rothstein, Richard, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated American* (New York, 2017). The Wentworth Avenue boundary of the Black Belt has been overlooked and under-analyzed by scholars like Richard Rothstein who have tended to focus instead on the segregationist attempts of the neighborhoods to the east and south of the Black Belt.

cities like Chicago, while the state's maintenance of poorer facilities within the Black Belt ensured that segregation really did mean separate and unequal.¹⁰

On the other hand, bringing children's racist violence to the fore does more than add another layer to a complex understanding of segregation. Scholars like Leonard Rubonowitz and Imani Perry have already acknowledged that "youth, especially teenagers, also participated in the racial resistance".¹¹ I argue in this chapter that swarming children were crucial to maintaining segregation in Chicago in the early twentieth century, while adults *also* participated in racial resistance.¹² Recent books by historians such as Victoria Wolcott and Colin Fisher have demonstrated the importance of public space, particularly spaces of urban recreation, to racial violence and segregation (as well as efforts at integration).¹³ Swarms of children dominated these spaces, and typical motivators such as competition for housing and labor apply to them less easily. Children fought for control of urban spaces, the right to play in certain parks and the right to walk down certain streets. Their street culture gave Chicago's racial violence its everyday anxiety in the early twentieth century.

¹⁰ Leonard Rubonowitz and Imani Perry, building on work by Stephen Grant Meyer, argued that through much of the twentieth century, segregation was enforced by extensive criminal activity and the failure, by and large, of the criminal justice system to arrest, prosecute, convict and punish the perpetrators of these race based crimes. Rubonowitz, Leonard S., and Perry, Imani, 'Crimes Without Punishment: White Neighbors' Resistance to Black Entry', *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 92:1/2 (Autumn, 2001-Winter 2002), 335-428; Meyer, Stephen Grant, *As Long As They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighbourhoods* (Oxford, 2000).

¹¹ Rubonowitz, and Perry, 'Crimes Without Punishment:', 364.

¹² This chapter builds on the excellent book by Andrew Diamond on youth culture and race in Chicago from the 1908 to 1969. I take issue with Diamond's contention that children younger than simply copied 16-25-year-olds when they participated in racial conflict. Diamond also stressed the importance of Irish Athletic Clubs in early twentieth century racial violence (following general consensus on youth gang involvement since the 1910s and certainly after the Chicago Race Riot.) I argue here, that children unaffiliated with athletic clubs had a much more active street presence and (although less organized) an equal intent in keeping African-Americans from their territories. Diamond, *Mean Streets*.

¹³ Wolcott, Victoria W., *Race Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia, 2012); Fisher, *Urban Green*.

Starting prior to the Great Migration, this chapter considers children's role in maintaining Chicago's racial segregation up until 1930. This period straddles the Chicago Race Riot of 1919, one of the most deadly racial clashes in the history of the United States and the height of the destructive power swarm.¹⁴ But the 1919 Race Riot must be understood in the context of the everyday racial violence before and after the riot that maintained the racial geography of Chicago's South Side, shown in figure 20.

¹⁴ Recently, particularly since the publication of Charles Lumpkins's book in 2008, *American Pogrom*, historians have debated the correct terminology for the episodes of anti-black collective violence that occurred across the country in the early twentieth century. Lumpkins's use of 'pogrom' to describe the East St. Louis Riot of 1917 is intended to highlight the ethnic-cleansing nature of the anti-black violence as well as official, state involvement. Following David Krugler, I have decided to stick with the term 'race riot' to describe what happened in Chicago in late July 1919. Krugler "opted to use *pogrom* sparingly, using the word to describe just two of the riots treated in [the book]: Longview, Texas, and Phillips County, Arkansas. Here the scope of civil authorities' support for white mob attacks was so great, and the intent to massacre blacks so obvious, that usage of *pogrom* appears appropriate." Krugler, David F., 1919, *The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back* (New York, 2015), 11. I would add that the term 'pogrom' describes an imbalance of power not found in race riots. In Chicago in 1919 at least, black Chicagoans were able to arm themselves and engage in self-defense, and, at times, retaliatory violence against white rioters. See also, Heitmeyer, Wilhelm, and Hagan, John, *International Handbook of Violence Research* (Boston, 2003). Lumpkins, Charles, *American Pogrom: The East St Louis Race Riot and Black Politics* (Athens, Ohio, 2008).

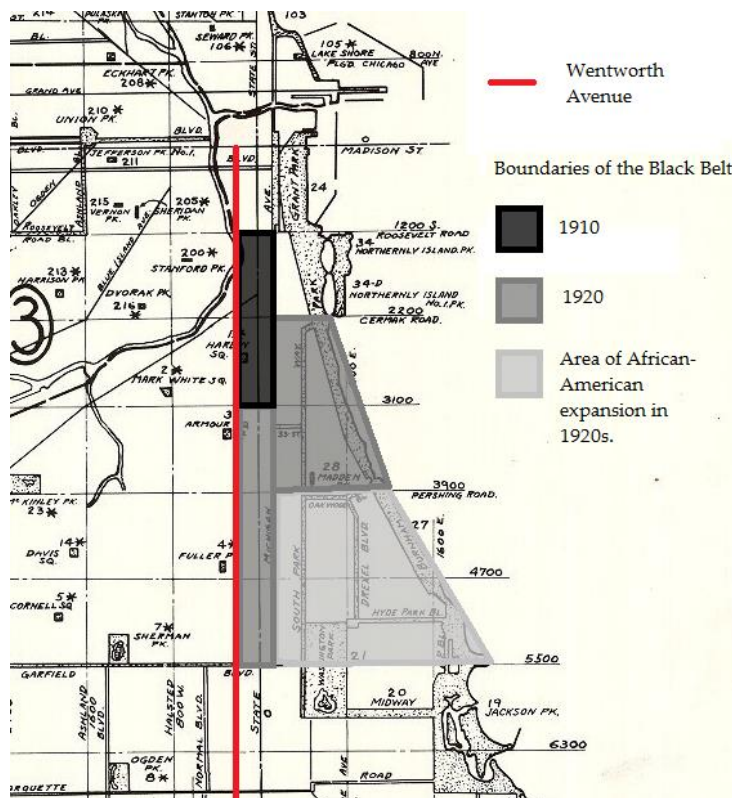


Figure 20: The Black Belt, 1910-1920.

Race and Place on the South Side

The city of Chicago annexed the townships of Lake and Hyde Park in 1889, creating much of the South Side of Chicago. The somewhat eclectic mixture of neighborhoods lying to the South of the Loop housed some of the poorest and also some of the most affluent inhabitants of the city. Big industries too had their home on the South Side. The huge stockyards to the south-west of the Loop and, increasingly, the steel works in South Chicago, dominated the economy of this area. Those in search of work crammed into the poor neighborhoods, particularly those close to the stockyards such as Canaryville, Bridgeport, and the aptly named, Back of the Yards.

Typically considered Irish, those neighborhoods which made up Packingtown, like other working-class neighborhoods in the city, were actually fairly ethnically diverse. Most immigrant neighborhoods were, what sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess termed 'zones in transition': neighborhoods whose make-up changed as some members of older

immigrant groups moved out in search of better housing and newer immigrant communities moved in.¹⁵ This process of ethnic succession was never total. Historian Thomas Philpott has demonstrated that even neighborhoods which were supposedly ethnic enclaves were actually “ethnic hodgepodes”.¹⁶ After all, only the most socially mobile of an ethnic group could afford to move out of the slum neighborhoods to more suburban areas. Most areas where immigrants lived resembled the 19th Ward, depicted in figure 21 where the different colors in the map represented different ethnicities. On the South Side in the early twentieth century, Packingtown was a neighborhood in transition: the older Irish and German communities gradually made room for Poles, Lithuanians, Bohemians, and others.¹⁷

¹⁵ Park and Burgess, *The City*.

¹⁶ Thomas L. Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (1991), 143. The only true ghetto in Chicago, Philpott argued was the black ghetto, an idea discussed in more detail below.

¹⁷ Washington, Sylvia Hood, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954* (Oxford, 2005).

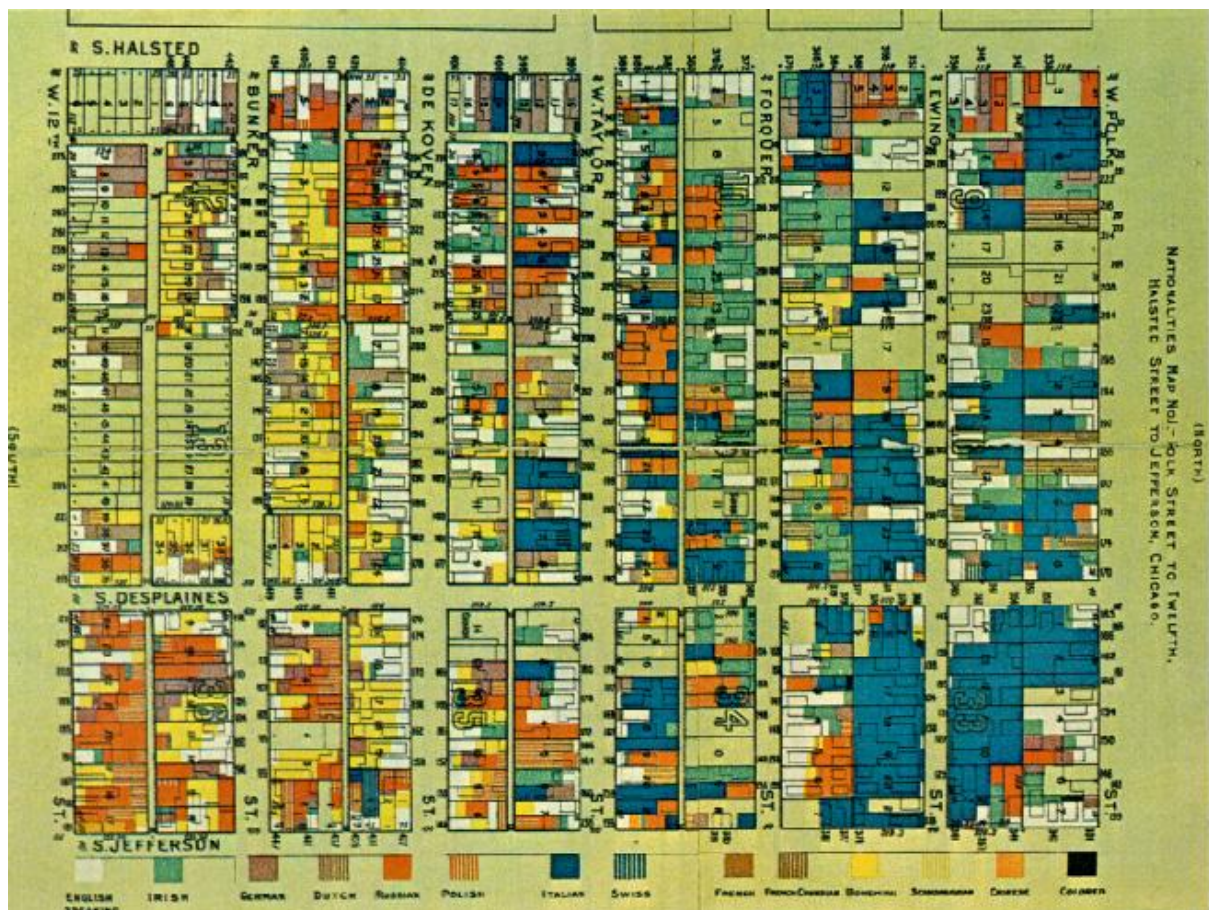


Figure 21: 'Map of Nationalities in the 19th Ward', *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895).

To the east of Packingtown, along the lakeshore, very different communities lived at the turn of the twentieth century. Drawn by the lake and the attractive legacy of the White City, wealthy Chicagoans moving outward from the city center had long chosen to settle along Prairie Avenue and in the affluent neighborhoods of Kenwood and Hyde Park. By the early 1900s, Hyde Park had become something of a resort to wealthy Chicagoans, with hotels springing up along the lake shore and offering easy access to the South Side's many beaches.

In a thin strip of land sandwiched between the wealthy South Siders to the south and east, and Packingtown to the west, was Chicago's main African-American neighborhood at the turn of the century: the Black Belt. African-American people had lived in Chicago since the city began; the first permanent settler in Chicago was a black trader, Jean Baptist Pointe de Saible. Fugitive slaves started building a community in Chicago from

the 1840s, and by 1860 almost a thousand African-Americans lived in the city. After the Civil War the population swelled considerably, reaching 15,000 in the early 1890s.¹⁸ Although black Chicagoans lived throughout the city, the vast majority lived in these few wards on the South Side.

While most black Chicagoans lived in the Black Belt prior to the Great Migration, not all Black Belt inhabitants were black in this period. In 1910, none of Chicago's black residents lived in a census tract more than 75% black, and only a third lived in a census tract more than 50% black. By 1920, the situation had changed. Wartime job opportunities pulled black and white migrants from other parts of the United States to Chicago, while the dream of escaping racial injustices of the South and securing education for children made Chicago particularly appealing to black southerners. The population swelled and the Great Migration was well underway. Black Chicagoans increased from 75,000 in 1916 to nearly 110,000 four years later.¹⁹

The Great Migration was largely an adult or at least adolescent phenomenon, the black population of Chicago was, on the whole, older than the white population. While census data put the proportion of white Chicagoans under fifteen in 1920 at 28.5 percent, the proportion of black Chicagoans under fifteen years of age was just seventeen percent.²⁰ Contrastingly, in rural areas in the United States black children under fifteen-years-old made up over forty percent of the African-American population.²¹ Children did migrate, but not in the same numbers as adults.

¹⁸ Spear, *Black Chicago*, 5.

¹⁹ Blair, Cynthia, *I've Got To Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago, 2010), 228.

²⁰ Graham, Irene Jeannette, 'Negroes in Chicago, 1920: An Analysis of United States Census Data', unpublished master's thesis, University of Chicago, (1927).

²¹ Ibid.

Some African-American arrivals moved into small but growing black communities on the West and North sides of the city, but the majority of black Chicagoans continued to live in the strip of housing on the South Side known as the Black Belt.²² The African-American population of the South Side tripled between 1910 and 1920, reaching over 90,000, close to ninety percent of all the city's black inhabitants.²³ Unlike the white immigrant neighborhoods where the ethnic makeup shifted continually, following Park and Burgess's pattern, the Black Belt was an anomaly, becoming more homogenously African-American in the period.²⁴ Housing within the Black Belt, never particularly plentiful, became ever more difficult to find. The Chicago Urban League, which provided help to new migrants, struggled to house newcomers.²⁵ Rent skyrocketed even as conditions deteriorated. African-Americans routinely paid fifteen to twenty-five percent more for housing than whites in comparable situations.²⁶

While population density increased in the Black Belt as demand for housing rose and rents soared, many African-Americans of all classes sought better housing outside the traditional black neighborhood. The Black Belt, after all, had the worst housing conditions in the city.²⁷ An investigation by the University of Chicago in 1913 showed that only a quarter of houses in the Black Belt in this period were classed as "in good repair".²⁸ Typical housing problems in the neighborhood included leaking plumbing, standing water, broken windows, broken toilets, no running water, and even leaking sewage.²⁹ Additionally,

²² E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (Chicago, 1932), 88.

²³ Tuttle, William M., Jr., 'Contested Neighborhoods and Racial Violence: Prelude to the Chicago Riot of 1919', *Journal of Negro History* 55:4 (Oct., 1970), 266-288.

²⁴ Cressey, Paul Frederick, 'The Succession of Cultural Groups in the City of Chicago', unpublished doctoral thesis, (1930).

²⁵ Tuttle, 'Contested Neighborhoods', 266-288.

²⁶ Taylor, Graham, 'Chicago in the Nation's Race Strife', *The Survey* 42 (August 9, 1919), 696.

²⁷ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*.

²⁸ Louise DeKoven Bowen, *The Colored People Of Chicago, An Investigation Made For the Juvenile Protective Association* (Chicago, 1913)

²⁹ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 153.

despite paying extortionate rates, black tenants had difficulty getting landlords to make any repairs. Yet, because of the shortage of housing within the Black Belt, even the worst, least desirable houses were in high demand.³⁰ To make matters worse, after the city closed the segregated vice district in 1912, the various businesses of vice found new homes in the Black Belt.³¹ Middle-class black Chicagoans tried to differentiate themselves from the seemingly uncouth and uneducated new arrivals, as well as the slum conditions of the Black Belt. Seeking respectability, middle-class African-Americans looked for housing away from the traditional center of black life on the South Side.

Demand for decent housing put pressure on the boundaries of the Black Belt. Middle-class families attempted to move into better neighborhoods, but working-class blacks also moved constantly in search of improved housing.³² Yet the need for housing was just one of several factors that forced black Chicagoans, young and old, to push the boundaries of the Black Belt. Opportunities for recreation, education, and work drew city-dwellers across the color line and created moments of interracial contact and conflict.

African-American children ostensibly had greater contact with white children than black and white adults did in this period, as schools in Chicago had been desegregated since 1874.³³ Black children in Chicago attended racially mixed schools in the pre-Great Migration era.³⁴ Not all white children were content to share schools, however. The transfer system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century allowed white children to transfer away from less desirable schools, while the school board never granted black children's

³⁰ Ibid., chpt. 5.

³¹ In the late nineteenth and even early twentieth century, Americans called red-light districts "segregated" districts and referred to the creation of them as "segregation." Keire, *For Business and Pleasure* see esp. chpt. 3.

³² CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, chpt 5.

³³ Spear, *Black Chicago*, 6

³⁴ CCRR, *Negro in Chicago*.

transfer requests.³⁵ By the early 1900s, the transfer system was failing, since too many white students were trying to transfer out of the worst, often mixed-race, schools. In 1905, the board halted the transfer system even for white children but, in the face of white student boycotts and mass truancy, reinstated it shortly thereafter.³⁶

When the city attempted to redistrict elementary schools in the 1900s, white students who the city moved to racially mixed schools went on strike, and even rioted. The Copernicus School, for example, located in a middle-class neighborhood on the Southwest Side was about a third black in the 1900s. When the School Board transferred a group of white students there in 1907 from an overcrowded but all-white school nearby, the new Copernicus students began a fight involving 250 students who used stones, clubs and hatpins as weapons. A police wagon was needed to dispel the violence. After the riot, parents of the white students asked the Board to return the children to their former school, but despite this request, violence continued and “[gave] way every few days to an open fight” even a year and a half later.³⁷ White children were willing to fight for the right to attend all white schools.

Conflict occurred even in well-established diverse schools. Joe N. grew up on the Near South Side (in what was to become the Black Belt) in the 1890s and 1900s. When he was a little boy, he remembered few black people in his neighborhood but, he told his interviewer, gradually more and more moved in and the white people left.³⁸ According to Joe, there used to be problems between the white and the black children when the schools finished each day. These “brick wars” got so bad that the schools staggered the release of the children; the white children were released from school first and once they had all

³⁵ Homel, Michael Wallace, ‘Negroes in the Chicago Public Schools, 1910-1941’, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Chicago, (1972).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.; Spear, *Black Chicago*.

³⁸ ‘Life History of Joe N.’.

dispersed, the black children would be let go. This was a temporal segregation in response to racial violence between the neighborhood children.³⁹ In 1909, the principal of the Colman School also advocated time-based segregation when the first black students (a brother and sister) at the school complained of being beaten by their white schoolmates. “Arrive late and leave early” came the advice from the school, which made no attempt to punish or prevent racial violence. The father of the children protested: “It isn’t right that they should have to sneak into school and sneak home again. They have as much right on the street as any other children.”⁴⁰ This right to the street and to recreation spaces motivated African-Americans like this father to protest northern segregation and violence throughout this period.

Interracial contact between children did not always lead to interracial conflict as it had in the Colman School example. The CCRR, found examples of schoolyards and playgrounds where black and white children would play quite harmoniously. In fact, in twelve of the thirteen playgrounds at mixed-race schools, the CCRR reported that pupils of both races mingled.⁴¹ The director of the Carter School playground, situated in the Black Belt, for example told the CCRR that he had no trouble between the black children, who made up about a quarter of the frequenters, and white children on the playground.

Cohabitation did not necessarily mean integrated play. According to the CCRR, “voluntary racial grouping” was common. At the Copernicus Playground on the South Side, for example, the playground was divided into two halves: a larger end intended for boys’ use and a smaller end intended for girls. Instead, the children divided racially, with the black and white children alternately occupying either end. As the CCRR reported “No instance of mixed play was observed, but there seemed to be no antagonism between the

³⁹ See also Homel, ‘Negroes in the Chicago Public Schools’, 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁴¹ CCRR *The Negro in Chicago*, 138, 283; Homel, ‘Negroes in the Chicago Public Schools’.

groups, and no disorders were reported.”⁴² Recognizing this shared use of public space as separate or parallel play, not integrated play, complicates race relations between young children often depicted as innocently color-blind.⁴³

Parallel play, while usually harmonious, could result in interracial conflict particularly when children had to share resources. At the Carter playground, black and white children played alongside each other. Yet, when a fight began between a black boy and a white boy, the rest of the children divided themselves along racial lines – the African-Americans supporting the black boy and the whites supporting the white boy – especially, according to the CCRR “after the fight was transferred to the street.” The police arrived, responding to a riot call, and put an end to the fight and both black and white children continued to use the playground. Children thus may have shared public spaces, but they were aware of, and at times reinforced the color line.⁴⁴

A Matter of Black and White

Ethnicity complicated the black and white dichotomy of the color line. Indeed, in the early twentieth century, Americans used the word “race” to describe nationality or regional identity, as in the Sicilian race or the Irish race.⁴⁵ Like color-race, ethnicity affected

⁴² CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 285.

⁴³ See for example, Eugene O'Neill's controversial play on miscegenation from 1924 which opens with black and white children playing innocently together. O'Neill, Eugene, *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (New York, 1924)

⁴⁴ CCRR *The Negro in Chicago*.

⁴⁵ Thomas Guglielmo used the two terms to describe how early twentieth century Americans conceptualized race: ‘color’ (as in the black race, or white race) and race (as in a variety of different identities, from nationality to larger groupings such as Nordics or Mediterraneans). In keeping with the majority of the historiography on ethnicity and whiteness, I have decided to use the more common, yet somewhat anachronistic labels of race (where Guglielmo would use color) and ethnicity (where Guglielmo would use race). In general, this chapter demonstrates an experience of whiteness among immigrant youth in Chicago in line with Guglielmo's thesis: i.e. European immigrant youth by the 1920s understood themselves as belonging to a white race as well as their ethnic race. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*. See also Frye Jacobson, Matthew, *Whiteness of A Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

young Chicagoans. Gangs of different ethnic groups fought, created, and policed boundaries between their territories. But as criminologist Frederic Thrasher first argued in 1927, space could be more important than race to Chicago's gang formation in the 1920s.⁴⁶ Most gangs in Chicago, Thrasher argued, were based around a shared territory not a shared ethnic identity. This thesis has more recently come under criticism from John Hagedorn, who argued that race, white supremacy, and racial segregation were actually crucial to gang formation.⁴⁷ When it came to color-race, Hagedorn was right; shared territory seldom led to mixed-race gangs. Moreover, gang activity even prevented these shared territories occurring, as white gangs helped create the segregated racial geography of Chicago. In contrast to color-race, however, ethnicity-race usually played a secondary role to territory in the formation of white gangs, especially as second-generation immigrant children Americanized and came to understand ethnicity-race as secondary to color-race.⁴⁸ But even for the white groups territory and ethnic identity sometimes coincided, and some children, particularly Jewish boys, found themselves in a peripheral position in immigrant children's understanding of whiteness in the early twentieth century.

The Irish had traditionally dominated the South Side neighborhoods in Packingtown, with large numbers arriving in the 1840s and 50s. The new Irish incomers faced discrimination in Chicago as they did across the country in the antebellum period, yet by the late nineteenth century, and with the arrival of new waves of immigrants, the Irish were integrated into the white urban machine.⁴⁹ As other Europeans, including many

⁴⁶ Thrasher, *The Gang*.

⁴⁷ John M. Hagedorn, 'Race Not Space: A Revisionist History of Gangs in Chicago', *Journal of African-American History*, 91:2 (Spring, 2006), 194-208.

⁴⁸ Although ethnic-race did still have salience and many 'new' migrants in this period, i.e. from Southern and Eastern Europe, did face discrimination because of their ethnic-race. Indeed, immigration restrictions on these groups in the 1920s were partly as a result of their supposed racial inferiority. Gerstle, *American Crucible*.

⁴⁹ For more on the Irish and whiteness see Roediger, David R., *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991)

Catholic Poles and Lithuanians, moved into the South Side from the 1890s, the older Irish communities complained but largely accepted the newcomers.⁵⁰

On the North Side, in the early 1900s, the Catholic Irish children joined forces with the Protestant Swedes to fight the Sicilians, referred to as “the dark people”, who were moving into the neighborhood in the early 1900s.⁵¹ Many young Sicilians faced difficulties when their families moved into new neighborhoods populated by older immigrant groups. Anthony Sorrentino, who grew up on the Near West Side remembered taunts like “Dago, Dago, eats nothing but potatoes” as late as the 1920s and recalled Jewish parents forbidding their children from playing with the Italians.⁵²

Often fights between ethnic groups took place around the playgrounds. One Swedish pastor, recorded in sociologist Harvey Zorbaugh’s *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, reported:

The Sicilian girls, timid and shy, come to Seward Park. They run to an empty swing. Two Swedish girls jump in, pushing them away. “Get out! Dagoes! Dagoes! You can’t play here!” It is the same at the sandpiles and the “shoots.” It is the same on the beaches... The boys fight over the playground, too, but mostly outside. These fights are only partly for Seward Park; they are chiefly nationality gang-fights. The Swedish and Irish always win against the Sicilians. Even an onslaught led by a Sicilian boy on a horse ended in a rout for the Sicilians.⁵³

The pastor didn’t believe the boys’ fighting was over the playground, instead calling it “nationality gang-fighting”. Yet taking place in public spaces around the playground, this fighting concerned territory, the right to use certain streets, and undoubtedly intimidated would-be park users. Children and young people of all ages prized playgrounds and other recreation spaces, and youth gangs frequently fought to control them.

⁵⁰ Jablonsky, *Pride in the Jungle*.

⁵¹ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians*; Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, 160

⁵² On the other side of the divide, Peter S was a Jewish boy who did hang around with Italians even against the wishes of his father., ‘Life History of Peter S.’.

⁵³ Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, 160.

Many gangs defined themselves as Sicilian or Irish or Jewish and excluded would-be members who were not the correct nationality. One Polish mother told an interviewer that her sons were terrified to walk down the street because the neighborhood gang of Italian boys would beat them up.⁵⁴ Polish and Jewish boys who lived near Douglas Park also divided along ethnic lines and the Jewish gang adopted the motto “Wallop the Pollock”.⁵⁵ For Frank De Liberto, whose family moved to North Campbell Avenue on the Near West Side in the 1920s, his Italian ethnicity caused problems when he wanted to join the gang on a solidly Irish block. He recalled: “I had to fight every damned one of them to get into that damned club ... I taught them all – they didn’t want me around because I was a Dago. Understand? They were all Irish.”⁵⁶ Frank then told his oral history interviewer: “Well, I finally joined the club. I joined the club. Then everything was fine and we got along beautiful.”⁵⁷ Frank had proved his worth to his neighborhood gang through fighting and was accepted by the Irish group. Ultimately, it was Frank’s home within the neighborhood that made him eligible for membership in the gang.⁵⁸

Territorial-based gangs were the norm in Chicago in the early twentieth century. Which street the boys called home more often than not overrode ethnicity in granting access to gang membership. For example, the boys of a gang of fifteen twelve- to fifteen-year-olds who called themselves the Black Hand Society acknowledged some difference between the majority Jewish and few Italian members of the gang. The gang singled out the Italians with the nickname “Greasers”, a typical epithet for Italians, but accepted the Italians into the fold “because of their compatibility and their residence in the neighborhood.”⁵⁹ This

⁵⁴ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, loc.1140.

⁵⁵ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 196.

⁵⁶ IAC, b.15, fol.175.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ For a very similar story see Wickersham Commission, *Enforcement of the Prohibition Laws*, vol.ii, Chapter 1, Delinquent Behavior in Relation to the Social Situation.

⁵⁹ Indeed, the very name ‘Black Hand Society’, probably had its origin in popular images of Italian crime in the United States in this period when Black Hand was often used synonymously with

practice was common among the life history interviewees as well. Many recalled friends to whom they gave such names as “Dago”, “Wop”, “Swede”, and “Dinno”. These nicknames distinguished the boys’ different ethnicity while still allowing them to be members of the gang.⁶⁰

On the other hand, the neighborhood identity and the ethnic identity of the gang could sometimes coincide. One gang comprising German and Hungarian boys who lived in a German-Hungarian community to the north of Little Sicily would often find itself in battle with a solely Italian group (known as the Blackhawks) who lived just south of them.⁶¹ For these boys, ethnicity and neighborhood corresponded and, in single-ethnic blocks, boys reinforced the ethnic identity of the block through gang membership and aggressive play. But for gangs such as the aptly named Boundary Gang, composed of sixty Polish, Bohemian, and Greek boys between fourteen- and sixteen-years-old, it was their common home around Twelfth Street “in the vicinity of the railroad tracks” that unified them, not a common ethnicity.⁶²

Because gangs of children often dominated street spaces they could control who was and who wasn’t allowed on certain streets. Policing the edges of gang territory played a key role in the identity of all gangs, not just the Boundary Gang. Ernie O. told his life history interviewer that he and his friends were a “regular gang” with a “certain boundary”. They had Russell Square Park “surrounded”.⁶³ Crossing into another gang’s territory meant trouble, as Fred Hackney found out in 1917. A rival gang lived a few blocks north of him. One day, heading home from school, Fred had to deviate from his normal route because of

Mafia. Lupo, Salvatore, *The Two Mafias: A Transatlantic History, 1888-2008* (New York, 2015), loc.60.9.

⁶⁰ ‘The Life History of Philip M.’, LHC, b.49 fol.52; ‘The Life History of Joe N.’; ‘The Life History of Angelo M.’; Strangely, Angelo M. called his friend ‘The Dago’ even though he was Italian himself.

⁶¹ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 198.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 282.

⁶³ ‘Life History of Ernie O.’.

a fire. He was forced to go around, into the rival gang's territory where they found him and beat him.⁶⁴ The boundary lines that these gangs created thus controlled the movement of rival gang members. The swarming children that reformers saw actually had strictly demarcated lines which they guarded fiercely. Yet while white boys feared crossing these gang boundaries between white communities, gang lines normally did not limit the movement of white adults. Those above, or below, gang age could quite comfortably cross between various territories. Within gang age (around ten- to twenty-years-old), however, boys had little choice about which gang to join. Boys joined their street's gang or risked being beaten up every time they left the house.

Unsurprisingly, when Frederic Thrasher wrote *The Gang* in the mid-1920s, about half of the gangs he documented were "of mixed nationality".⁶⁵ One Polish boy summarized his gang's stance "Aw, we never ask what nationality dey are ... If dey are good guys, dey get in our gang. Dat's all we want."⁶⁶ Another boy "a Lithuanian gang leader of thirteen years" corroborated this: "I never ask what nationality he is ... A Jew or a nigger can be a pal of mine if he's a good fellow."⁶⁷ Seemingly, these two boys were happy to mix with a variety of races and ethnicities. On the other hand, the Lithuanian boy's comment suggests his views were unusual. Although he did not explicitly say it, the "even" is implied: *even* a Jew or a "nigger" could be his friend. A progressive stance maybe, but certainly one which

⁶⁴ Case History of Fred Hackney, EBP, b.35, fol.3.

⁶⁵ 351 out of 747. Thrasher, *The Gang*, 215.

⁶⁶ Polish gang boy extracted in Thrasher, *The Gang*, 215.

⁶⁷ Thrasher, *The Gang* p.215; According to Timothy Gilfoyle a good fellow in the nineteenth century was one who engaged in criminal activities while displaying courage and bravery. Good fellows didn't rely on strong-arming to get their way, they avoided violence, using wit and wile to make a living. A good fellow was a money getter and money spender who lavished money on others. Above all a good fellow was loyal. Gilfoyle, Timothy, *A Pickpocket's Tale: The Underworld of Nineteenth-Century New York*, (W. W. Norton and Company: New York, 2006); Mara Keire's research into the early twentieth century sporting world has shown 'good fellow' could also refer to prostitutes. Keire, Mara L., 'Swearing Allegiance: Street language, US War Propaganda, and the Declining Status of Women in Northeastern Nightlife, 1900-1920', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 25:2 (May, 2016), 246-266.

needed specific mention, as though the audience should be surprised. Notably, his statement stayed within the realm of possibility, no real examples sprung to mind, just the potential for future friendships. As this boy's comment suggests, of all the second-generation children in Chicago in the early twentieth century, Jews had a particularly ambiguous position within the racial order.⁶⁸

In some neighborhoods, Jews played with other children. Rosalie Augustine, an interviewee for the 'Italians in Chicago Oral History Project', did not recall any tension between the Italian and the Jewish children in the Melrose Park neighborhood in the 1920s, saying that she often went to her Jewish friends' houses.⁶⁹ Peter S., a young second-generation Jewish immigrant who lived on Chicago's West Side in the 1920s hung around with Italian boys of his neighborhood, even against the wishes of his father who only wanted him to socialize with other Jews.⁷⁰ Peter thus distanced himself from his father's ethnic-understanding of community and played with other white, but non-Jewish boys.

In other parts of the city, gangs excluded Jewish boys along with African-Americans. According to one member, in the Kluck Klan, as they called themselves, "no discrimination was made in taking in members except that negroes and Jews were barred."⁷¹ The very name Kluck Klan demonstrated the American-ness of the boys' understanding of race. This wasn't a European racism transplanted from the old country, but, rather, an American racism based self-consciously on one of the biggest social movements of the period: the Klu Klux Klan.⁷² This emulation wasn't an isolated case,

⁶⁸ The place of African-American children in this hierarchy was much more clear-cut. According to historian Eric L. Goldstein, Jews had an uncertain relationship to whiteness from the late nineteenth century until the end of World War II. Goldstein, Eric L., *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity* (Princeton, 2006).

⁶⁹ 'Transcript – Augustine Rosalie (AUG-101), 1980, IAC, Series 1 b.2 fol.19.

⁷⁰ Life History of Peter S.

⁷¹ Gang boy's own story extracted in Thrasher, *The Gang*, 286.

⁷² The Klan enrolled over 2 million members between 1920 and 1926, commanding as much support as organized labor. Jackson, Kenneth, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York,

either. Other gangs also adopted KKK symbolism: on the stretch of lakefront where the race riot of 1919 began, for example, a group of young boys, calling themselves the “McMullins” burnt a fiery cross in the 1920s.⁷³

Some groups of youths, like the South Side athletic club Ragen’s Colts, were not such admirers of the KKK.⁷⁴ This disdain was not due to any progressive views on race. Dynamite Brooks for example, who would become one of the Colt’s famous alumni, once denounced the Klan as a bunch of “nigger lovers”.⁷⁵ Rather, the Colts, who were predominantly Irish, found the KKK’s anti-Catholicism off-putting. When Klan members gathered at a South Side church in Chicago in 1923 to hear a sermon on “one hundred per cent Americanism”, they were attacked by several hundred “hoodlums”, a term usually used to describe young, immigrant gang members.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, even this incident shows that children of European immigrants in Chicago were fully versed in American racial systems, even if they didn’t always adopt or accept the Klan’s particular version of white supremacy.

Learning to value whiteness and racial identity over ethnic identity was part of the Americanization process. Americanization had been a key aim of the Progressive Era child-saving movement.⁷⁷ But children learnt how to be “American” from their peers as much as from government programs. Public spaces and public recreation were where children’s Americanization took place. For parents, leisure often took place within the ethnic community, in churches, and clubs. For children, ethnicity was much more situational. At

1967). Gunnar Myrdal argued that hatred of African-Americans is one of first steps in Americanization. Myrdal, Gunnar, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, (New York, 1944).

⁷³ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 138.

⁷⁴ For more on athletic clubs see the chapter 5.

⁷⁵ Carl Sifakis, *The Mafia Encyclopedia*, (New York, 1987), 272.

⁷⁶ For more on the term hoodlum see the following chapter. Jackson, *The Ku Klux*, 98.

⁷⁷ Barrett, James, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multiethnic City* (New York, 2013), 11.

home children might speak Polish, they might attend an Italian Catholic Church, or they might study at a parochial school, but as part of the swarm they spoke English and acted “American”. On the streets, immigrant youths learnt white solidarity and an American anti-black racism, and they reinforced this American racial system in the spaces of the city. While the gang boundaries between white groups had only applied to other children and youths, the lines youth gangs policed between white and black communities applied to young and old alike; entire communities feared crossing gang-lines. The most feared and long-lasting gang-line was Wentworth Avenue.

Wentworth Avenue

Wentworth Avenue, pictured in figure 22 below, ran from 16th Street just south of the Loop to the far southern suburbs. Nowadays the city has destroyed much of Wentworth Avenue to make room for the Dan Ryan Expressway, one of the busiest highways in the world which speeds suburbanites into the city center. A century ago, however, Wentworth Avenue looked as it appeared in the photograph. Unpaved, dirty, but commercial, Wentworth Avenue was a place where groups of white boys played and policed the city’s color line. Together these violent swarms of white youths made Wentworth difficult and dangerous for African-American children and adults to cross, limiting black Chicagoans’ access to work and leisure.



Figure 22: 'Bernard J. Hagamann's store and neighboring buildings with children standing on the sidewalk in front' (1906) *Chicago Daily News*.

By the end of the First World War, black children feared Wentworth Avenue, and refused to cross it even to go to and from school.⁷⁸ According to the school district superintendent in the area around Wentworth Avenue, black children often chose to attend schools outside the district so that they did not have to cross Wentworth Avenue.⁷⁹ Black children did not do so because they preferred attending schools based in predominantly black areas. Many black children attended majority white schools outside of the main Black Belt area, but these usually lay to the east and south. Few if any ventured west across the color line of Wentworth Avenue.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 115; 'The Life History of Joe N.'.

⁷⁹ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 251-252

⁸⁰ Once you eliminate schools with no black attendance, there was no correlation between a school having high black attendance and being in a district with a particularly high black population when statistics were collected in 1920. One of the elementary schools with the highest proportion of black students (at 90%) was situated to the east of the main Black Belt, in an area forty-two

But it wasn't an adult color line that African-American children feared, instead, it was white children, just like those depicted in figure 22, who enforced the geographical segregation. According to the principal of the Raymond School, black children had to be escorted over the "gang line" of Wentworth Avenue to attend "manual training" classes at a mainly white school, "because of trouble, not from members of the school, but groups of boys outside the school."⁸¹ When a group of sixty black children were invited to play music at a park across the color line, they were stoned as they were leaving by "a rough set of boys". Their teacher "told the children to run for their lives, and they all had to scatter and hide in the bushes of the park or run toward home if they could."⁸² From then on, whenever the pupils were invited to play music outside of their own neighborhood, the African-American children all had excuses and refused to go. They decided to obey the white gang's racial divide of the city and remain on their side of the color line.⁸³

Despite the threat of violence from white hoodlums, many black children did challenge the color line. The Tilden School, a high school across Wentworth Avenue in Canaryville, became a common scene for racial conflict. When African-American boys tried to play a basketball game, a favorite activity of Progressive recreation leaders, at Tilden School, police had to escort them back across Wentworth Avenue and even then some were hit with thrown bricks by gangs of white boys outside the Tilden School.⁸⁴ African-American children also continued to try to attend public schools across Wentworth Avenue. In spite of Tilden School's reputation for racial violence, between 1915 and 1922, sixty African-American boys enrolled en masse at the school at the start of one school year.

percent African-American. On the other hand, officials didn't even record the numbers of black children attending elementary schools to the west of Wentworth Avenue such as Mark Sheridan School and Healy School. If any black children attended at all around 1920, their numbers were staggeringly small. Analysis drawn from CCRR, *Negro in Chicago*, 242.

⁸¹ Ibid., 252.

⁸² Ibid., 250.

⁸³ Ibid., 250.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 252.

The group was equivalent in size to around a tenth of the total school population in 1921.⁸⁵ According to a teacher at the school “they were thrown out by the Tilden [read: white] boys. They made it so hot for the colored boys that the sixty had to withdraw.”⁸⁶ School officials did not formally condone children’s enforcement of school segregation, but even if they had acted to protect integration, officials’ ability to stop racial conflict was limited. Much of the violence on the part of groups of white children took place outside school property, on the streets and in public recreation spaces where children dominated.

Native Chicagoans grew up learning the racial boundaries of the city, but those who just arrived in Chicago, like the poet Langston Hughes, had to learn quickly to toe the color line. Hughes arrived in Chicago as a teenager in 1918. On his very first weekend, Hughes wandered the streets, taking in his new city. At some point he drifted west of Wentworth Avenue. Now in a white neighborhood, a gang of white boys attacked Hughes telling him “they didn’t allow niggers in that neighborhood.”⁸⁷ Hughes escaped with only a few bruises, but also the lesson that Wentworth Avenue was a dangerous line for a black man to cross.

Yet black Chicagoans did cross the gang line, many on a daily basis. By the end of the First World War, the stockyards employed some five thousand African-Americans, rivalling Pullman as an employer of black workers.⁸⁸ As the number of black stockyard workers increased, more and more African-Americans crossed the color line on their way to work. These were not periphery to center commutes, but rather east-west and radial to the Loop. To get to work, most black stockyards workers took the 35th Street or 47th Street

⁸⁵ ‘1921 Annual Report of the County Superintendent of Schools, In the Country of Cook, State of Illinois’, Annual Reports of the Superintendent’s Board of Education, Illinois State Archives; CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 252.

⁸⁶ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 252.

⁸⁷ John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 1998), 1

⁸⁸ Wood, Junius, *Negro in Chicago* (Chicago, 1916), 8

streetcars.⁹⁰ Children, like the “Murderers”, were often involved in targeting black commuters. 47th and Racine, where the Murderers chose to attack black workers, was a streetcar transfer point and a busy intersection within the middle of the white Back of the Yards neighborhood. It was a predictably vulnerable place for black commuters. But, in order to work, black stockyard workers continued to cross into the white hoodlums’ territory.

White Chicagoans far more frequently crossed the color line. Following the 1912 closing of the Twenty-Second Street Levee, Chicago’s red-light district, increasing numbers of white men and women frequented the Black Belt’s many leisure resorts.⁹¹ White children made use of these entertainment venues alongside white adults. The Juvenile Protective Association made numerous investigations into children and young people and commercialized vice in mixed race locations on the South Side.⁹² Life history interviewees like Tony C. talked about taking dates to entertainment venues in the Black Belt or visiting brothels there.⁹³ For white people, crossing the color line did not function in the same way as it did for black people; the line didn’t create a blacks-only ghetto, instead it created whites-only spaces to the west.

To the south and east of the Black Belt during the 1910s, residents of middle-class, white neighborhoods such as Woodlawn, Oakland, Kenwood, and Hyde Park, also worried about keeping their communities solidly white. When black families moved into an area, whites feared property prices plummeting as the white families scrambled to sell and flee the changing neighborhoods. In reality, these neighborhoods had been

⁹⁰ For example, ‘Beaten on Street Car’, *The Chicago Defender* (11 August 1917), 5; ‘Attacked by White Men’, *The Chicago Defender* (May 29, 1920), 13. ‘Beaten by Whites’, *The Chicago Defender* (25 September, 1920), 9;

⁹¹ Blair, *I’ve Got To Make My Livin’*, 17.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 234.

⁹³ Life History of Tony C. LHC, b.45 fol.(unnumbered).

deteriorating for years in the lead up to World War One as suburbanization developed as a realistic and desirable option for middle-class Chicagoans.⁹⁴ Moreover, the African-American families moving into the neighborhoods usually had a far higher income and paid more for housing than the existing communities.⁹⁵ White property speculators fueled the panics, deliberately renting to African-American families in solidly white blocks or paying black actors to pretend to look for property in white middle-class neighborhoods and then convincing white property owners to sell at below market prices.⁹⁶

Middle-class adult whites in these neighborhoods organized, creating protective housing associations that sent out letters like this one from the Hyde Park Property Owner's Association:

Every white person Property Owner in Hyde Park come to this meeting. Protect your Property.

Shall we sacrifice our property for a third of its value and run like rats from a burning ship, or shall we put up a united front and keep Hyde Park desirable for ourselves?⁹⁷

Protective associations like the Hyde Park Property Owner's Association also created racially restrictive covenants, forbidding members to lease or sell to African-Americans. The covenants were legally binding for a period of fifteen or twenty years; any signatory could sue any other signatory who broke the terms.⁹⁸

White property owners also resorted to physical violence. As early as 1897 white property owners in Woodlawn "declared war" on black residents and tried to force them

⁹⁴ Tuttle, 'Contested Neighborhoods' 266-288; Jackson, Kenneth T, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1987).

⁹⁵ For similar story in Detroit see Sugrue, Thomas J., *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1996).

⁹⁶ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*.

⁹⁷ Extracted in CRRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 118

⁹⁸ Wendy Plotkin, "'Hemmed In': The Struggle Against Racial Restrictive Covenants and Deed Restrictions in Post-WWII Chicago', *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 94:1 (Spring, 2001), 39-69.

out of the neighborhood with threats of violence.⁹⁹ Starting in 1917, African-Americans moving into these neighborhoods to the south and east of the Black Belt also faced the prospect of bombings. Between 1917 and 1921, fifty-eight African-Americans households, or property belonging to real estate men known to sell or lease to black families, were bombed. The majority of the bombings took place on the South Side, in neighborhoods to the south and east of the traditional Black Belt. The bombings killed two black Chicagoans, injured others and damaged around \$100,000 worth of property. The police did little to nothing to stop the bombings or catch bombers, arresting only two people in the four-year period from 1917 to 1921, and releasing both. Although no one was ever found guilty of bombing, it seems likely that the property owners' associations were involved; bombings often followed shortly after meetings of housing associations, and local papers reported that "bombs and bullets" were discussed at association meetings. At the very least, the housing associations did not distance themselves from the violence.¹⁰⁰

Considering the legal and extra-legal measures middle-class white communities to the east and south took to keep out African-American residents in the 1910s, the maps in figures 24 and 25 are somewhat surprising. Prepared by the CCRR in the early 1920s, the two maps showed the changing boundaries of black Chicago.

⁹⁹ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 143.

¹⁰⁰ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 122-130; See also Tuttle, 'Contested Neighborhoods', 266-288

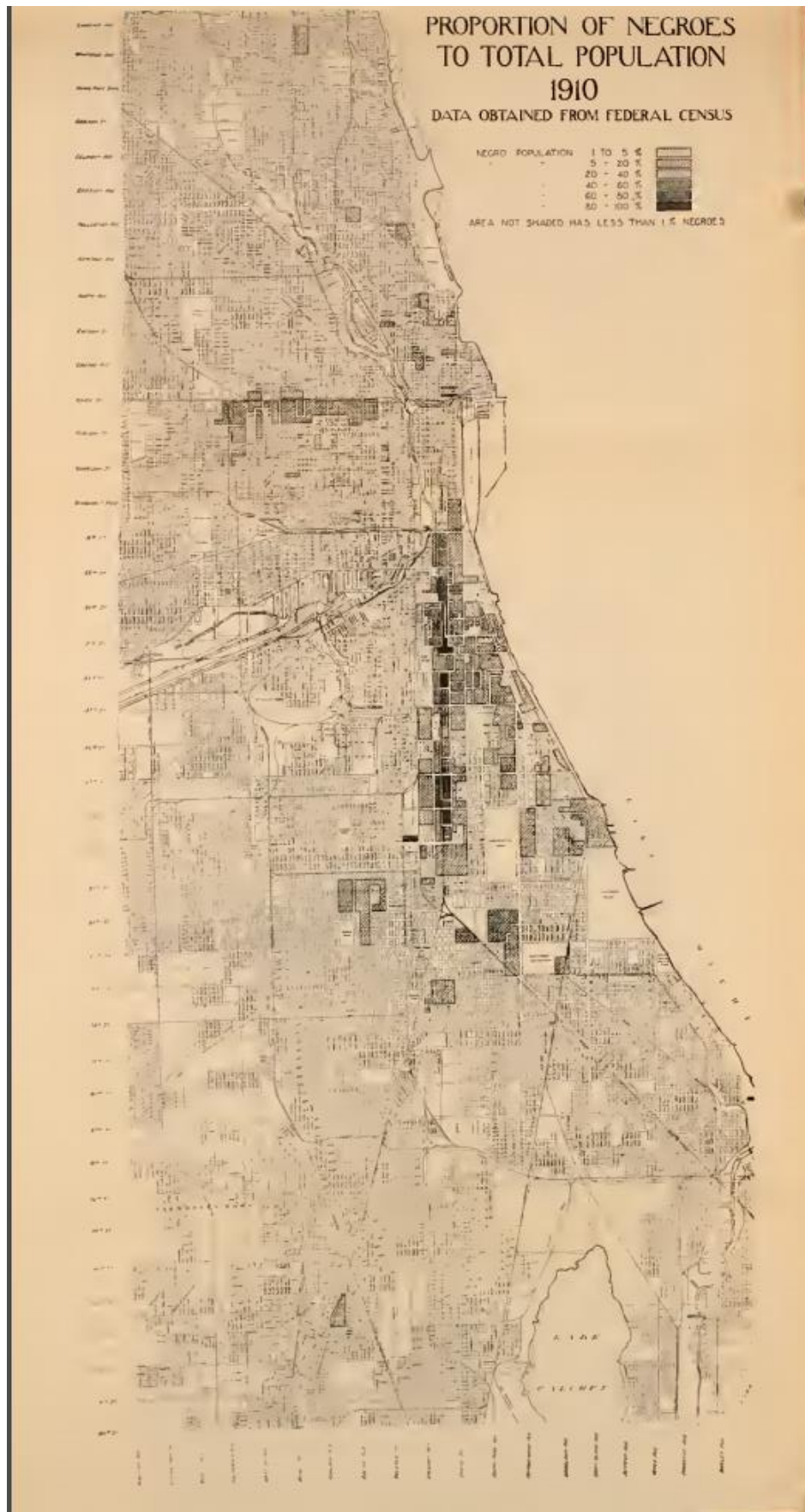


Figure 24: 'Proportion of Negroes to Total Population, 1910', from CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*.

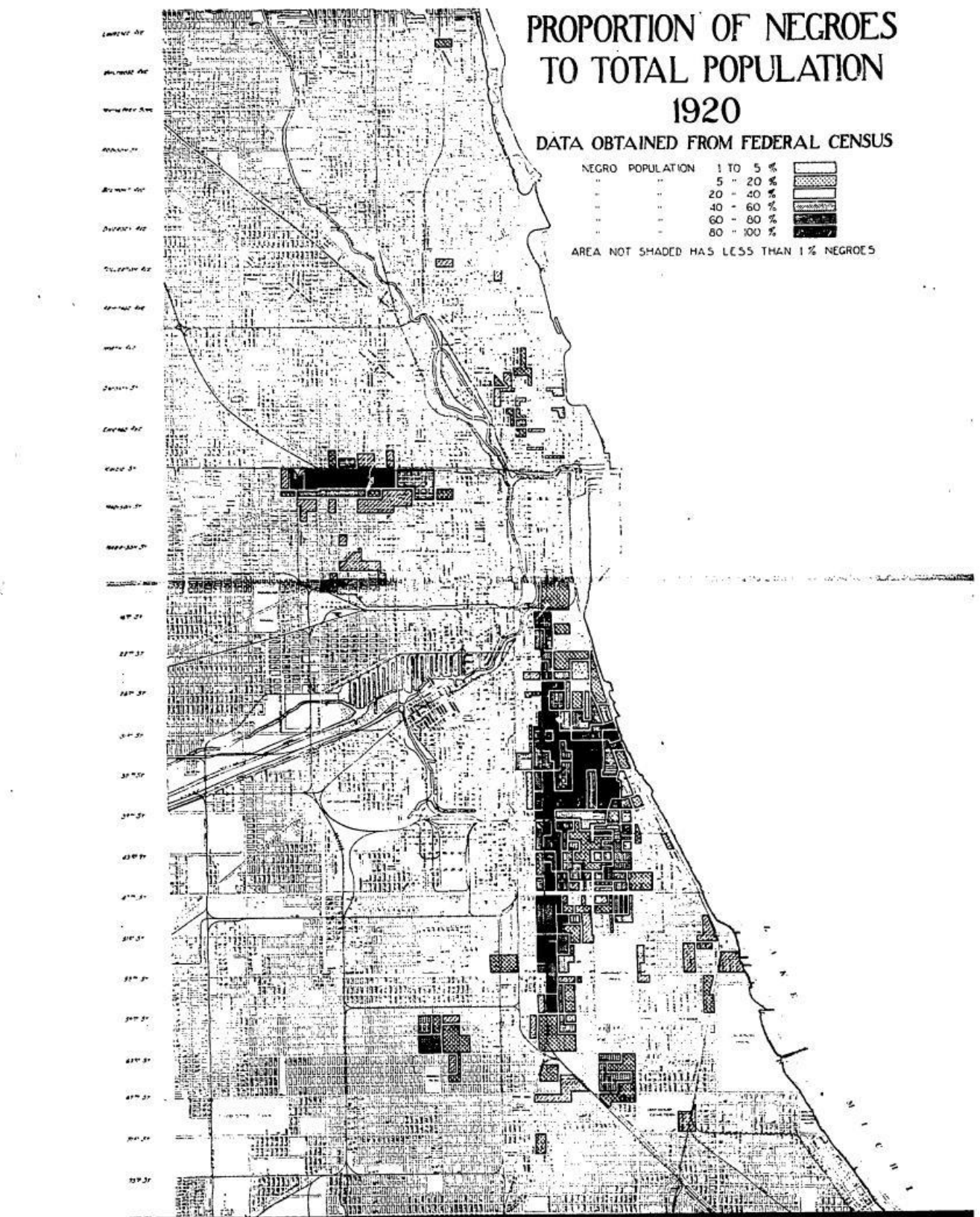


Figure 25: 'Proportion of Negroes to Total Population, 1920', from CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*.

The Black Belt of 1910 that figure 24 mapped was somewhat amorphous, the boundaries hard to describe. At points, it stretched as far west as South Shields Avenue, and east to the lake. Figure 25, which mapped the proportions of black Chicagoans to the total population in 1920, captured a more clearly demarcated area. To the south and east, the Black Belt expanded between 1910 and 1920, even into Hyde Park and Kenwood, where housing associations were trying desperately to keep African-Americans out. To the west, however, the Black Belt contracted. A sharply defined north-south line, Wentworth Avenue, replaced the meandering western edge of the Black Belt of a decade earlier.

Housing to the west of the Black Belt may not have been luxurious (in reality it was often appalling) but it was, at least, an improvement on the housing in the Black Belt and, certainly, a lot cheaper than in the Black Belt itself. Housing across Wentworth Avenue would certainly have been desirable for black families, constantly moving in search of better accommodation. Despite this, however, by 1920 Wentworth Avenue proved a decidedly inflexible barrier to black home-seekers.

The color line of Wentworth Avenue was not maintained by organized housing associations or even occasional bombings but, rather, by everyday gang violence and intimidation. Thus, while black Chicagoans like one Mrs. Clarke, who was bombed four times, stood their ground in the face of repeated bombings and refused to “be driven out”, they struggled to resist white enforcement of the color line to the west of Wentworth Avenue.¹⁰¹ The CCRR reported in the early 1920s:

There are residence districts of Chicago adjacent to those occupied by Negroes in which hostility to Negroes is so marked that the latter not only find it impossible to live there, but expose themselves to danger even by passing through. There are no hostile organizations in these neighborhoods, and active antagonism is usually confined to gang lawlessness. Such a neighborhood is that west of Wentworth Avenue... In the

¹⁰¹ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 115.

section immediately west of Wentworth Avenue and thus adjoining the densest Negro residence area in the city, practically no Negroes live....¹⁰²

Youth gang violence, including that of elementary-school children, thus proved to be very successful at maintaining white control of neighborhoods.

But if competition for housing and labor played a role in worsening race relations in the late 1910s, conflict over the use of recreational spaces and opportunities proved just as important.¹⁰³ Recreation spaces were often scenes of violently enforced racial segregation throughout the United States in this period. Historian Victoria Wolcott's work on the nationwide African-American struggle against recreational segregation has demonstrated that access to public amusements mattered to both white segregationists and black anti-segregationists as much as access to housing or jobs.¹⁰⁴ Interracial leisure spaces fueled white fears about interracial sex far more than sharing work places or even neighborhoods. Swimming pools, and beaches, inspired the greatest white fears and often erupted as sites of conflict.

Choices for recreation within the Black Belt were decidedly limited. The largest green space within the bounds of the Black Belt in the 1910s was Beutner Playground, a somewhat sad patch of grass with almost no play equipment. As for swimming, no pools existed in the Black Belt and black Chicagoans could only access the lake at the Twenty-Fifth Street Beach.¹⁰⁵ The city unofficially designated this narrow and unattractive strip of shoreline for use by black city-dwellers and hired black Chicagoans to serve as lifeguards.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Ibid., 115.

¹⁰³ Victoria Wolcott's recent study of recreation, segregation, and black resistance highlights the importance of recreation: "One way to broaden our understanding of desegregation is by conceiving of it as part of a broader struggle for control of and access to urban space ... African-Americans' demand for the right to use recreation was not simply about integration and interracial friendship but about power and possession". Wolcott, *Race Riots and Roller Coasters*.

¹⁰⁴ Wolcott, *Race Riots and Roller Coasters*.

¹⁰⁵ McCoy-Gaines, Irene, 'A Plea For Our Girls', *The Chicago Defender* (28 Feb. 1920), 12.

¹⁰⁶ Grant, Julia, *The Boy Problem: Educating Boys in Urban America, 1870-1970* (Baltimore, 2014).

When black Chicagoans remained within the leisure spaces of the Black Belt, they rarely faced racial violence, but segregation, while allowing black children some use of play facilities, rendered leisure space separate and unequal.

In the late 1910s, as black Chicagoans tried to make use of superior leisure facilities outside the Black Belt, battles over the color line frequently broke out in recreational spaces. The CCRR reported that, during the war, white boys between the ages of ten and twenty were responsible for stoning or otherwise attacking African-Americans who tried to make use of recreational facilities at or near: Franklin Playground, Carter Playground, Beutner Playground, Sherwood Playground, Armour Square Park, Ogden Park, Fuller Park, 38th Street Beach, 31st Street Beach, 29th Street Beach, and weekly on Sunday afternoons at Washington Park.¹⁰⁷ Figure 26 shows a map of the incidents that took place at South Side parks, playgrounds, and beaches overlaid on a map showing the expansion of Chicago's Black Belt from 1910 to 1920. Apart from the violence at Ogden Park, all the episodes took place on the edges of the Black Belt, in spaces where African-American's were moving into a neighborhood of white communities.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, see esp. Clashes. The Defender, too, often reported on African-American children being attacked in and around recreational facilities. See, for example, 'Race Girls Brutally Assaulted by Whites in Washington Park', *The Chicago Defender* (8th June 1918), 11; 'Aldermen Have Protection Placed to Preserve Order at Beaches', *The Chicago Defender* (27 July 1918); 'White Boys Start Trouble on Beach', *The Chicago Defender* (August 5 1916), 'Ruffianism in the Parks', *The Chicago Defender* (12 July 1919).

¹⁰⁸ The Ogden Park violence was situated near a small black community which had settled in that area.

Although public facilities were officially desegregated in this period unofficial violence forced African-Americans out of play-spaces. As early as 1903, a young black man was run out of the Beutner Playground by a group of white Chicagoans keen to keep

control of a park then on the edge of the Black Belt.¹⁰⁹ But in the case of Beutner at least, city authorities sided with African-American users of play-spaces. When white gangs made it difficult for black children to use Beutner Playground during the 1910s even though it was firmly located in the Black Belt by then, just to the east of Wentworth Avenue, the park district hired a black park director and instructed him to “turn over the playground particularly to Negroes.”¹¹⁰ The white hoodlums were effectively banished from Beutner. But while white children were largely excluded from Beutner, they could use the vastly superior recreational facilities at Armour Square Park, less than two blocks away, but across the color line of Wentworth Avenue.

Significantly if somewhat disingenuously, state officials blamed segregation on children. According to a playground attendant, the racial separation at the playgrounds around Wentworth Avenue “was due entirely to action on the part of the children, as the officials did not discriminate in any way.”¹¹¹ Playground officials nevertheless did participate in racial violence and discrimination. According to two black aldermen in 1918, white lifeguards on Lake Michigan shore were “largely responsible for the assaults on Race people seeking the privileges of bathing there.”¹¹² Park policemen also routinely stopped black Chicagoans from swimming at recreation centers.¹¹³

Most often white law enforcers simply failed to protect black patrons and tolerated white violence. In one report, park police officers at Washington Park looked on as a white gang assaulted two black girls.¹¹⁴ Even though neither the police nor the park authorities officially condoned gang violence, they tended to accept informally or even to encourage

¹⁰⁹ Fisher, *Urban Green*, 94.

¹¹⁰ See Fisher, *Urban Green*, 96.

¹¹¹ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 276.

¹¹² Fisher, *Urban Green*, 96.

¹¹³ Wolcott, *Race Riots*, 28.

¹¹⁴ ‘Race Girls Brutally Assaulted by Whites in Washington Park’, *The Chicago Defender* (8 June 1918), 11.

white attacks on black park users. The Chicago Defender reported in August 1915 of trouble at the bathing facilities in Jackson Park. A group of white youths, as well as the life-saver working there, dunked a young African-American boy in the pool until he nearly drowned. They told him he “would pollute the water”. The case went to trial where the presiding judge reportedly said it was the first case of the type of which he had ever heard. The article in the Defender mocked the judge, saying “alas! The judge has not been kept informed. There are many cases of the kind”.¹¹⁵ The recreational spaces became hotbeds for racial violence not because of the possibilities for interracial sex or fears of cleanliness; rather, racial violence occurred here because these were the places where children dominated and valued their territorial control.

Violence often occurred during concerted efforts by groups of African-American youths to gain access to play-spaces. If the city hoped that concessions to black recreation seekers at Beutner Playground and the Twenty-Fifth Street Beach would stop black Chicagoans attempting to use the better facilities white people enjoyed, they were mistaken. With such limited options, black children and young people tried to make use of more desirable recreational facilities at the edges of the Black Belt. Battles that took place at Washington Park every Sunday during the spring and summer of 1919 attested to the fact that white youth violence wasn't always enough to stop completely African-American use of play-spaces. Gangs placed signs around the park neighborhood in the lead up to July 4, 1919, warning African-Americans that they would be run out of the neighborhood if they dared to cross the color line.¹¹⁶ Yet despite these signs, many black Chicagoans picnicked in the park on July 4, though some carried weapons in case of violence.¹¹⁷ On the lakeshore, black children tried to access beaches other than the one at Twenty-Fifth Street. A mob

¹¹⁵ ‘Color Line Drawn at Bathing Beach’, *The Chicago Defender* (28th August 1915), 1.

¹¹⁶ Fisher, *Urban Green*, 97.

¹¹⁷ Graham Taylor, ‘Chicago in the Nation’s Race Strife’, *The Survey* (August, 1919) 625

attacked a little African-American boy as he attempted to use the Thirty-Ninth street beach in 1913, leading the Juvenile Protective Association to report: “even the waters of Lake Michigan are not available to colored children.”¹¹⁸

As the summer of 1919 began, racial tensions mounted in the parks and playgrounds of the city. Police responded to a riot call at the Carter Playground where a fight between a white and a black child escalated into a what historian Colin Fisher called “a mini-race riot”.¹¹⁹ In June, a gang of white youths “rampaged” along a row of African-American houses, breaking windows and the sole street lamp.¹²⁰ Later that month, two hundred police officers were required to stop the beating of African-Americans by “a small army of white men”. However police did not stop a white mob killing a black man with billiard cues.¹²¹ In mid-July, *The Defender* commented on the spike in racial violence in an editorial called “Ruffianism in the Parks” that complained of “young savages” who attacked black park-users. “No citizen of color”, according to the *Defender*, “even when accompanied by women members of his family, is safe.”¹²² By mid-July, the racial tensions of the South Side, never completely calm, frequently erupted into bouts of violence. While the state, at any point, could have intervened and refused to tolerate the rising tide of racial violence, it did not. The *Defender* appealed repeatedly to the park boards to put an end to the white “ruffianism in the parks”. Fearing the rising violence, the paper wrote in mid-July 1919 “blame for whatever happens under their [the park board’s] jurisdiction rests with them alone.”¹²³ Before August began, this violence would reach a fever-pitch and thirty-eight Chicagoans would be dead.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Fisher, *Urban Green*, 95.

¹¹⁹ Fisher, *Urban Green*, 95.

¹²⁰ Diamond, *Mean Streets*, 19.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹²² *The Chicago Defender*, cited in Fisher, *Urban Green*, 95.

¹²³ Fisher, *Urban Green*, 95.

“Riot Sweeps Chicago”¹²⁴

On July 27th 1919, thousands of Chicagoans took to the lakeshore in attempts to escape the summer heat. Among them was Eugene Williams, a seventeen-year-old African-American boy and three of his friends.¹²⁵ They hitched a lift on the back of a produce truck through largely Irish gang territory where they had previously been stoned by gangs of white boys. Eugene and his friends entered the water, not at 25th Street Beach, which was commonly used by African-Americans, but by cutting through an industrial lakeside area just to the South. The boys messed around, using a raft they had made from discarded or stolen railroad ties as a float, and drifted steadily South. In the mid-afternoon Eugene drifted across another color line, the unofficial border between African-American lake-space around the 25th Street Beach and whites-only water around the 29th Street Beach.¹²⁶

Ashore, trouble was already brewing. A group of African-American men and women had attempted earlier in the day to access the lake at the 29th Street Beach. This resulted, as usual, in conflict: white beach users threw stones and taunts at the black would-be bathers. The African-American group was driven away, only to return, throwing rocks in retaliation. As Eugene drifted south, the whites on the shore responded with anger and white youths began stoning the intruding boy, preventing him from swimming ashore. Eugene clung on to his raft until a white boy swam out towards him. The report commission in the wake of the riot did not indicate the intentions of this boy, whether to help or to attack Eugene, but Eugene was evidently scared. As the boy neared, Eugene let

¹²⁴ ‘Riot Sweeps Chicago’, *Chicago Defender* (2 Aug 1919), 1.

¹²⁵ Williams was at most 17, some accounts put him as young as fourteen.

¹²⁶ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, and Fisher, *Urban Green*, 98.

go of the float. Not a strong swimmer and fatigued by clinging onto the raft during the stoning, he sank beneath the surface and drowned.¹²⁷

The riot didn't begin straight away. As onlookers of both races gathered, African-Americans called for the policeman on duty to arrest a white man who had reportedly thrown a rock which struck Eugene on the head. The police officer refused and, instead, attempted to arrest a black man. According to the CCRR, the African-Americans gathered, and angered by his actions, attacked the police officer.¹²⁸

News of Eugene's drowning and rumors of white bloodshed spread across the South Side and, as night fell, violence erupted.¹²⁹ Just a few hours after Eugene drowned, white gangs attacked dozens of African-Americans to the west of Wentworth Avenue. For the next four days, white mobs attacked black Chicagoans who dared to venture into white neighborhoods. Gangs of white hoodlums also made excursions into the Black Belt, destroying African-American property, attacking black residents, and engaging in drive-by shootings down the center of the Black Belt.

Gangs of white youths, making excursions into the Black Belt and beating up black pedestrians outside the Black Belt, were crucial to the development and destruction of the

¹²⁷ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, also Tuttle, William M., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York, 1970).

¹²⁸ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*. The actual events of the day have always remained somewhat contentious. Rumors at the time of the riot laid the blame for instigating the riot upon various groups. The definitive historian of the race riot, William Tuttle, interviewed one of Eugene's swimming buddies on the day of the start of the riot who told him that the riot began when they tried to bring a black officer to the scene of Eugene's death. According to Tuttle the white group then attacked the black police officer. There is no way to know for sure whether to believe the reminiscences of an eyewitness many years on or the report of a thorough though politically constrained commission investigating just a few years later. Both stories are believable. White groups gathered would have resented a black officer making arrests of white people, while the black group may have finally cracked under the pressure of endemic police injustice especially in the face of such a crime in broad daylight with multiple witnesses. Tuttle, *Race Riot*.

¹²⁹ While violence did spread beyond the South Side, to the north and west, the vast majority of the rioting took place in the black belt and the South-West side. Drawing on classic fears of the 'black male rapist', rumors of a purely fictitious the sexual assault of a white woman circulated around the South Side, in a similar fashion to other race riots.

riot.¹³⁰ The CCRR made repeated references to the importance of gang activities in their report writing: “The rioting was characterized by much activity on the part of gangs of hoodlums”; “Gangs and their activities were an important factor throughout the riot. But for them it is doubtful if the riot would have gone beyond the first clash”; and “It is a singular fact that militia activities were principally against gangs of hoodlums, and the majority of these gangs were composed of white youths.”¹³¹

‘Youths’ was an ambiguous term which could include young men well into their twenties. According to the CCRR the majority of these hoodlums were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two. Both the CCRR and historians of the riot have blamed much of the gang activity on Chicago’s athletic clubs. The clubs, which had far more to do with the political machine and disreputable behavior than athletics, often functioned as organized gangs of youths in their late teens and early twenties.¹³² And athletic clubs, particularly the notorious Ragen’s Colts, certainly participated in the riot. Though no Colt was ever charged with a crime during the riot, some of the club’s own members admitted that they had driven automobiles through the Black Belt and managed to “bump off a number of Niggers.”¹³³ But historians have overstated the role of athletic clubs in the history of the riot.¹³⁴ Many of the white gangs involved in the riot were conflated with the athletic clubs, but not all, not even the majority, of youth gangs on Chicago’s South Side were athletic clubs. If the average Ragen’s Colt was in his late teens or early twenties, street gang members tended to

¹³⁰ Andrew Diamond’s book on Chicago youth and race from 2009, *Mean Streets*, includes the most extensive examination of the importance of youth to the development of the riot.

¹³¹ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 1, 11, 42.

¹³² Diamond, *Mean Streets*; Tuttle, *Race Riot*; CCRR *The Negro in Chicago*, 6, 13; For more on athletic clubs see Chapter 5.

¹³³ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 14.

¹³⁴ David Krugler’s recent book, *1919*, for example, highlighted role of athletic clubs but misidentified street gangs (which were often younger and less organized), like the Dirty Dozen, as athletic clubs. Krugler, *1919, The Year of Racial Violence*.

be considerably younger, often still in elementary school.¹³⁵ As the CCRR observed, these younger Chicagoans also took part in the rioting:

The fact that children were frequently part of mobs is one of the thought-provoking facts of the Chicago riot. Psychologists say that impressions made upon the child mind are forces which mould adult character to a great extent. A number of children, some not more than four or five years old, swarmed in front of the 47th Street car in the John Mills case and effectively blocked it while men climbed aboard and sought out the Negroes... There were others, still children in mind, Negro boys of fifteen, accused of murders.¹³⁶

According to the CCRR, children “swarmed” to sites of violence to “see what the riot looked like” and, in a typically passive construction, “were swept up in the excitement of the riot.”¹³⁷ Yet, like adult South Siders, children actively chose to participate in the riot and, as a result, contributed to the escalating racial violence.

Photographs of the riot, as in figure 27, attest to the youthfulness of many of the white rioters.¹³⁸ In this figure, and ones like it, a mob of white children cheered outside an African-American residence which they had just set on fire.¹³⁹ A few adult women and some girls posed on the edge of the picture, smiling at the camera, but the main participants in the violence were the boys, some captured still climbing out of the house. The majority

¹³⁵ For more on the definition of athletic clubs, their relationship to other types of youth gang in Chicago in this period, and the typical ages of gang members see Chapter 5.

¹³⁶ CCRR *The Negro in Chicago*, 22

¹³⁷ Many historians have dismissed children’s participation in the riot. Thomas Guglielmo, for example, wrote that Italian children who posted threatening letters at black residences were “caught up in the riot excitement” and even Diamond underestimated the importance of children younger than 16. Diamond described these children as simply copying the older boys, auxiliary to the racial violence. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*; Diamond, *Mean Streets*. Quotations from A young boy who took part in mob violence during the riot quoted in CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 23.

¹³⁸ See also Jun Fujita, ‘View of white children celebrating after having raided the home of African-Americans during the race riots, Chicago, 1919’, Chicago Daily News, CHM; Jun Fujita, ‘Chicago race riot, white men, boys and young girls standing in front vandalized house’, (1919 July-Aug.), Chicago Daily News, CHM; Jun Fujita, ‘Chicago race riots, 1919. Victim of racial violence being stoned and bludgeoned by the corner of a house’, Chicago Daily News, CHM.

¹³⁹ Fujita, ‘View of white children’.

of the children in the photograph appear considerably younger than sixteen. These were school-age white children gleefully active in the riots.



Figure 27: 'White children cheer outside an African-American residence that they have set on fire. The police arrived soon afterward.' Bettmann Collection, photographer unknown.

In figures 28 and 29, clearly taken just minutes apart, another group of white children have demolished an African-American home. In the second image, the children pose, celebrating. For them, this occasion was a fun experience. Shortly after the photographer took figure 27, the police arrived, but far too late. The swarm had already inflicted considerable damage.



Figure 28: Jun Fujita, 'White Children Raiding an African-American House, Chicago, 1919', *Chicago Daily News*



Figure 29: Jun Fujita, 'View of white children celebrating after having raided the home of African-Americans during the race riots, Chicago, 1919', *Chicago Daily News*.

White boys in gangs participated extensively in the violence against African-American people. The Dukies and Shielders, who collectively made up the notorious Mickies and had their territory around Armour Square Park, just west of Wentworth Avenue, put aside their traditional hostilities to participate in the race riot. They were, according to one former gang member, all of elementary-school age. The Dukies attended the Mark Sheridan and Healy schools while the Shielders attended the Ward School situated on South Shields Avenue.¹⁴⁰ Although the exact riot activities of the Mickies remain unclear, we do know what another typical gang of white boys in their early to mid-teens, The Dirty Dozen, did during the riot.¹⁴¹ Armed with revolvers, blackjacks, and knives, they set out to attack black Chicagoans.¹⁴² At the 35th and State intersection, inside the Black Belt and five miles from their own territory, one of the gang members stopped a trolley full of African-Americans. As the gang started beating up the trolley riders, one of their members was killed, apparently by an African-American woman with a razor. In response, the gang claimed to have killed two black men and beat up five others.¹⁴³

This incident was probably one of the crosses (at 35th and State) on the map of riot activity published by the Chicago Tribune and shown in figure 30 below. Somewhat confusingly, the editor placed west at the top of the map, with north to the right-hand side. Each cross represented “the most serious riots”, while “smaller clashes occurred in many other places.” The map broadly corresponded to the later CCRR map of clashes, with most incidents occurring in the Black Belt and Packingtown. The CCRR reported that, of those injured, 34% received their wounds in the Black Belt while 41% received them in the Packingtown. Notably, the violence was not spread out within Packingtown, instead,

¹⁴⁰ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 185, 201.

¹⁴¹ The boys were between 16 and 22 when Thrasher published their story in the mid-1920s so were much younger than this in 1919. Thrasher, *The Gang*, 47.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁴³ See Thrasher, *The Gang*, 47.

attacks occurred primarily on the main transport routes between the Black Belt and the stockyards, especially at transfer points.¹⁴⁴ While black Chicagoans had been fairly free to cross Wentworth Avenue into Packingtown during commuting hours prior to the riot, during the riot itself, it was commuting that put black Chicagoans at the most danger.

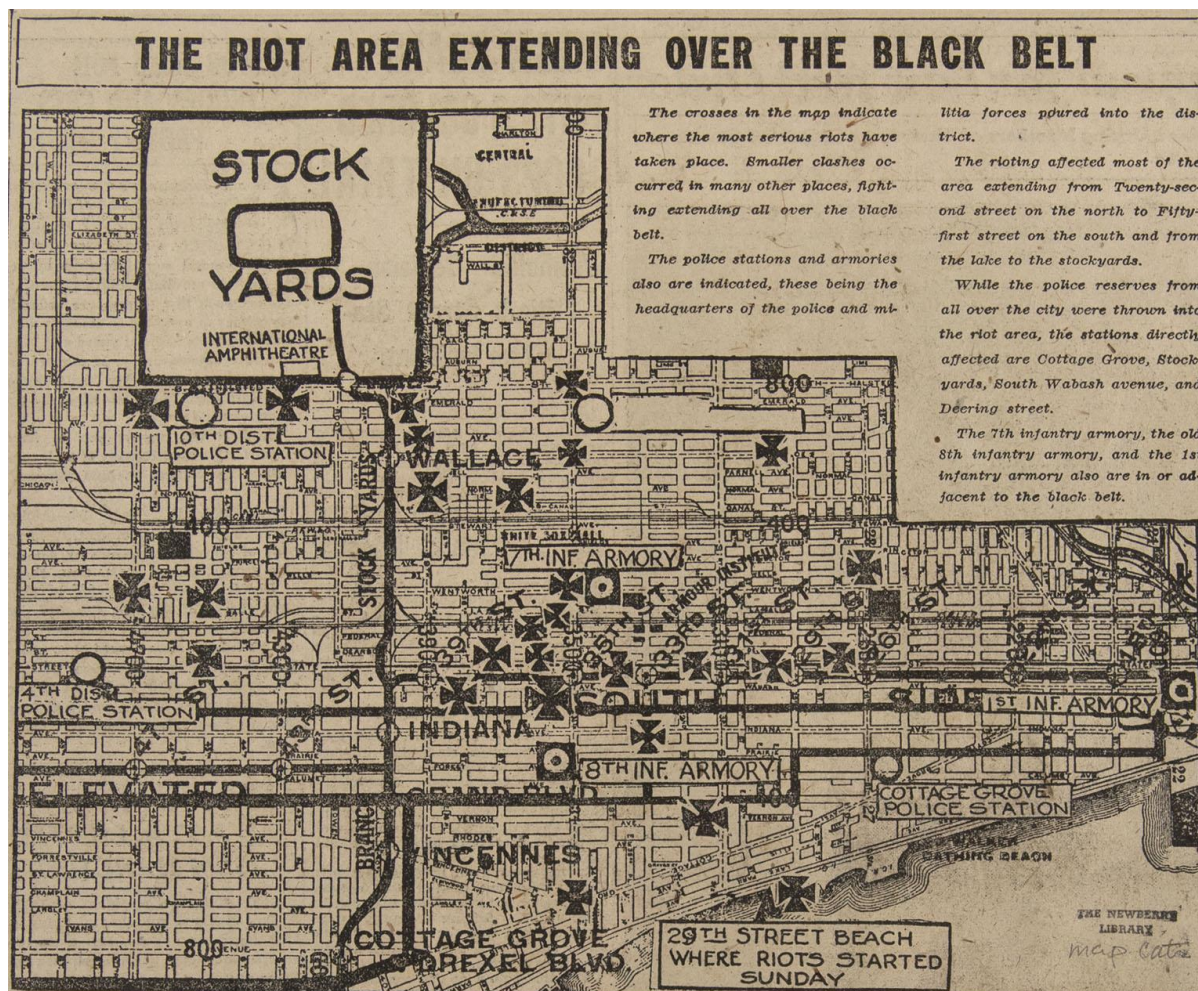


Figure 30: 'The Riot Area Extending Over the Black Belt' (with West at the top), *Chicago Tribune* (July 29, 1919), 4.

During the riot, as in other riots across the country that year, black Chicagoans armed themselves and defended the Black Belt from white incursions.¹⁴⁵ Many of the crosses within the Black Belt marked places where black rioters attacked white Chicagoans. In the Black Belt, African-American veterans of the First World War donned their uniforms and

¹⁴⁴ CCRR, *Negro in Chicago*, 9

¹⁴⁵ For other riots see Krugler, 1919.

gathered on the streets.¹⁴⁶ They organized community defense, guarding important thoroughfares like State Street. The line between self-defense and retaliation was elusive. From windows, black gunmen shot at white youths who invaded the neighborhood, and black women took up arms to defend their homes; while on the streets gangs of black men stopped street cars to beat up white riders and attacked lone white people in black majority neighborhoods.¹⁴⁷ News of black violence against white individuals received a disproportionately high amount of media coverage, spreading across the city and fueling further rioting.

Despite the outrages on both sides, by the fourth day of the riot, the situation had begun to calm. The weather cooled for the first time since Eugene Williams's death and rain poured on Wednesday and Thursday (the fourth and fifth days after the riot began). Late on the Friday night, a fire raged across a mainly Lithuanian part of the Back of the Yards, leaving nine hundred and forty-eight people homeless. While no-one was ever charged with arson, white hoodlums in blackface were blamed. As one prominent meatpacker said:

I believe it goes without saying that there isn't a colored man, regardless of how little brains he'd have, who would attempt to go over into the Polish district and set fire to anybody's house over there. He wouldn't get that far.¹⁴⁸

The fire was probably set by hoodlums who took the riot as an opportunity to engage in destructive behavior, potentially with the aim of instigating more racial conflict. They did not succeed. The fire proved to be the final serious incident of the riot.

¹⁴⁶ Black veterans became the 'New Negroes' of the 1920s, willing to violently resist white aggression. Du Bois had given a speech just a few month before the riot at Chicago's Wendall Philipps High School referring to returning black soldiers: they "will never be the same again. You need not ask them to go back to what they were before. They cannot, because they are not the same men." See Baldwin, Davarian L., *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill, 2007), 11.

¹⁴⁷ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 5-6; 'List of Injured: Whites', *Chicago Defender* (2 August, 1919), 1; See also, Krugler, 1919. Krugler argued that black Chicagoan's decision to defend themselves transformed the murder of Eugene William into a full-blown race riot.

¹⁴⁸ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 20-21.

By this time the city had called in the National Guard, as the police alone proved unable, or unwilling, to quell the fighting. The National Guard combined with the rain eventually ended the riot, leaving Chicagoans to assess the damage. The rioters had killed twenty-three African-Americans and fifteen whites, injured over five hundred Chicagoans (almost two-thirds of whom were black), and rendered around a thousand black families homeless; their homes looted and destroyed.¹⁴⁹

The riot was not an anomaly in Chicago's racial history. Rather, the riot resembled, in many ways, previous conflicts in Chicago, but on a far larger scale. It was not uncommon for violence to occur over black Chicagoan's use of recreational facilities within the city, nor was it surprising for children to be at the forefront of violently enforcing segregation. The texture of the violence also resembled pre-1919 events, gangs targeted streetcars, stoning was common, and lone black commuters in white neighborhoods continued to be particularly vulnerable.

Yet, the race riot differed in certain respects from previous racial violence in the city. Firstly, it was far more widespread and destructive than previous episodes of racial violence. Secondly, it involved white gangs en masse specifically travelling into the Black Belt to destroy black property and to attack black Chicagoans. Previous skirmishes focused primarily on enforcing the color line at the boundaries of the black neighborhood. During the riot, a third of those injured or killed had received their wounds within the Black Belt itself.¹⁵⁰ Thirdly, African-Americans for the first time in Chicago enforced a color line of their own. Black Chicagoans targeted white people on the streets of their neighborhood.

As with previous episodes, police on the streets failed to stop white hoodlums' violence against African-Americans. Police officers were far less likely to arrest white

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

rioters than African-Americans caught up in the violence.¹⁵¹ When a black man, Kin Lumpkin was beaten by a white mob on an L platform at Forty-Seventh Street as he was heading home from work, it was he who was arrested and booked for rioting. The members of the white mob were not apprehended.¹⁵² The same was not true of black mobs and white victims in the Black Belt. In one incident, police officers fired indiscriminately into a crowd of gathered black Chicagoans after someone threw a brick, resulting in four African-American deaths and many injuries.¹⁵³ Furthermore, the police focused their forces within the Black Belt itself, while white gang violence was left virtually unchecked in the white neighborhoods to the west. In total, twice as many African-Americans were arrested as whites, despite being also twice as likely to have been injured by rioters.¹⁵⁴

When police activity failed to restore the peace by the second day of the riot, Chief Garrity ordered the police to create a “dead-line”.¹⁵⁵ The line was drawn along the traditional color line of Wentworth Avenue from Twenty-Second to Sixty-Third Street and police were to allow no black person to cross west of the line and no white person east. In practice, however, the “dead-line” mainly served to stop African-Americans crossing west and thousands of black Chicagoans were cut off from their jobs in the stockyards.¹⁵⁶ Thus, in the midst of the riot, police enforced the color line that gangs of white youth had informally policed for years.

¹⁵¹ “‘Death For Rioters,’ Court Says”, *The Chicago Defender* (August 9, 1919), 1.

¹⁵² CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 33

¹⁵³ Ibid., 6; Harper, Lucius C., ‘Showered with Bullets’, *The Chicago Defender* (August 2, 1919), 1.

¹⁵⁴ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 35

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 37; ‘Dead-line’ here is used in its original sense – a line past which prisoners cannot cross or they will be shot. The term originated during the American Civil War at POW camps and is usually thought to have gone out of usage by the end of the nineteenth century. Deadline, meaning a due date, emerged in the early twentieth century, it’s etymological genealogy unknown. See www.etymologyonline.com/word/deadline (accessed 17/11/2017); ‘Dead-Line’, Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com (accessed 17/11/2017)

¹⁵⁶ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 66

When the CCRR asked a black alderman for his views on how to improve race relations within the city, it is hardly surprising therefore, that the alderman's suggestions seem to specifically target young and school-age gang boys:

1. Pass a vagrancy law that will take the idle, shiftless and intolerant hoodlum off the street...¹⁵⁷
2. Close all vicious poolrooms and dens of vice, and permit no boy under nineteen years of age to enter poolrooms.
3. Forbid loitering on street corners, especially at transfer points
4. Prohibit vicious and race-antagonizing campaign speeches...
5. Make more rigid the habeas corpus act, tighten up on parole and probation laws and enforcement of the truancy law.¹⁵⁸

Only the fourth suggestion seemed to target anyone apart from hoodlums and the alderman's inclusion of age-specific laws and truancy laws demonstrated his recognition that school-age children were, at least in part, responsible for the poor race-relations on the streets of the city.

The CCRR also emphasized recreation spaces as places of racial violence and segregation: "it is no new thing for youthful white and negro groups to come to violence. For years, ... there have been clashes over baseball grounds, swimming pools in the parks, the right to walk on certain streets."¹⁵⁹ As a result of these findings, the CCRR recommended that the "park and proper authorities" attempt to stop the discrimination of African-Americans which "practically bars Negroes out of certain recreation centers near their own congested areas". The CCRR further demanded more recreation facilities for the black community of the South Side, better training of supervisors, who should be held responsible for any racial clashes in places under their direction, and that the city and park

¹⁵⁷ Hoodlum typically referred to a delinquent boy or young man who hung around on street corners, similar to larrikin in Australia or hooligan in the UK. For more on age and hoodlums see the following chapter.

¹⁵⁸ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 478.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

police guarantee protection for all citizens in going to and from parks, recreation centers, and playgrounds.¹⁶⁰

While the citizens of the Black Belt pushed for protection and access to recreation spaces in the wake of the riot, white hoodlums returned to policing the boundaries of the Black Belt rather than invading the African-American neighborhood itself. This is not to say that racial violence decreased in the 1920s. Racial violence, particularly along the Wentworth Avenue color line continued in the daily practices of young white Chicagoans.

Race After The Riot

Although Wentworth Avenue continued to mark a dangerous boundary for black Chicagoans in the 1920s, life in the Black Belt was far from a monotony of violence and discrimination. After the race riot, despite the fact the violence had been national news, African-Americans continued to migrate to Chicago. The black population of the city doubled again in the 1920s to over 230,000 in 1930.¹⁶¹ During the 1920s, the Black Belt itself became increasingly racially homogenous. Whereas no black Chicagoans had lived in an area ninety percent African-American in 1920, by 1930, two-thirds of black Chicagoans did.¹⁶²

In many ways, the Black Belt flourished in the 1920s. Music coming out of State Street's jazz clubs dominated the nationwide Jazz Age, with artists like Louis Armstrong and King Oliver playing in the Black Belt. Black owned businesses, including a myriad of jazz and blues clubs, prospered. The black middle-class grew and, following immigration restrictions in the 1920s, job opportunities for working-class black Chicagoans increased.

¹⁶⁰ 'The Aftermath of Chicago's Racial Conflict', *The Chicago Defender* (October 7 1922), 1; The racial violence which often occurred in Chicago's new outdoor recreational spaces has been documented and examined in Fisher, *Urban Green*.

¹⁶¹ Meyer, *As Long As They Don't Move Next Door*, 32; Frazier, *The Negro Family*, 88.

¹⁶² Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin'*.

Politically, the community gained new importance as a sub-machine for the Republican Party, and black Chicagoans even won elected office in both local and state government. Racial consciousness and racial solidarity reached their pre-World War Two peak.¹⁶³

Of course, many African-Americans during the Great Migration Era did not seek integration. Black southerners coming to Chicago often did not want integrated churches or to spend leisure time with white people.¹⁶⁴ But African-Americans were the first to point out the vast difference between voluntary separation and violently enforced segregation. And the color line which white youths policed kept rents high in the Black Belt and kept housing conditions appalling.

The pressure on the boundaries of the Black Belt had never been greater in the 1920s and the housing crisis for black Chicagoans was as dire as ever. The growing black middle-class, in particular, continued to seek better housing outside of the old black areas, but as black homeseekers pushed at the edges of white neighborhoods to the south, east and west of the Black Belt, white communities employed a range of legal and extra-legal measures to stop the expansion. To the south and east, white homeowners continued to use housing associations. In 1927, the Chicago Real Estate Board drafted a standard racial covenant for use by groups of homeowners. To the west, it was mainly gang violence that maintained white homogeneity.

We can see from the expansion of the Black Belt that white youth violence was as effective if not more so than housing associations. Throughout the 1920s the area of black residences moved east and south but the western border remained largely static. Even by the census of 1930, Wentworth Avenue remained a remarkably hard color line. The census tracts directly to the west of Wentworth Avenue reporting less than ten percent African-

¹⁶³ Reed, *The Rise of Chicago's Black Metropolis*; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, (1983).

¹⁶⁴ Grossman, James R., *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago, 1989).

American residents while Bridgeport, still further west, maintained a 99.1% white population.¹⁶⁵ Significantly, the African-American community managed to expand into those neighborhoods that adopted restrictive covenants and even ones where whites bombed black homes.¹⁶⁶ Children's everyday violence in enforcing the color line worked remarkably effectively. In the face of white violence and racial covenants, more black Chicagoans meant more dense, not bigger, black neighborhoods.¹⁶⁷

By no means the "ghetto" of later decades, the color line still limited opportunities for work, schooling, play, and even organized crime for Black Belt residents.¹⁶⁸ Following the race riot, parents kept African-American children like future businessman and writer Dempsey Travis away from the lake, so Dempsey never learnt to swim.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, by 1930, the school board had gerrymandered the school attendance zones to coincide with the color line. Where just one school, Keith Elementary, was over ninety percent black in 1916 and catered to just eight percent of the city's black school children, in 1930, twenty-six schools in the city had at least ninety percent African-American students. In addition, eighty-two percent of black children in Chicago attended one of these twenty-six schools.¹⁷⁰ Like playgrounds in black neighborhoods, the schools were, unsurprisingly, under-

¹⁶⁵ 'Map of the Census Tracts of Chicago (1930), Proportion of total population Negro', Social Science Research Committee, University of Chicago, Pacyga, Dominic A., 'Bridgeport', *Encyclopedia of Chicago* <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org> (accessed 05.01.2018)

¹⁶⁶ Historians (with the notable exception of Arnold Hirsch) have tended to see restrictive housing associations as the main force behind residential segregation in northern cities in this period. See for example, Spear, *Black Chicago*; Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*; Giffin, *African-Americans and the Color Line*.

¹⁶⁷ Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin'*,

¹⁶⁸ For more on crime and race see Chapter 5.

¹⁶⁹ Travis, Dempsey, *An Autobiography of Black Chicago* (Chicago, 2013), 38.

¹⁷⁰ Davison M., Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North: A Battle Over Northern School Desegregation, 1865-1954* (New York, 2005), 147; Wood. *The Negro in Chicago*, 21.

resourced compared to neighboring white schools.¹⁷¹ From the 1920s, white Chicagoans stopped calling for school segregation – they had achieved their goal.¹⁷²

While in 1922 thirty-two of the thirty-four double-shift schools were majority white, but by the 1930s most shift schools were majority black and some of these even had triple-shifts.¹⁷³ Disapproving members of the black middle-class tied shift schools directly to delinquency, maintaining that pupils only attending half-days had “time to learn all kinds of devilment...”¹⁷⁴ Unsupervised, according to a local columnist, “dozen of boys in gangs travel[led] the streets for want of anything else to do.”¹⁷⁵

Sociology student A. Jaffe, who studied black gangs on the South Side in the late twenties, found African-American boys as young as nine or ten in delinquent gangs. Their primary delinquencies took place on State Street and mainly involved robbing delivery trucks. Many of the gang members played baseball in Washington Park.¹⁷⁶ Throughout the 1920s, black Chicagoans had continued to lay a claim to Washington Park, and as the Black Belt encompassed it, black and white Chicagoans began to refer to the park as the Booker T. Washington Park.¹⁷⁷

Black youths in the 1920s took to protecting their own “turf” from white rivals. Young white gang members learned not to pick a fight with black gangs in their territories.¹⁷⁸ Black boys also started fighting along Wentworth Avenue. Black American Communist, Claude Lightfoot, who was a teenager in Chicago in the 1920s remembered throwing stones with a group of African-American boys at white gangs across Wentworth

¹⁷¹ Homel, ‘Negroes in the Chicago Public Schools’.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 108; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis* 202.

¹⁷⁴ Chicago Defender article quoted in Homel, ‘Negroes in the Chicago Public Schools’, 112.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 112.

¹⁷⁶ Jaffe, A., ‘Negro Delinquent Gangs’, EBP b.132, fol.6.

¹⁷⁷ Fisher, *Urban Green* 104

¹⁷⁸ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 186

Avenue.¹⁷⁹ When Frederic Thrasher spent an evening with a gang of white boys in the mid-1920s he was warned not to cross the color line: “Don’t go that way, that’s niggertown; it ain’t safe.”¹⁸⁰ White boys in the 1920s, thus also learnt to obey the color line.

In the face of white violence, black children were by no means passive. They formed their own gangs, laying claims to their own spaces in the city where they could protect themselves from white aggression.¹⁸¹ One white boy told sociologist Frederick Thrasher:

At the park we had a big gang fight which grew out of a baseball game with the colored guys from Lake Street. The score was a tie, but it was getting dark and the n*****s did not want to play no more. They started a fight about the money that was on the game... We thought we’d beat them up, but we did not like to try it on their own grounds. The next day when our leader heard about it... he went right over to Lake Street. He got bounced on the first thing and knocked out in an alley.¹⁸²

The African-American boys in this story had laid claim to the baseball park as “their grounds”, an ordering of the city that the white boys, who feared being beaten up in retaliation, respected.

Racial separation was not total, however. Although far from the norm, Thrasher classified twenty-five out of eight hundred and eighty gangs as “Mixed negro-white”, compared to three hundred and fifty-one which were of mixed ethnicity.¹⁸³ Many boys did not fret over the contradictions of racism and having an occasional black friend. In one breath, Eddie S. told his life history interviewer that no blacks were allowed in his neighborhood and, in the next, talked about “two boy friends of [his], one white, the other colored.”¹⁸⁴ In another case, a gang which had made a name for itself by targeting African-Americans had, by 1930, accepted a black member. The inconsistencies of their racism were

¹⁷⁹ Barrett, *The Irish Way*, 17.

¹⁸⁰ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 22

¹⁸¹ Jaffe, ‘Negro Delinquent Gangs.’

¹⁸² Thrasher, *The Gang*, 186.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Life History of Eddie H.’

apparent when one of the white gang members said of the black gang-mate: “Aw, he’s white. He always plays fair – he’s a good guy.”¹⁸⁵ Clearly, even admitting an African-American boy on an individual basis did little to undercut the deeply racist views of white youth gangs.

Most gangs were either black or white and these gangs did not meet on equal terms. White gangs had connections and alliances with the police which black gang members could never aspire to. The police, who had done little to stop white youth violence prior to and during the riot, continued to turn a blind eye in the 1920s. And when the police murdered an unarmed young black man using a shovel in the 1920s, the young white gang who witnessed it closed ranks around the police officer. The gang pulled out their guns and told the rest of the black onlookers to leave. They later provided witnesses for the policeman, saying he had killed the black hoodlum in self-defense. The policeman got off, and from then on “that squad would do almost anything” for the gang.¹⁸⁶ White hoodlums like this gang forged alliances with the police and, as adults, many of them even joined the police force, taking the lessons they learnt on the streets with them.¹⁸⁷

White violence along the color line was entrenched in youth culture on the South Side. Even as the ethnic make-up of neighborhoods, and the neighborhood gangs, changed, traditions of racial hostility remained. The “Mickies”, a group of elementary-school boys whose territory spanned areas in Fuller Park, Canaryville and Bridgeport, kept the name “Mickies”, drawn from the anti-Irish slur “Mick”, even after the majority of the gang were Italian rather than Irish. They also maintained their traditional role of policing the color line

¹⁸⁵ Cited in Guglielmo, Thomas A., ‘Encountering the Color Line in the Everyday: Italians in Interwar Chicago’, *Journal of American Ethnic History* 23:4 (Summer, 2004), 45-77.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with gang member in Raymond Saylor ‘Notes for lower north side study, inc. Little Italy 1931’, EBP, b.136, fol.6..

¹⁸⁷ For more on ageing up, see chapter 5.

and keeping black people out of their neighborhoods.¹⁸⁸ Eddie H., who was a teenager in Canaryville in the 1920s, hung around with a gang around Root and Princeton, two blocks west of Wentworth Avenue. Eddie told his interviewer that: “The children of the neighborhood ... there was one thing that held pretty true amongst us and that was no negroes or strangers could pull off anything on Princeton Ave or Root or if we were around even pass through.”¹⁸⁹ As John L. Lewis (Principal of the Raymond School) told the CCRR, the gang line of Wentworth Avenue “is a tradition. It is handed down.”¹⁹⁰

Gangs of white youths continued to use extremely violent tactics to police the color line of Wentworth Avenue in the 1920s. If anything, they were emboldened by the riot to ever greater acts of violence. In 1929, a group of young men in Eddie H.’s neighborhood a few blocks west of the Black Belt, beat to death a black man, Charles Mallory, in front of his wife for daring to cross the color line. Before they attacked him, the gang “demanded to know what [Mallory] was doing in that neighborhood.” Mallory insisted he was just taking short cut home, the gang ignored him and killed him as his wife fled.¹⁹¹ The color line in Chicago was sustained with violence throughout the decade.

With continued threats to black Chicagoans crossing the color line, white gangs maintained control of recreation centers to the west of Wentworth Avenue in the twenties. In 1928, less than one half of one percent of visitors to Armour Square park were African-American even though it lay just two blocks west of Wentworth Avenue and forty percent of those living within six blocks of the park were African-American. The other communities which populated the neighborhood: the Irish, Sicilians, Croatians, Germans, and

¹⁸⁸ Thrasher, *The Gang*.

¹⁸⁹ ‘The Life History of Eddie H.’ Eddie has an Austrian surname in the case file, although this may have been a pseudonym created by the case worker.

¹⁹⁰ Records of the CCRR, Microfilm, Roll No. 30-11, Micr. USA 388, Vere Harmsworth Library, University of Oxford.

¹⁹¹ ‘Whites Slug Man To Death On West Side’ *The Chicago Defender* (16 March, 1929), 1.

Lithuanians, all used the park.¹⁹² The lack of black patrons is hardly surprising considering the threat white park users posed. At the Franklin Parker school playground, one block west of Wentworth Avenue, for example, a black boy of thirteen was stabbed to death by a white boy, also thirteen, in 1924.¹⁹³

Conclusion

Wentworth Avenue had remarkable longevity as a geographical color line. It was only after World War Two, as the African-American population of the city swelled again, that black residents moved west of Wentworth. The usual actors in stories of racial segregation: housing associations, the state, and white adults fearing competition for housing and jobs, cannot in themselves explain the endurance Wentworth Avenue as the city's most visible geographic color line. Instead, children and young people were the literal foot-soldiers of racial segregation. Typical motivations of whiteness and ghetto formations such as competition for housing or jobs, are less easily applied to children, yet neither can children's actions be brushed aside as mindless or meaningless. White children's everyday acts of racial violence were intended to keep their most valued places – streets in their territories, playgrounds, and other recreation spaces – white. That both black and white children valued parks and playgrounds, beaches, swimming pools, and baseball diamonds, gave shape to the racial violence of the city, including the 1919 Race Riot.

Children proved able to enforce the color line because of their presence on the streets and in the new recreation spaces of the city. Although institutional and regulatory changes had somewhat undermined "the swarm" by the 1910s and 1920s, children still dominated street space. This was the acme of the swarm's power to dominate Chicago's

¹⁹² Osborn, Marian Lorena, 'The Development of Recreation in the South Park System of Chicago', unpublished master's thesis, University of Chicago (1928).

¹⁹³ 'Boy, 13, Killed By Another in School Yard', *The Chicago Tribune* (23rd September 1924), 1.

street. The violence that maintained this color line was swarm violence; it relied upon a visible, destructive, and mobile masses of children and young people upon the street. The power and violence of young white gang members or hoodlums frightened all adults, not just black adults. In the wake of the riot, the coroner's report warned the city that hoodlums were "the greatest menace to the peace of Chicago"¹⁹⁴

But hoodlums were young, and the children who rioted grew up. As each generation got older and left street culture, swarm violence required a new generation to replace the old. Significantly, lessons learnt as a child on the street followed Chicagoans into adulthood. For black Chicagoans, their experiences as children in the city inspired life-long resistance and activism. As adults, white hoodlums who beat up African-Americans on the wrong side of the color line became gangsters but also police officers, homeowners, union leaders, and politicians. Violently racist attitudes thus permeated the city as the swarm grew up.

¹⁹⁴ 'Coroner's Report.' Records of the CCRR, Microfilm, Roll No. 30-11, Micr. USA 388, Vere Harmsworth Library, University of Oxford.

Chapter 5:

Punks, Hoodlums, and Gangsters

Growing Up in Gangs in the 1910s and 1920s

In 1927, the Chicago School criminologist Frederic Thrasher published a groundbreaking work on gangs entitled *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago*. Originally referring to groups of prisoners or frontier outlaws, the term “gang” only came to apply to street-frequenting urban youth with the rise of urbanization.¹ Even in the late nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, urban commentators were more likely to decry swarms of children and youth on the streets than concern themselves with gangs and gang behavior. It was only in the 1920s when American public consciousness of urban gangs really exploded. The number of New York Times front-page articles about gangs in the city jumped from forty-five in the 1900s, to ninety in the 1910s, to almost three hundred in the 1920s.²

According to Thrasher, gang activity was the result of boys’ natural instincts channeled into unproductive avenues in the interstitial spaces of the city. Or, in other words, gang boys weren’t bad boys, they just grew up in the wrong places. The beginnings of the gang could be found in the swarm:

The beginnings of the gang can best be studied in the slums of the city where an inordinately large number of children are crowded into a limited area. On a warm summer evening, children fairly swarm over areaways and sidewalks, vacant lots and rubbish dumps, streets and alleys. The buzzing chatter and constant motion remind one of insects which hover in a swarm, yet ceaselessly dart hither and thither within the animated mass.³

¹ Fraser, Alistair, *Urban Legends: Gang Identity in the Post-Industrial City* (Oxford, 2015).

² Hardman, Dale G., ‘Historical Perspectives of Gang Research’, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 4:1 (1967), 5-28; Thrasher, *The Gang*.

³ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 26

In the mid-1920s, Thrasher estimated urban life had drawn 25,000 boys and young men into gang life.⁴ In some neighborhoods, all the boys were members of gangs. Occasionally girls joined or started their own gangs, but most gangs, at least those criminologists like Thrasher studied, were all male. Gang life affected how both members and non-members related to the city. What corner one could walk on, what opportunities a street offered, how dangerous a trip to the store would be; these all depended on one's relationship to gang life in the neighborhood.

But, while the gang began in the swarm, gang members' relationship to the streets changed as they grew up. This chapter examines growing up with gangs in Chicago in the 1920s. The youngest "punks" had the closest relationship to the streets, mainly spending their time on the corner. As they aged into hoodlums, gang members gradually moved indoors into pool rooms and rented clubrooms, particularly if they were members of social athletic clubs (SACs) with ties to machine politics. By the time they were adults, young men had largely left the male world of gangs. For many, marriage and full-time employment drew them away from the streets and the SACs into mixed-sex, indoor environments. Of all the pre-adolescent boys on a block who joined gangs, very few ended up as criminal gangsters in adulthood. But even the most infamous of Chicago's gangs, Al Capone's Syndicate, had roots in and links with the swarm and the tenement neighborhoods where "gangs-in-embryo" came of age.⁵

Play-groups

Despite the continual attempts by child-savers to get children into suitable play-spaces, thousands of Chicago's boys and girls continued to play on the streets in the 1910s and 20s. These swarms of children engaged in many of the same activities as the swarming

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Franklin Chase Hoyt, 'The Gang in Embryo', *Scribners* (August, 1920), 146-154.

generation of the 1890s. Foraging, junking, shooting craps; the streets and 'prairies' (vacant lots) remained key places in working-class children's lives.⁶ A few things had changed, of course. Baseball had become hugely popular among second-generation immigrant youths as the twentieth century progressed. For Nick, a delinquent boy of fourteen whose life history was taken in the late 1920s and whose primary ambition in life was to become the next Babe Ruth, his love of baseball caused huge problems with his family. While Nick told his interviewer "[he]'d rather play ball than anything else", his family wanted him to work at his uncle's restaurant. Nick and his group, "the guys on the street," did occasionally play baseball on the street, but they normally practiced in the nearby Clyde Park. For a proper game, against an opposing rival team, presumably for money, groups like Nick's needed a proper field, and more space than the street could offer. When they weren't playing ball in the park, the group would go swimming, play tag, and hitch rides on cars and trucks. Baseball thus supplemented but did not replace street play.⁷

Clifford Shaw and Henry D. McKay, the criminologists who wrote the report on juvenile delinquency for the Wickersham Commission in 1931, referred to Nick's group of friends as a "play-group", not a gang. Four years previously, Frederic Thrasher had differentiated between play-groups and gangs. According to Thrasher, play-groups were simply spontaneous friendship groups among children. What transformed a play-group into a gang was conflict with neighbors, police, and other gangs, for example. Through conflict, Thrasher believed playing boys grew into delinquent trouble-makers.⁸

⁶ For example see the case histories cited in Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, 'Spirit of Delinquency Areas', in Wickersham Commission, *Enforcement of the Prohibition Laws*, vol. ii, 109-139.

⁷ Shaw and McKay, 'Delinquent Behavior', 3-22.

⁸ Thrasher, *The Gang*. There is much discussion over the correct definition for a gang. In this chapter, I concentrate on Thrasher and his definition. Not only was Thrasher the most prominent of the Chicago School criminologists, his work on gangs and delinquency have remained influential to the present day. Sheldon, Tracy and Brown wrote of *The Gang* in 2013: "[it is] "as relevant today as it was when originally published". Sheldon, Randall G., Tracy, Sharon K., and

Although play-groups usually didn't have the organized structure of gangs, they still provided some of the most important influences on a child's development. According to Shaw and McKay, the three most important influences on a child's development were the family, the play-group, and the neighborhood. In Nick's case, the rules and customs of the play-group contradicted the traditions and expectations of the family, and Nick chose the approbation of his peers.

Girls, even in the 1920s, were less likely to spend time on the streets than boys. Although Nick's younger brother followed him everywhere, his sister strongly disapproved of Nick's street life. A study from 1931 of children's street play in twenty cities across America consistently found that boys accounted for around two thirds of children on the streets.⁹ But if one-third of the street-playing children in the 1920s were girls, they featured even less in the early research on play-groups, gangs, and peer socialization. In Thrasher's seminal study of gangs, the topic "girls" in the index redirects the reader to the topic of "sex in the gang".¹⁰ Most research into delinquent girls focused on older, working girls who frequented dance halls and went out on dates. Theoretically at least, the "play-group" was very much a male phenomenon.

According to Thrasher and other sociologists, these play-groups were "gangs-in-embryo", or, as Thrasher argued "the majority of gangs develop from the spontaneous play-group."¹¹ Yet even if gangs tended to develop from play-groups, not all play-groups became gangs. Chicago School sociologists did not consider middle-class children's play-

Brown, William B., *Youth Gangs in American Society*, 4th ed. (Belmont, 2013), 195. See also Fraser, *Urban Legends*.

⁹ Reeves, Will R., 'Report of Committee on Street Play', *Journal of Educational Sociology* 4:10 (1931). 607-618

¹⁰ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 1st ed. (1927), 558.

¹¹ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 29

groups to be “gangs-in-embryo”.¹² A gang was a decidedly working-class group.¹³ Thrasher included two photographs of groups of young boys, one middle-class and one working-class, explicitly stating that if the middle-class group “were located in a slum, the group would probably be a ‘gang-in-embryo’.” Instead the middle-class group remained a “play-group” even into adolescence, mischievous, certainly, but not delinquent.¹⁴

While middle-class “play-groups” could consist of children and youth of any age, when sociologists documented groups in working-class neighborhoods they tended only to refer to fairly young children as “play-groups”. From the age of six or seven, working-class children, particularly boys, began to have an independent street life. Nick, at fourteen, was somewhat unusual as still being classified as part of a “play-group” rather than a gang. By the time the play-group members had reached their mid-teens, if not earlier, most groups had matured into most matured from gangs-in-embryo to fully-fledged gangs.

It was their age and the need to prove themselves that kept the youngest immigrant boys from joining gangs. But gang members would have used neither the term play-groups nor “gangs-in-embryo” to describe these younger boys who hung around on the streets of their neighborhoods, mingling with but not a part of gang life. Instead, older boys called pre-gang aged boys “punks”.

Punks

When Laddie P. was just a ten-year-old boy growing up on the West Side of Chicago in the early 1920s, he and his friends idolized the teenagers of the 42 gang, the most famous

¹² See also Hoyt, ‘The Gang in Embryo’, 146-154

¹³ While criminologists and law enforcement did not consider middle-class boys’ groups ‘gangs’, middle-class men, looking back on their own childhoods did use the word gang to describe their play-groups. These tend to be romanticized, Tom Sawyer-esque narratives, often set in rural or small-town locations. See for example Paul L. Benjamin, ‘The Pirates’ Den’, *The Survey* (May 20, 1922), 277.

¹⁴ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 33.

youth gang on the West Side. Many times, he recalled, they would sit across the street and stare at the gang members. Laddie was infatuated with their fancy clothes, their fast cars, and their talk of girls. If their admiration got too irritating, Laddie and his friends could expect an “Alright punks, beat it” from the 42s. If they were lucky, the punks would be allowed to watch the corner for “the heat” and holler if they noticed the police coming around. But, in general, at ten-years-old, Laddie and his friends were too young to be involved in the 42 gang.¹⁵

In gang slang in the 1920s, a punk was “a little boy”, a pre-adolescent like Laddie.¹⁶ It was a derogatory term to describe a young boy, a challenge to his masculinity, often used by older brothers referring to their unworldly younger siblings.¹⁷ Punks were decidedly not manly figures. Gang boys linked masculinity, especially for younger boys, to age as well as gender; the opposite of manly being both childish and feminine. Thus, boys who failed to live up to the masculine ideal, by such actions as crying, being cowardly, and caring too much about what adult authority figures said, would be mocked as a “baby” or “blubber” in addition to “punk”.¹⁸

Punk-hood was often visible in the clothes boys wore. Ernie O., for example, hated his “sissified clothes” that included a fashionable “Buster Brown” collar, a red bow tie and short pants, as shown in figure 31. Not only was a Buster Brown suit feminine, it also included the typical feature of pre-adolescent boys’ clothing: short pants. Ernie, loathing his Buster Brown suit and, desperate to shed the symbols of young childhood, used to steal

¹⁵ ‘Life History of Laddie P.’.

¹⁶ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 267.

¹⁷ ‘Life History of Tony D.’; ‘Life history of Carlo D.’.

¹⁸ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 340.

long pants from his older brother whenever he went out.¹⁹ Benny D. was also desperate for long pants, even before he entered kindergarten, and begged his mother to buy him a pair.²⁰



Figure 31: 'A drawing of a Buster Brown suit inside a pattern for the suit', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (July 19, 1903), 54.

But "punk" had more negative connotations than "baby" or "blubber" among boys in the early 1920s. A punk may have meant any young boy, but it also referred to a boy who allowed himself to be "used sexually" by other boys.²¹ Among prisoners, hoboes and seamen, punk usually referred to a youth who had sex with an older man in return for

¹⁹ 'Life History of Ernie O.' Interestingly a young Gene Kelley also remembered being jeered for being a sissy when he wore a Buster Brown suit. See Hirschhorn, Clive *Gene Kelly: A Biography* (Chicago, 1975) 27.

²⁰ 'Life History of Benny D.', LHC, b.46, fol.27 (5-5).

²¹ George Chauncey's study of homosexual life in New York in this period traced the usage of gay slang such as "fairies", "wolves", and "punks". As early as the 1890s, Chauncey wrote that "*Punk* generally denoted a physically slighter youth who let himself be used sexually by an older and more powerful man, the wolf, in exchange for money, protection, or other forms of support ... The punk's sexual character was ambiguous: he was often neither homosexually interested nor effeminate himself, but was sometimes equated with women because of his youth and his subordination to the older man." Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 88.

money, favors, or protection. In this context, punks were typically around fifteen or sixteen.²² Among Chicago's immigrant and working-class youth, however, punks who let themselves be "used" for sex could be far younger.

Punks were commonplace in reformatory culture. When Cuno C. was in the Juvenile Detention Home, a fellow inmate told him that "this here kid was a punk and that he took it in the ass." Cuno then spent a considerable time trying to "lay" or "moon" the punk. Unsurprisingly the reformatory officials frowned on homosexual behavior and tried to separate Cuno from the younger boys. As Cuno later told his interviewer: "I believe they didn't want to trust me with the kids because they were afraid I would moon some of the boys."²³

Sexual punks or moonboys also appeared on the streets. Laddie P. and his friend, Felix, had "a moonboy on the line", who let them "fuck" him in exchange for membership in Laddie's gang.²⁴ They never did let him in the gang though, and the boy eventually stopped coming after Laddie and Felix let another boy join in. Gang boys, like Laddie, looked down on moonboys, in this case using the promise of gang membership to get sexual favors without intending to let the punk join. If being the "punk" in a homosexual experience carried negative connotations, having the penetrative role proved widely accepted among the life history boys. At least eight of the interviewees openly admitted,

²² Chauncey, *Gay New York*. See also Anderson, Nels, (Dean Stiff) *The Milk and Honey Route: A Handbook for Hobos* (New York, 1931) According to Nels Anderson, few pre-adolescent boys were tramps. Of the young adolescent boy hoboes, Anderson wrote, they sometimes travelled in groups to protect themselves from the advances of older men. Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago, 1923), 137, 145. According to 'Box Car Bertha', lesbians also frequented the hobo trails around Chicago. Reitman, Ben, *Sister of the Road: The Autobiography of Box Car Bertha* 1st Nabat edition (Edinburgh, 2002), 47.

²³ 'Life History of Cuno C.'. See also 'Life History of Angelo F.', LHC, b.47, fol.38; 'Life History of Glenn O.'; 'Life History of Angelo S.', LHC, b.53, fol.12-11.

²⁴ 'Life History of Laddie P.'.

even bragged about, laying boys. Gang boys valued sexual experience in the dominant (penetrative) role with either boys or girls.

Because gang boys respected those with the right kind of sexual experience, girls proved useful to punks who wanted to prove their manliness. Some punks started trying to have sex with girls at a very early age. Angelo F. told his life history interviewer he first tried to have sex with a girl when he was just seven-years-old in 1922.²⁵ Robert K. first had sex with a girl when aged ten and Ernie O. told his interviewer he was twelve at the time of his first sexual experience.²⁶ These boys may have been exaggerating, but even as lies they suggest the value boys placed on early sexual experience with girls.

While punks respected older boys' ability to "lay" girls, many did not value friendship with girls.²⁷ Roy C., for example, who hung around with the older boys of the neighborhood in the early 1920s when he was eight, couldn't stand girls except for kissing games.²⁸ Being in love with a girl was even worse, and in fact lessened a boy's status. Carlo D.'s friend called him a "punk" when a pre-teen Carlo said he was in love with a girl.²⁹ Schools played on young boys' distaste for associating with girls, moving troublesome boys to sit with girls as a punishment for misbehavior.³⁰

Girls, unlike boys, could not be punks. One of only a couple of female life history interviewees in the collection, Mary M. liked hanging out with a group of boys as a young girl and was accepted by them. Although most of Mary's friends were girls, she spoke scathingly of them and made references to them as "sissies" for not hanging out with the

²⁵ 'Life History of Angelo F.'.

²⁶ 'Life History of Robert K.', LHC, b.48, fol.50 (7-7); 'Life History of Ernie O.'.

²⁷ With few exceptions, the life history boys only talk about having female friends in their early years on the street.

²⁸ 'Life history of Roy C.', LHC, b.45, fol.20 (4-2).

²⁹ 'Life history of Carlo D.'.

³⁰ 'Life history of Laddie P.'.

gang.³¹ But even Mary, who preferred the company of boys, spent most of her time with a her single-sex group of girlfriends. Girls' and boys' street cultures in the twenties tended to be fairly separate.

According to a study conducted by Northwestern University Settlement in 1917, girls from six to ten spent much of their time on the street or alleys. While younger girls mingled and played with boys, according to the study, from the age of eight upwards, girls began forming single-sex "cliques". The study did not use the word gangs to describe girls' groups. "The groups are never mixed," the study reported, "the girls belonging to cliques, and the boys to well-defined gangs."³² In addition to playing separately on the street, the study explained, girls continued to do considerably more housework and child-care than their brothers.³³

Yet, some girls refused to remain the passive, docile creatures of gang boys' imagination. When Angelo F. was just a young punk, he was friends with a girl whose sister, Florence, "was known around the neighborhood as a tomboy as she acted like a boy and did things that girls were not supposed to do... She certainly was a mean fighter."³⁴ One time Florence even interfered when Angelo had an argument with another boy. The boy mocked Angelo for having a girl protect him, and the crowd of children around them laughed. Angelo then felt the need to fight, his pride and masculinity at stake. Hanging around with girls jeopardized punks' status even when the girls tried to be just one of the guys.

Status, reputation, and masculinity dominated punks' concerns, particularly if they wanted to join in with older gangs. According to Thrasher, it was not uncommon to see

³¹ 'Life History fo Mary M.', LHC, b.56, fol.87 (15-8).

³² Palmer, V., 'Northwestern University Settlement Study of the Pre-Adolescent Girl', NUSAR, General Administrative Records, Series 41/1, b.44, fol.6.

³³ Palmer, 'Northwestern University Settlement Study of the Pre-Adolescent Girl'.

³⁴ 'Life History of Angelo F.'.

“punks” of just five or six smoking to demonstrate how grown up they were.³⁵ One boy Thrasher documented, who moved into the neighborhood of the Rough Stars gang in Chicago, wanted to go to school but, as he told Thrasher, the Rough Stars “started throwing things at me and calling me a sissy, until I joined them. I was out of school then fifty-six days.”³⁶ Not every young boy on the street wanted to join gangs. Sissies or stiffs, unlike punks, didn’t aspire to gang membership. The gang boys of the neighborhood would “look down on ... any good boy” and “them working stiffs”.³⁷

Most boys growing up on the streets of working-class, immigrant neighborhoods in Chicago did aspire to gang life. Fighting could separate a would-be gang member from the stiffs. As one life history interviewee Thomas told sociologist Anthony Sorrentino, willingness to fight was what separated him and the other “bad boys” from the “stiffs”:

The good boy worked when he could, and minded his business, and I guess we didn’t work and we didn’t mind our business. We were always getting in fights and that to impress people. A lot of the fights, I didn’t want no part of them, and they were just forced upon me, but I was more scared to say no than to fight. I had to live up to the name, you know, being smart or tough.³⁸

Fighting played a major part in shedding the punk reputation. When Thomas was fourteen and working in a restaurant, some “hoodlums” used to come in and call him “punk”. In response he’d pull off his apron, “throw it on the floor, and invite them outside.”³⁹

Boys like Thomas often had to fight to earn membership in gangs. Frank De Liberto fought every member of the neighborhood gang when he and his family moved to North Campbell Avenue in the 1920s.⁴⁰ Fighting demonstrated a boy’s masculinity and his courage or gameness. Figure 32, an undated photograph taken near the Northwestern

³⁵ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 100.

³⁶ Ibid., 166.

³⁷ ASP, b.1, fol.5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ IAC, b.15, fol.175. See also, ‘Life History of Robert K.’ and Thrasher, *The Gang*.

University Settlement in the early twentieth century, shows one punk in short pants about to start a fight, possible showing off to the older boys, clearly egging him on. But boys also had to demonstrate gameness for stealing and other activities, not just fighting. Roy C., who grew up on the North Side in the 1920s, was shunned by his gang when he refused to steal in 1926. Feeling excluded and jealous of their new money and nice clothes, Roy gave in and proved his worth by breaking into a drug store and stealing \$11.⁴¹ After that Roy was accepted back into the gang's fold; gameness ensured his standing.



Figure 32: Children on the street near Northwestern University Settlement, NUSAR, Scrapbooks, 1917-1984, series 41/7., b.18, fol.2.

Not all boys joined existing gangs. Some started their own, often in imitation of the older gangs of the neighborhood. Many established gangs, particularly SACs, in Chicago had recognized “junior” or “midget” divisions. Often this modelling was less official.⁴² Cuno C., for example, was a member of a gang whose leader had an older brother that

⁴¹ ‘Life History of Roy C.’, for more examples see Thrasher, *The Gang*.

⁴² Thrasher, *The Gang*.

taught him “all the rackets.”⁴³ Sometimes the older boys in gangs used the younger boys for certain crimes, knowing that if the police caught the punks they would likely just release the younger boys.⁴⁴ In return the punks got a share of the profits and a share in the gang’s reputation.

Gang membership affirmed a punk’s status, but other factors also motivated boys to join gangs. Protection on the streets played a big role. Ernie O. got into a fight with a boy on the schoolyard when he was a little punk in the third grade. The boy and his gang then waited for Ernie on the street after school to beat him up. After that, Ernie decided to “arrange” his own gang, reasoning that if there was going to be a fight, he’d “just as well make it a good one.”⁴⁵ The thrill of gang life also tempted boys to join gangs. Stanley, the boy in Clifford Shaw’s published life history ‘The Jack-Roller’, was fascinated with the street life of the older boys in his neighborhood. To Stanley, being in the gang “was freedom and adventure” especially compared to his miserable home life. Stanley, aged eight, listened to the stories of the older guys’ lives and longed “to go out and achieve some of the glories” for himself.⁴⁶ For life history interviewee Mario and his friends, it was the older boys’ obvious money which piqued their interest in gang life. Watching the older gang on the block, Mario and his fellow punks, “would see older fellows flash twenty-dollar bills... these guys made easy dough in all kinds of rackets. And seeing this we younger kids would get a taste for some easy dough too.”⁴⁷ Benny D. confirmed that money motivated punks to join gangs:

I think ‘envy’ is the cause of a lot of boys getting in trouble. For instance, a hoodlum comes down the street in a new car all dressed up and there are two little boys standing

⁴³ ‘Life History of Cuno C.’.

⁴⁴ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 258.

⁴⁵ ‘Life history of Ernie O.’.

⁴⁶ Stanley’s Own Story, in Shaw, *The Jack-Roller*, 57.

⁴⁷ For the etymology of ‘a racket’ meaning a scheme for dishonestly making money see Lombardo, Robert M., *Organized Crime in Chicago: Beyond the Mafia* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 2013), 94. Life history of Mario, ASP, b.1, fol.15.

on the curb and one little boy says to the other 'some day I'm going to make a lot of money and get a car like that'.⁴⁸

For these boys, then, money, status, adventure, and protection pulled them into gangs even as diminishing opportunities for work and boredom pushed them there. "As young punks what could we do?" Mario told his life history interviewer, "We didn't like school and we were too young to work so there was nothing to do but hang around the street or candy store or the poolroom."⁴⁹ Unsurprisingly then, many if not most punks from working-class immigrant neighborhoods joined gangs. Once a boy was accepted into gang life, he would not remain a punk for long, he would become a hoodlum.

Hoodlums

Street-frequenting youths and social scientists alike referred to gang members as hoodlums. Sometimes used synonymously with gangster, thug, or criminal, hoodlums were actually subtly differentiated from the other "types".⁵⁰ Sociologists in the 1920s used the term "hoodlum" quite specifically. Thrasher presented an extensive (and influential) definition of hoodlumism in *The Gang*:

The hoodlum is a definite social type. He takes particular delight in interfering with the orderly pursuits of business and pleasure which he sees about him and indeed, often enough, which may have been planned for his own benefit. He breaks up a party, eggs a speaker, molests school children, taunts women and girls on the streets, or engages in petty thievery of personal belongings. He is a vandal; it seems to give him pleasure to despoil and destroy property wherever opportunity arises. He does not hold a job. He is often on the streets or the poolrooms. He is a loafer and idles away countless hours in smoking, gambling, and rough horseplay... He is, in brief, a thoroughly disorganized (or, if you like, unorganized) person, and if the trend of his present evolution is carried far enough, he is pretty likely to develop into a criminal.⁵¹

⁴⁸ 'Life history of Benny D.'.

⁴⁹ 'Life history of Mario'.

⁵⁰ This is especially true of popular culture, see for example *Hoodlum* (1997) directed by Duke, Bill [Film] USA: United Artists.

⁵¹ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 394.

While certainly a thief and involved in various illegal activities, a hoodlum was thus “a proto-criminal, not yet the fully formed entity.”⁵²

A hoodlum was quite different, therefore, from the gangster. A gangster was a serious, fully-formed criminal. With the cartelization of vice businesses under prohibition, suppliers of alcohol replaced the owners of disreputable venues as the wealthiest men in vice. The gangster was a member of the syndicate, a businessman in a criminal business organization. He was a very mobile figure, making use of automobility to evade police crackdowns and to maintain the illicit network of production and supply of liquor. Unlike the indolent pimp – the archetype of masculinity in the sporting world prior to World War One – whose women had brought him money, the gangster was a go-getter, earning money for himself and supporting his women.⁵³ Gangsters were the top of the Prohibition underworld. To get there, Judge Hoyt of the New York Juvenile Court suggested a gangster developed out of regular adolescent gangs.⁵⁴ A hoodlum was thus a pre-gangster. More akin to the Australian term “larrikin” or the British “hooligan”, hoodlums were “loafing youths of mischievous proclivities.”⁵⁵

Popular culture of the time also differentiated between hoodlums and gangsters. The classic gangster movie, *The Public Enemy*, actually defined its main character, the titular “public enemy”, Tom Powers, as a hoodlum not a gangster. Powers, played by James Cagney, may have been involved in the syndicate, but he was very young. At the start of the film, Powers was a small boy growing up on the street and was just in his early twenties

⁵² Richard Maltby, ‘Why Boys Go Wrong: Gangsters, Hoodlums and the Natural History of Delinquent Career’, in Lee Grieveson, Esther Sonnet, and Peter Stanfield, (eds.), *Mob Culture: Hidden Histories of the American Gangster Film*, (Oxford, 2005), 441-66; see also Thrasher, *The Gang*.

⁵³ Keire, *For Business and Pleasure*.

⁵⁴ Hoyt, ‘The Gang in Embryo’.

⁵⁵ Bryce, James, *The American Commonwealth*, vol. iii (London, 1888), 236.

at the end. In contrast, the film referred to Nails Nathan, a much older member of the mob, as a gangster not a hoodlum.⁵⁶

The age boundaries of “hoodlumism” were not well-defined. Boys as young as nine-year-old “Fatty” could earn the title “hoodlum” or “hood”, but this was fairly uncommon.⁵⁷ Hoods tended to be adolescents. Unlike punk, hoodlum was not a derogatory term among gang boys. When teenager Ernie O. and his friends saw their crimes covered in the newspapers under the headline “Hoodlums are attacking innocent men in a slightly inebriated condition, and beating them up”, they felt “kind of tough”, pleased to be regarded as hoodlums.⁵⁸ Boys actively wanted to be hoodlums or “hoods” and would seek out ways to earn the name.⁵⁹

Hoodlums developed a somewhat different culture from the younger “punks”. Most hoods had moved on from the money-making activities of younger childhood such as junking and opportunistically stealing goods from stores and abandoned houses. Instead, while still opportunistic, they tended to steal money more directly and to plan their criminal activities such as preying on drunks or robbing trucks that drove through their neighborhoods. “Jack rolling”, beating up and stealing from drunks, was so common among hoodlums that the most famous published life history of a delinquent boy was entitled “The Jack-Roller”.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ruth, David E, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago, 1996); *The Public Enemy* (1931), directed by Wellman, William A., [Film] USA: Warner Bros.

⁵⁷ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 395.

⁵⁸ ‘Life History of Ernie O.’.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Tony D., who bought his clothes at a shop because his friend told him that’s where all the hoods shop. ‘Life History of Tony D.’.

⁶⁰ Jack rolling or beating up and stealing from drunks was such a common trope among hoodlums that the most famous published life history of a delinquent boy was entitled ‘The Jack-Roller’. Shaw, *The Jack Roller*.

Some gangs had specific “rackets” in which they specialized. In the early 1920s, for example, Mike F. and his gang concentrated on stealing pigeons.⁶¹ Fifteen-year-old Angelo F.’s gang’s racket, sticking-up stores, was more violent.⁶² According to Stanley “The Jack-Roller”, rackets changed with age. While the “little fellows” stole and broke into freight trains, “the older guys did big jobs like stick-up, burglary and stealing autos.”⁶³ Stanley’s own racket at the time was stealing from peddlers, but later he and a friend specialized in seducing, beating, and robbing homosexual men.⁶⁴ This racket was known as “playing the fruits” and was also a favorite of Anthony M.⁶⁵ Sometimes, in this racket, the young hoods actually had sex with the target, as was the case with Anthony’s friend Angie, and accepted money as payment.⁶⁶

A good racket could bring in considerable amounts of money to young hoodlums, giving them the resources to buy flashy clothes and even cars. More commonly, hoods used money to access new spaces of commercial leisure. Philip M., who explained that he started stealing because he wasn’t old enough to get a job, spent his earnings at “shows and zoo parks and every place where we could have a good time and spend money.”⁶⁷ By the 1920s cheap movie theatres proved extremely popular among young people. Of one hundred gang boys Thrasher interviewed about movies, the average boy attended the movies three times a week, a third went daily.⁶⁸ Few hoodlums saved any of their earnings, instead pouring money back into the commercial recreation of the city.

⁶¹ ‘Life History of Mike F.’,

⁶² ‘Life History of Angelo F.’.

⁶³ *The Jack Roller*, 54.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁵ ‘Life History of Anthony M.’.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ ‘Life History of Philip M.’

⁶⁸ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 102.

Importantly, with enough disposable income hoodlums could treat girls. Fifteen-year-old Tony D., who called himself a hood, spent most of his money on clothes and taking girls out.⁶⁹ Mike F. even explained his thieving by telling his interviewer that when he started dating girls, he needed a lot of money.⁷⁰ Boys often took girls to motion picture houses where horrified reformers believed the darkness encouraged boys to “slyly embrace the girls near them and offer certain indignities.”⁷¹ Girls frequently relied on these treats to access new leisure spaces. Even working-girls seldom had enough disposable income to pay for commercial amusements themselves.⁷²

Some girls took to the rackets in order to earn extra money for themselves. According to youth gang researchers Randall Shelden, Sharon Tracy, and William Brown, girls’ involvement in gangs took three forms: membership in an independent girl gang, equal member in a male gang, or a female auxiliary of a male gang.⁷³ All three types could be found in Chicago in the early twentieth century.

Occasionally, girls joined or started independent girl gangs. In 1912, Jane Addams noted:

[the] desire for adventure also seizes girls. A group of girls ranging in ages from twelve to seventeen was discovered in Chicago last June, two of whom were being trained by older women to open tills in small shops, to pick pockets, to remove handkerchiefs, furs and purses and to lift merchandise from the counters of department stores.⁷⁴

Girls like this gang participated in a variety of rackets to make money and steal coveted merchandise. But either girl gangs were exceptionally good at avoiding capture or they

⁶⁹ ‘Life History of Tony D.’.

⁷⁰ ‘Life History of Mike F.’.

⁷¹ Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil*, 247.

⁷² Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*.

⁷³ In general, gang research as a whole has downplayed the role of girls in gangs. See Shelden, Tracy, and Brown, *Youth Gangs*, chapter 5.

⁷⁴ Addams, *The Spirit of Youth*, 67.

participated in these rackets much less frequently than boys. Unlike boys, girls tended to appear in the Juvenile Court on immorality charges rather than for theft.⁷⁵

Some girls did become accomplished criminals, however. If they were boys, they would have been considered hoodlums, but as girls they were “gun girls” or “gun molls”.⁷⁶ The word “moll” also meant girlfriend in hoodlum culture, and many gun molls may have got their start in gang life as girlfriends to male members.⁷⁷ Gun molls tended to work within male gangs. According to Thrasher, “Gangs composed entirely of girls [were] exceedingly rare.”⁷⁸ Yet, gun molls did not play peripheral roles in mixed-sex gangs. Eddie H.’s girlfriend, Mercedes, earned the title “queen of the auto bandits” because she developed such a proficiency in the motorcar racket.⁷⁹ One female gang member included in Thrasher’s study, twenty-one-year-old gun moll Honey, led her own gang. “It is alleged that her gang has engaged in numerous robberies and that she was accustomed to threaten them with a gun if they ‘got yellow’.”⁸⁰ But even Honey’s gang was ninety percent male, Honey being the only girl. Early twentieth century gangs were predominantly male.

A good spot to run a racket added value to a gang’s territory, which other gangs had to respect. Gangs of younger boys like Carlo D.’s gang chose where to steal based on a shared knowledge of gang territories. When they decided to rob passing trucks, the boys settled on using the intersection at Harrison and Morgan, a couple blocks north of a rival gang that they knew played the truck racket at Polk and Morgan.⁸¹ However, most hoodlum rackets in the 1920s tended to require mobility rather than a spot of “prime real

⁷⁵ See Knpfer, *Reform and Resistance*, 197-199.

⁷⁶ Thrasher wrote a chapter for his book entitled ‘The Gun Girl’ but it was never published. Thrasher, Frederic, ‘The Gun Girl’, EBP, b. 139, fol. 6.

⁷⁷ Laune ‘The Good Hoodlum’, EBP, b.133, fol.8.

⁷⁸ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 228. See also Shelden, Tracy and Brown, *Youth Gangs*, chapter 5.

⁷⁹ ‘Life History of Eddie H.’.

⁸⁰ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 241.

⁸¹ ‘Life History of Carlo D.’.

estate” which characterized the drug-selling and truck-looting rackets. Whether burglarizing stores, holding-up drunks, or stealing autos, hoodlums’ rackets involved searching the city and moving around, not waiting on street corners.

Race and ethnicity also played a role in who gang members targeted in their rackets. John K., a Lithuanian teenager, and his gang specialized in holding up Greek restaurants.⁸² Anthony M., who spent his time with Italian and Irish boys, told his interviewer that everyone used to “bother” the Jews.⁸³ David D., on the other hand, refused to burglarize stores in Chicago’s Chinatown, as he told his interviewer, “I kinda was scared of Chinese they were some bad luck to me I just couldn’t get used to them.”⁸⁴

Largely due to the restraints on their mobility, African-American gangs tended to target other black Chicagoans, as well as white pleasure seekers within the Black Belt.⁸⁵ With strict color lines defining where black youths could go, the Black Belt served as the prime territory for young black jack-rollers and the steady stream of drunk pleasure seekers frequenting the commercial leisure spaces of State Street provided ample opportunities for black hoods.⁸⁶ By 1920, drug-dealing had also moved into the Black Belt, and street corners became important sites to sell and buy illicit substances.⁸⁷ Unlike the mobile jack-rollers and auto thieves, drug-dealers were much more stationary, waiting on known street corners for customers to come to them, a good racket for black boys unable to venture around the city with the ease of their white peers. Young black gang members found

⁸² ‘Life History of John K.’, LHS, b.48, fol.49 (7-6).

⁸³ ‘Life History of Anthony M.’.

⁸⁴ ‘Life History of David D.’.

⁸⁵ Jaffe, ‘Negro Delinquent Gangs’.

⁸⁶ Light, Ivan, ‘The Ethnic Vice Industry, 1880-1944’ *American Sociological Review*, 42:3 (1977), 462-479

⁸⁷ Spillane, Joseph, ‘The Making of an Underground Market: Drug Selling in Chicago, 1900-1940’, *Journal of Social History* 32:1 (Autumn, 1998), 27-47; Bingham Dai, *Opium Addiction in Chicago* (Shanghai, 1937).

themselves with a different range of rackets available to them than the white hoodlums in other parts of the city.

The CCRR and many of the social scientists in 1920s Chicago mainly considered gangs a white phenomenon. As the CCRR reported:

Negro hoodlums do not appear to form organized gangs so readily. Judges of the municipal court said that there are no gang organizations among Negroes to compare with those found among young whites.⁸⁸

According to Robert Lombardo, it was not until 1974, that any scholar (in this case Francis Ianni) suggested that African-Americans could form any criminal organizations as sophisticated as white gangs.⁸⁹

But African-American gangs were in many ways similar to white immigrant gangs. According to A. J. Jaffe who wrote an ethnography of black gangs in Chicago in the late 1920s, the groups could be “quite powerful and well organized”.⁹⁰ Like white immigrant hoodlums, African-American hoodlums made money through a mixture of legal, semi-legal, and illegal opportunistic activities like selling ice creams, shoplifting, and “rolling” drunks.⁹¹ Furthermore, even while criminologists denied black gangs’ existence, the police were already cracking down on African-American boys’ delinquency. The Wickersham Commission reported that throughout the twenties African-American children in Chicago were arrested at far higher rates than any other group including first- and second-generation immigrants.⁹²

⁸⁸ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 11-17, this was the extracted in Thrasher, *The Gang*, 203.

⁸⁹ Lombardo, Robert M, ‘The Black Mafia: African-American Organized Crime in Chicago 1890-1960’, *Crime, Law & Social Change* 38 (2002), 34.

⁹⁰ Jaffe, ‘Negro Juvenile Gangs’.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Shaw and McKay, ‘Characteristics of Delinquency Areas’, 81.

While non-white gangs clashed with the police, some white gangs received virtual immunity from arrest. The social athletic clubs proved particularly well insulated from adult interference.

Athletic Clubs

Young children did participate in racial violence in Chicago in the 1910s and 1920s, but many of the most infamous rioters were members of Chicago's SACs. One of the recommendations the CCRR made in the conclusion of its report on the Race Riot of 1919 was that the police should "pay particular attention" to the South Side's "athletic clubs", search them for arms, and, if necessary, close them down.⁹³

In a riot characterized by its violence, one club, known as Ragen's Colts, stood out as especially vicious.⁹⁴ In 1919, the athletic club was fairly well-established, having been founded in 1900 by Frank Ragen in the Stockyards neighborhood. By 1912, the club had chosen the name of Ragen's Colts in honor of its founder and patron. It boasted of its strength by adopting the motto "Hit me, and you hit 2000."⁹⁵

The Colts were just one of around three hundred athletic clubs in Chicago in the 1910s and 1920s. Others included the Aylwards, Our Flag Club, the Emeralds, the Mayflower, and the Hamburg Athletic Club, to which future Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley belonged.⁹⁶ Many of the clubs were ostensibly Irish-Catholic organizations predominately situated in the old Irish neighborhoods of the South Side – Canaryville and Hamburg. Their membership was mainly adolescents and young men. Daley's biographers

⁹³ CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 641

⁹⁴ Ibid., 14, see chapter 4 for more on the Colts and the Chicago Race Riot.

⁹⁵ Tuttle, *Race Riot*, 199.

⁹⁶ It is highly likely that Daley, just a few years away from being elected the Hamburg AC's president, would have been involved in the violence of the race riot when his club were among the most predominant rioters. Daley refused to answer questions on the subject throughout his career. Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor, *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation* (New York, 2000), see also CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*; Thrasher, *The Gang*.

Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor described the SACs as “a combination of sports club, adjunct to the political machine, and youth gang.”⁹⁷ Like street gangs, athletic clubs partook in delinquent and criminal activities and policed the boundaries of their neighborhoods.⁹⁸

Sociologists like Thrasher dubbed SACs “conventionalized” or “formally organized” gangs.⁹⁹ In the process of conventionalization, a gang might adopt a constitution, by-laws, and even elect officers. Membership usually involved the payment of dues. Most athletic club members, according to Thrasher, were young men over sixteen. These “conventionalized” gangs often formed on their own initiative, but could also be formalized by an interested adult: a ward politician, or a saloon keeper for example.¹⁰⁰ Well-meaning child-savers also formed athletic clubs from which criminal gangs developed like one church club that became an automobile stealing outfit.¹⁰¹ Athletic clubs, once formed, could also have a junior division for recruiting new members. The O’Brien’s SAC, for example, had a section for fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds who had a clubhouse around the back of the regular SAC. Younger even than the juniors were “midgets”, such as the Jersey Midgets, a group of boys aged eleven to fourteen.¹⁰² These clubs gave a formal structure to the apprenticing of younger boys into gangs which occurred in clubrooms and poolrooms across Chicago. In figure 33 Lewis Hine captured this dynamic in a photograph he captioned: “teaching the young rider how to start. A common scene in Pool Room Branch.” With the older boys looking on, the young punk tried to demonstrate his skills.

⁹⁷ Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*, 17.

⁹⁸ For a damning report on SACs see CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*. Also, Thrasher, *The Gang*, 395-399.

⁹⁹ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 63.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 259.



Figure 33: Lewis Hine, 'Teaching the young rider how to start. A common scene in Pool Room Branch. St. Louis, Mo.', 1910, Records of the Children's Bureau, 1908-2003, National Archives, available online at <https://catalog.archives.gov/> (accessed, 27.03.2018)

Racial and ethnic divides characterized athletic clubs. SACs were almost exclusively white because, as historian John Hagedorn has demonstrated, black gangs lacked the patronage system which provided the route to conventionalization.¹⁰³ Irish athletic clubs had a reputation for attacking Jews, Poles, and Lithuanians as well as black Chicagoans.¹⁰⁴ Ragen's Colts' particular rivals were a Polish gang known as the Wigwams, but if the Wigwams were not around, the Colts would simply scour the Polish neighborhood looking for fights.¹⁰⁵ Like street gangs, however, ethnic lines were not always easily drawn. The

¹⁰³ Hagedorn, 'Race not Space'.

¹⁰⁴ Diamond, *Mean Streets*.

¹⁰⁵ Jablonsky, *Pride in the Jungle*

O'Brien's were certainly mainly Irish, but they also contained Scottish and Swedish members.¹⁰⁶

In one crucial respect, athletic clubs were differed from youth street gangs in that they had a permanent clubroom:

The older adolescent gang often meets on the streets, but usually tends to hang out in a poolroom, saloon or store of some sort. When gangs of this type become conventionalized (probably assuming the name of an athletic club) they attempt to get some definite quarters where they will be welcome to loaf or to rent a clubroom, oscillating between it and the streets or poolrooms as economic pressures dictate.¹⁰⁷

As Thrasher argued, athletic clubs didn't hang out on street corners, instead they would often rent a specific clubhouse. Theirs was a more indoor culture than other youth gangs, though not completely separated from the street. When Studs Lonigan, James T. Farrell's titular young hero in his novels about growing up poor in Chicago in the 1910s and 1920s, made his reputation fighting, he began calling his street friends "punks" and joins an older gang in their pool room.¹⁰⁸ When younger hoodlums tried to emulate the SACs, they recognized the clubroom as the defining feature: "every street gang in Chicago aspires to be an athletic club with rooms of its own."¹⁰⁹ These gangs would build shacks in alleys or, if funds allowed, would hire a basement or take over a poolroom to use as clubrooms.

Clubhouses gave gangs an identity, a meeting ground, and a place to hang out as well as engage in some of the sporting activities that gave them their title of athletic clubs. Although SACs did occasionally form baseball teams, they usually shunned the organized team sports and athletics that Progressive reformers lauded. Instead, boxing was the primary sporting activity in the clubhouses.¹¹⁰ The Colts boasted several renowned prize-

¹⁰⁶ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 258

¹⁰⁷ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 74.

¹⁰⁸ Farrell, James T., *Young Lonigan* (New York, 1932).

¹⁰⁹ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 396. See also the Apaches Athletic Association in Thrasher, *The Gang*, 58-59.

¹¹⁰ Thrasher, *The Gang* 59; Diamond, *Mean Streets*.

fighters and decorated their clubhouse with cups and trophies attesting to the fact.¹¹¹ Gaming and pool also became popular pastimes within the clubhouses.¹¹²

SACs sometimes used clubrooms for “the club dance”, though on occasion SACs would hire out larger dance halls. In order to boost funds, the club dance also allowed club members to bring girls into the clubhouses.¹¹³ Before Prohibition, the clubs would obtain bar permits and sell liquor at the dances. According to Thrasher “the liquor produced complete relaxation of all restraint and the wildest debauchery often followed the dance.”¹¹⁴ Although fun, club dances could prove dangerous events for girls. The police refused bar permits to one club because two girls had been raped at a previous party.¹¹⁵

Clubrooms provided a private place for gang members to bring women to rape. When a gang of seventeen- to twenty-one-year-olds who rented a poolroom got an eighteen-year-old Jewish girl to come in with them, six or seven gang members raped her. The proprietor of the poolroom called the rest of the gang, seventeen in total, and they all had a turn raping her. The girl spent three months in hospital. The gang members ended up in Joliet penitentiary.¹¹⁶ Although this was an extreme example, clubrooms did provide gangs with places to bring girls for sex, consensual or not.

The desire for a clubroom connected athletic clubs to urban politics. Many clubs had a patron (often Irish-American) who was involved in the city machine. Frank M. Ragen of the Colts served as a Cook County commissioner, while Aldermen Tommy Doyle and Joseph McDonough were Hamburg patrons and, indeed, former Hamburg presidents.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Tuttle, *Race Riot*, 199.

¹¹² Thrasher, *The Gang*, 59.

¹¹³ Girls, dating and dances were a big part of social club life. For more see McBee, *Dance Hall Days*.

¹¹⁴ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 233.

¹¹⁵ Louise DeKoven Bowen, *The Public Dance Halls of Chicago* (Chicago, 1917).

¹¹⁶ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 238.

¹¹⁷ Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*; Diamond, Andrew J., *Chicago on the Make: Power and Inequality in a Modern City* (Oakland, 2017).

The club patron would pay for the rent on the clubroom and other expenses. In return, the club members would help secure electoral victories. As one ex-member of the Colts recalled, “When we dropped into a polling place, everyone else dropped out.”¹¹⁸ Even when club members were too young to vote themselves, they were valuable to city politicians. In 1919, testifying to the CCRR, Jane Addams explained that while ward politicians had for many years targeted the young voter and the boy nearly of voting age, in the late 1910s, politicians had begun to support boys as young as thirteen and fourteen. In return for electoral loyalty, the patron paid the club’s rent, gave them “special privileges”, and kept the police from interfering in their activities.¹¹⁹

Concerned adults like Thrasher recognized that children and young people in athletic clubs were not swarming on the streets. In fact, Thrasher noted, the ward “heeler”, the political machine operative in charge of securing votes in a ward, acted like a bee keeper, getting swarming children off the streets. “The ward ‘heeler’ often corrals a gang like a beeman does his swarm in the hive he has prepared for it.”¹²⁰ But if child-savers recognized that athletic clubs “hived” children, they were by no means happy about it. The athletic club was not the sort of hive that produced good, worthy citizens capable of maintaining democracy. Instead the athletic clubs undermined democracy as, “every gang boy in the hive [wa]s expected to gather honey on election day,” by intimidating voters and maintaining party loyalty.¹²¹

For the years in the build up to the 1919 race riot, law enforcement had, by-and-large, turned a blind eye to the SACs’ more illicit activities, including voter intimidation. In the wake of the CCRR report, however, the athletic clubs suffered some setbacks. The police

¹¹⁸ Cited in Steven A. Reiss, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana, 1989), 96.

¹¹⁹ Jane Addams extracted in CCRR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 55; see also Thrasher, *The Gang*, 398.

¹²⁰ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 456.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 456.

forcibly closed several clubs that had been involved in the riots. But these closures were only temporary; many clubs re-opened in just a few months.¹²² The Colts continued and became increasingly synonymous with violence, so much so that their long-time patron and name-sake Frank Ragen announced he was severing ties with the club in 1922.¹²³ The Colts finally disintegrated in 1927 following a police investigation to a shooting at the clubhouse which revealed an arsenal of weapons including shotguns, pistols, and synamite.¹²⁴ In contrast, the majority of SACs continued to prosper and maintained, even strengthened their connections to the political machine.

Not all youth street gangs transitioned into the “conventionalized gang” or athletic club, however. The notorious 42 Gang, known in their neighborhood on the Near West Side as the “junior mafia” were a group of exceptionally well-organized hoodlums. Yet, for most of its ten-year existence – from 1924 to 1934 – the gang remained a street gang, only occasionally using club houses or political connections.¹²⁵

The 42 Gang

The original 42s started out, much like any other hoodlums, as punks skipping school in the early 1920s. Rocco Marcantonio, Pete “Mibs” Gallichio, and Louis Pargoni lived on the Near West Side and began truanting together in the seventh grade. Their first racket as small-time hoods involved stealing silk shirts from clotheslines. From there, they graduated to bicycle theft and stealing the tires from automobiles. The boys fell in with an

¹²² Elaine Lewinneck, *The Working Man's Reward: Chicago's Early Suburbs and the Roots of American Sprawl* (Oxford, 2014); See also “Clubs Closed by Riots Seek to Open Again,” *Chicago Tribune*, (August 23, 1919); “Three Athletic Clubs Raided on South Side,” *Chicago Tribune*, (September 12, 1919); CCCR, *The Negro in Chicago*, 12–17.

¹²³ Diamond, *Mean Streets*, 43.

¹²⁴ Lindberg, Richard C., *Gangland Chicago: Criminality and Lawlessness in the Windy City, 1837-1990* (Lanham, 2016).

¹²⁵ According to Landesco, the 42s were involved in election day intimidation but on a “bipartisan” basis, i.e. they worked for hire rather than for a longstanding political patron. Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang, JLP, b.1, fol.1, SCRC, UC.

older group of youths in their mid-teens to early twenties, including their notorious soon-to-be leader, Joseph “Babe Ruth” Calaro, a young man born around 1907. These older boys showed the younger ones the ropes of the lucrative automobile racket and how to pay off the police.¹²⁶

As the gang turned to more serious crime, it attracted more and more members from a gang network forged through the bonds of school, neighborhood play, and juvenile justice institutions. These boys were mainly teenagers, some as young as thirteen, and even a few punks as young as six.¹²⁷ The younger boys would form “mobs” of two or three around a more senior member, a form of syndication which marked the gang out as one of the most organized of all Chicago’s youth street gangs.¹²⁸

By 1925, the gang had grown to some fifty-eight members and adopted the name the 42 Gang.¹²⁹ John Landesco, a Chicago School sociologist who studied the gang in the late 1920s and early 1930s, conducted life history interviews as part of his research. One of the interviewees, an original member, told Landesco that the name came from the story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. The gang was like the Forty Thieves, except even bigger and even better.¹³⁰

The main area where the 42s operated was on the Near West Side, in the Taylor Street neighborhood. Cuno C., who grew up there during the 42s’ ascendancy remembered: “Most of the people were scared to walk on T[aylor] street after midnight because if they did these “42s” would stick them up and take all the money they had.”¹³¹ Despite their fear of the 42s, or perhaps because of it, Cuno and his friends were desperate to become

¹²⁶ Lombardo, *Organized Crime*; Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹²⁷ Lombardo, *Organized Crime*, 106.

¹²⁸ Lombardo, *Organized Crime*; Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹²⁹ Lombardo, *Organized Crime*, 104.

¹³⁰ Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹³¹ ‘The Life History of Cuno C.’.

members of the gang. Through this mixture of intimidation and aspiration, the 42s controlled the neighborhood.

The 42s proved particularly dangerous to girls. The gang members attacked, kidnapped, and raped women and girls they met on the streets.¹³² This violence towards women was a shared part of hoodlum culture. Around ten percent of the life history interviewees admitted to raping girls while still juveniles.¹³³ Often hoodlums perpetrated these rapes as a gang. Gang rapes or “gang shags” were, according to Thrasher, “in vogue among the older adolescent gangs” in Chicago in the 1920s.¹³⁴ In fact raping girls permeated the sexual culture of young hoods so much that Robert K. called the first time he had sex “attacking her” even though he asked his partner’s permission first.¹³⁵ For the 42s, gang rapes or “gang shags” proved such a common activity that an intersection near their poolroom became known in the neighborhood as Gang Shag Corner.¹³⁶

Some gangs, like the 42s, had rules over which girls could be raped or even dated. The 42s’ disdain for women meant they discouraged each other from having steady girlfriends. Their leader, “Babe Ruth” Calaro, believed women “were all squawkers”.¹³⁷ But, although they didn’t go steady with any one girl, the gang did date girls. The 42s were mainly Italian but the girls they dated were Polish, Jewish, German, Irish, and Scandinavian. Italian girls, the 42s “respected” and intended to eventually marry, the other girls were “for a ‘good time,’ for sexual exploitation.”¹³⁸ Having a brother in the 42 gang protected girls like Teresa DeFalco from all “the boys in the neighborhood” who knew if

¹³² Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹³³ See for example, Life History of Angelo M.’; ‘Life History of Philip F.’, EBP, b.136, fol. 6; ‘Life History of Cuno C.’; ‘Life History of Nick Y.’; ‘Life History of David D.’; and ‘Life History of Alfred S.’.

¹³⁴ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 137.

¹³⁵ Life History of Robert K. See also ‘Life History of Eddie S.’.

¹³⁶ Lindberg, *Gangland Chicago*, 232.

¹³⁷ Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹³⁸ Thrasher, Frederic, ‘The Gun Girl’, EBP, b. 139, fol. 6.

they “touched” Teresa or her sisters “they’d have the brothers to account to.”¹³⁹ Because of her brothers’ protection, Teresa told her interviewer “I was never afraid to walk around at 10-11 o’clock in that neighborhood because ... even though it was the 42 Gang era at that time, it was known that you were of that neighborhood. And they never touched you.”¹⁴⁰ If a girl was not from the neighborhood, particularly if she was not Italian, the 42s considered her fair game.

While the 42s did have a clubroom of sorts at a poolroom at “Gang Shag Corner”, at Elburn and Loomis, the 42s never formally rented a home like the SACs. The 42s certainly had the income for a clubroom, but, without the patronage of a local political leader, the 42s’ hangouts were subject to police “shake-downs”. To avoid the police, the 42s were a very mobile group, a street gang rather than an athletic club. Most of their crimes involved automobiles, gang members prized driving ability, and high-speed chases with the police were normal. When looking for something to steal, the gang would cruise around in a motorcar, sometimes for hours at a time.¹⁴¹

When they weren’t cruising, the gang tended to hang around street corners, where punks like Laddie P. watched them in admiration.¹⁴² 42 leader, Babe Ruth, in particular, was idolized among the neighborhood punks, an adoration he encouraged and used to recruit pre-teen boys for some of the more dangerous roles in the gang.¹⁴³ The youngest boys thus ran the greatest risk of arrest. Yet, due to their youth, they were much more likely to be released or let off with light sentences in the reform schools than the older 42s.¹⁴⁴ By proving their loyalty and taking risks, many punks eventually entered the 42s. By 1932, the

¹³⁹ Interview with Teresa DeFalco, IAC, series 1, b.15, fol.170.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Landesco, 42 Manuscript.

¹⁴² ‘The Life History of Laddie P.’.

¹⁴³ Lindberg, *Gangland Chicago*, 231.

¹⁴⁴ They were also the most likely to be shot and wounded, however. Landesco, 42 Manuscript.

Chicago Police Department estimated, probably too generously, that the gang had some 500 members, mainly Italians but also including Poles, Jews, Greeks, and Irish teenage boys.¹⁴⁵

The largely Italian 42s, unlike the traditionally Irish SACs, had less support from the urban machine that controlled Chicago's politics. The patronage system of Chicago tended to favor the more established Irish-American clubs such as the Ragen's Colts. The 42s showed their utter disregard for the rules of the machine when they robbed the C & O Cabaret, resulting in a gun battle in which five people were wounded. The cabaret was owned by the brother of William "Botchie" Conors, the political boss of the Near North Side.¹⁴⁶

Unlike the SACs, whose political connections protected them from the police, the 42s paid off corrupt police officers. The boys would laugh about the policemen, whom they viewed as small-time crooks. As one life history interviewee told Landesco "we thought the police were scums, shysters, they could be bought for so little."¹⁴⁷ But sometimes the police could not be bought, especially after 1927 when several members of the 42s murdered an unarmed junk peddler in a union dispute. The Chief of Detectives himself, William O'Connor, ordered police squads to "Pick up every member of the "42" gang and every other hoodlum you can find on the west side."¹⁴⁸

With such notoriety in the late 1920s, it became increasingly difficult for the 42s to escape police interference, and many 42s faced arrest and trial. Judges even made use of exceptions in the Juvenile Court Law for members of the 42s and sent some boys of sixteen

¹⁴⁵ Lombardo, *Organized Crime*. Lombardo traced 190 members through police reports and newspapers. The gang functioned, he argued, somewhat as an umbrella organization for juvenile delinquent gangs on the Near West Side during Prohibition.

¹⁴⁶ Lombardo, *Organized Crime*.

¹⁴⁷ Life History of an original 42 member, JLP, b.1, fol.2.

¹⁴⁸ Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

to the grand jury.¹⁴⁹ In retaliation, the 42s intimidated and even murdered those willing to testify against them.¹⁵⁰ On the occasions that members were incarcerated, the 42s threatened the institutions themselves. In 1928, for example, the 42s promised a machine gun raid on St. Charles School for Boys where a number of their members were housed. The superintendent of the school took the threat quite seriously and asked for the state militia to be stationed at the school.¹⁵¹ On two other occasions when 42s were incarcerated in St Charles, the gang simply drove to the reformatory and picked up the freshly escaped hoodlum.¹⁵²

Hoodlums like the 42s often were armed, but guns were not limited to “big shots” like the 42s. At least fourteen of the life history interviewees talked about owning and using guns, including boys as young as seven or eight.¹⁵³ Many of the guns were stolen, often from parents or stores.¹⁵⁴ Hoodlums were victims as well as perpetrators of gun violence. Chicago’s police didn’t hesitate to shoot juvenile offenders. Philip M., Jerry C., and Roy C. all reminisced in their life histories about policemen shooting at them.¹⁵⁵ A couple of policemen stopped Stanley F. in an alley after he had stolen something, then told him to get up and run so they could shoot him.¹⁵⁶ Police shot and killed Angelo M. aged seventeen in 1931, not long after sociologists had recorded his life history.¹⁵⁷ The police also shot and killed several members of the 42s in the late twenties and early thirties. Yet, in the case of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Chicago Tribune, (April 9, 1927), extracted in JLP, b.1, fol.1.

¹⁵¹ Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹⁵² Lombardo, *Organized Crime*, 110.

¹⁵³ See for example ‘Life History of Robert K.’; ‘Life History of Louis B.’; ‘Life History of Walter N.’, LHC, b.50, fol.9-5; ‘Life History of Angelo F.’; ‘Life History of Mike F.’.

¹⁵⁴ See for example ‘Life History of Walter N.’.

¹⁵⁵ For examples see the ‘Life History of Philip M.’; ‘Life History of Jerry C.’, LHC, b.45, fol.23 (4-7); and ‘Life History of Roy C.’.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Life History of Stanley F.’, LHC, b.46, fol.34.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Life History of Angelo M.’.

the 42s at least, the police were often under fire themselves; the gang killed at least four police officers during their reign.¹⁵⁸

The 42s may have been young, but they were an important part of the Chicago criminal landscape. The Chicago Herald and Examiner estimated in 1927 that the 42s had already been credited with automobile thefts valuing one million dollars.¹⁵⁹ By the second half of the 1920s, the teenage 42s were major suppliers of automobiles to the bootlegging gangsters in a variety of criminal organizations including Al Capone's.¹⁶⁰ In addition, many 42-trained hoodlums graduated to adult criminal organizations.

As a well organized, even syndicated, street gang, the 42s seemed to straddle the line between hoodlums and gangsters. Historian of Chicago's gangs, Robert Lombardo, called them gangsters, while the newspapers of the twenties interchangeably referred to the 42s as "gangsters" and "hoodlums".¹⁶¹ But the 42s themselves didn't consider themselves gangsters. As one "42" told Landesco "Don't call me a gangster. I'm not a gangster. I am only a 'hood'".¹⁶² The 42s thus differentiated between themselves and the men in organizations like Capone's Syndicate even though many aspired to growing up into adult gangsters.

Gangsters, Husbands, and Growing Up

Following the 1919 Race Riot, the coroner's report of the riot, which urged the city to crack down on hoodlumism, listed among the evils of hoodlumism that "from the hoodlum ranks come the automobile thieves, the automobile bandits, the hold-up men, the

¹⁵⁸ Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang; Lombardo, *Organized Crime*, 107.

¹⁵⁹ Chicago Herald and Examiner (November 28, 1927), extracted in JLP, b.1, fol.1.

¹⁶⁰ Lombardo, *Organized Crime*; Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹⁶¹ Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹⁶² Ibid.

rioters.”¹⁶³ According to the report, hoodlums graduated from their smaller rackets into organized and violent crime. Certainly, gangs like the 42s had links to organized crime and frequently used violence. However, not all hoodlums became gangsters in adulthood. Some hoodlums died or went to jail, but the majority simply grew out of hoodlum and street life through marriage and entered full-time employment.

By the time John Landesco wrote his history of the 42s in the 1931, many of the original members had been killed or imprisoned. “Babe Ruth” was killed by police in 1927, at the age of nineteen or twenty, while he was stripping an automobile. The police also shot and killed Louie Pargoni, another of the original 42s.¹⁶⁴ Several of the gang were serving sentences in Pontiac and other penitentiaries. Patsy Pargoni, George Schiulo, Frank De Luca, Angie Russo, Joe Leopold, Chucky Lombardo, “Two-Gun” Pep, and Sam Giancana were among those incarcerated in 1931 for crimes from rape to postal robbery.¹⁶⁵

Some of the 42s graduated into the adult gangster syndicates of Chicago. Sam Giancana, Sam Battaglia, Milwaukie Phil Alderisio, Sam DeStefano, and Leonard and Marchall Caifano, were but a few of the 42s who entered the Capone outfit. Giancana eventually climbed so high he achieved the status of don.¹⁶⁶ Many members of the SACs became renowned gangsters, as well. Gunner McPadden, who couldn’t keep count of the numbers of men he had killed; Stubby McGovern, a famous hitman; and bootlegger Ralph Sheldon were all former members of Ragen’s Colts.¹⁶⁷

While some gangsters in the 1920s were immigrants or migrants from elsewhere in the US, most of the Chicago-born ones had grown up in the poor slums of the city. Many

¹⁶³ ‘Coroner’s Report.’ Records of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, Microfilm, Roll No. 30-11, Micr. USA 388, VHL, University of Oxford.

¹⁶⁴Landesco’s account says Calaro would have been 24 in 1931, other accounts put him as older Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹⁶⁵ Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹⁶⁶ Sifakis, *The Mafia Encyclopedia*, 124.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 272.

of the older generation of gangsters had been born in the nineteenth century, and swarmed on the streets in the 1890s and 1900s.¹⁶⁸ As gangsters, these men had a different relationship to the streets than in their boyhood and adolescence. Bootleggers were distributors who moved through urban space. They required territorial control, but on the scale of multiple neighborhoods, not the corners and blocks of hoodlums or drug-dealers.¹⁶⁹ Unlike the neighborhood gangs, bootleggers like Torrio's, later Capone's, Syndicate based themselves outside of Chicago proper. Capone chose Cicero, a suburban township, as the base for the Syndicate. There the gang had some political protection and was able to operate gambling and liquor establishments relatively unmolested. Mobsters also relied heavily on automobility, and indeed, the links between the 42s and the Chicago Syndicate were based on the trade in stolen vehicles and a supply of good drivers. Those hoodlums who made the transition from the 42 Gang to the Syndicate, like Sam Giancana, often began work for the gangsters as drivers.

Young black hoodlums couldn't enter the lucrative business of bootlegging. On the other hand, drug-dealing of opiates and cocaine, which had moved to the Black Belt after the closing of the Chicago "Levee" vice district in the early 1910s, became a lucrative source of income for some African-American Chicagoans in the 1920s.¹⁷⁰ African-American criminal syndicates also ran speakeasies and nightclubs.¹⁷¹ Although pimps had long

¹⁶⁸ Lindberg, *Gangland Chicago*, 215.

¹⁶⁹ Lombardo, *Organized Crime*. After the crackdown on legal drug-selling at the start of the twentieth century, drug-dealers sold illegally from fixed locations throughout Chicago's vice districts. Many lived in the neighborhoods they sold in, even selling from their own residences. After 1920, street-selling became ever more important to drug dealers. See Spillane, 'The Making of an Underground Market', 27-47.

¹⁷⁰ One reason for the association between drug-dealing and vice was the high level of addiction among prostitutes. Spillane, 'The Making of an Underground Market', 27-47.

¹⁷¹ Lombardo, 'The Black Mafia', 33-65.

existed in black prostitution, black male pimping became “endemic” after 1920.¹⁷² However, the Black Belt’s most famous illicit industry was policy.

Policy was a type of lottery, in which players selected three numbers that they hoped would appear during a random draw. The draw took place in public, one common location was under the elevated line at 31st and State, or in gambling clubs.¹⁷³ Boys got into policy as drawers, the blindfolded boys who picked numbers at random, or runners, who took money and slips between stands and the bank. Eventually, youngsters graduated to running their own policy stalls, under the rule of some of the wealthiest black Chicagoans, the “policy kings”.¹⁷⁴ As a mark of the policy kings’ power, Capone made a deal with them – Capone’s gang would stay out of policy, if the black gangsters stayed away from the beer racket.¹⁷⁵ This they did, and the peace between the policy kings and the Syndicate lasted until after the Second World War. The rackets of black gangsters were notably more static than those of white criminal organizations like the Syndicate. Perhaps because of the dangers African-Americans faced on the wrong side of Chicago’s color line, by and large, black criminals worked in the Black Belt with their customers coming to them.

Many hoodlums left the gang life altogether as they grew up. Adult gangs were much rarer than juvenile and adolescent gangs and the adult gangs, even including SACs, accounted for less than a quarter of all the gangs Thrasher studied.¹⁷⁶ Some, like Rocco Marcantonio, one of the original 42s, decided the price of the racket was too much to pay.

¹⁷² See Blair, *I Got To Make My Livin’*.

¹⁷³ Lombardo, ‘The Black Mafia’, 47.

¹⁷⁴ Haller, Mark H., ‘Policy Gambling, Entertainment, and the Emergence of Black Politics: Chicago from 1900 to 1940’, *Journal of Social History* 24:4 (Summer, 1991), 719-739.

¹⁷⁵ Hagedorn, ‘Race Not Space’, 194-208.

¹⁷⁶ SACs of course did include boys as well as men, like 17-year-old Richard J. Daley. Thrasher, *The Gang*, 74.

Rocco had been a hoodlum, a stick-up boy, but had been shot and left disabled by it. He left gang life and, at the age of twenty-one, was working “in a shipping room.”¹⁷⁷

Marriage played an important role in the disintegration of youth gangs and the movement of delinquent youths into conventional adult life.¹⁷⁸ Although some of the 42s continued in the rackets after marriage, others like Frank Gallichio straightened up specifically because “a reputable Italian girl of a decent family refused to marry him unless he reformed.”¹⁷⁹ One of the boys in the neighborhood of the 42 complained to Landesco that “the gang started breaking up – guys going to jail, getting married.”¹⁸⁰ In fact, marriage as the end to gang life became such a strong trope in popular culture, that Irving Kahal and Willie Raskin released a hit song called “Wedding Bells Are Breaking Up That Old Gang Of Mine” in 1929.¹⁸¹

Marriage meant entering adulthood, entering the heterosocial leisure spaces of adult men and women, and leaving the streets. The Kahal and Raskin song included the lines “Not a soul down on the corner, that’s a pretty certain sign/That wedding bells are breaking up that old gang of mine.”¹⁸² The cover for the sheet music, as shown in figure 34, captured this transition: the lonely young man stood on his own on the street while his married friends were pictured indoors. Before Prohibition, the social lives of adults in immigrant, working-class Chicago centered around the indoor worlds of the saloon, and small drinking establishments run by Irish women, known as shebeens.¹⁸³ When

¹⁷⁷ Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹⁷⁸ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 36.

¹⁷⁹ Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ McBee, *Dance Hall Days*, 179.

¹⁸² Extracted in McBee, *Dance Hall Days*, 179.

¹⁸³ McGirr, Lisa, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (W. W. Norton and Company: New York, 2016). Adults, particularly German immigrants, did spend leisure time in outdoor drinking places (beer gardens), see Duis, Perry, *The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston, 1880-1920* (Chicago, 1983).

Prohibition started to kill off the neighborhood saloon, working-class men's drinking moved into the athletic clubs, the dance halls, and, for married men in particular, the home. Some saloons continued, camouflaged as vacant stores or soft-drink parlors, but private homes providing "home-brew" became even more important sites for drinking among both sexes. In general, women produced the moonshine for home-consumption, and sold the excess. For men with wives, home drinking with the family and with neighbors took on a new significance in their leisure lives.¹⁸⁴ To adolescent boys and bachelors who resented the threat marriage placed on gangs, married men spending their leisure time at home seemed like coercion not a choice. It is unsurprising, therefore, that when his interviewer asked Cuno C. whether he expected to get married, Cuno replied: "That's worse than prison. You get married you have to stay home, you can't go out."¹⁸⁵ Cuno associated marriage with a loss of the street life, having to go to work, and becoming a "stiff".

¹⁸⁴ McGirr, *The War on Alcohol*.

¹⁸⁵ 'Life History of Cuno C.'.



Figure 34: Kahal, Irving, Raskin, Willie, and Fain, Sammy, (1929), 'Wedding Bells Are Breaking Up That Old Gang Of Mine' [Sheet music], New York: Mills Music Inc.

But the choice for hoodlums growing up in gangland Chicago in the early twentieth century wasn't nearly as neatly divided as straighten up or become a gangster. The criminal underworld wasn't the antithesis to the law-enforcement or the law-making classes. In contrast, the worlds of organized crime, politics, and respectable occupations like firefighting or policing remained interconnected.¹⁸⁶ Men could occupy positions in the interrelated worlds of organized crime, urban politics, business, labor unions, sports, and entertainment at various stages of their lives or, even, simultaneously.¹⁸⁷ In 1907, one half of the forty-five police precinct captains in Chicago owned "questionable saloons", while six others ran prostitution rackets.¹⁸⁸

This amorphous social world was tied together by a variety of social and ethnic adult institutions, but also through childhood and adolescent bonds created in gangs and athletic clubs. SACs with their direct ties to urban politics served as useful springboards

¹⁸⁶ Howell, *The History of Street Gangs*.

¹⁸⁷ See especially the work of Mark Haller. Haller, *Illegal Enterprise*.

¹⁸⁸ Sutherland, Edwin, *Principles of Criminology*, 240.

for aspiring politicians and gangsters alike. The Hamburg AC for example, could count among its former members, State Representative Tommy Doyle, ward committeeman Hugh “Babe” Connelly and Richard J. Daley who got his start in machine politics while president of the Hamburg AC in the 1920s.¹⁸⁹ Some of the most famous names in the “sporting world” also started out as SAC members.¹⁹⁰ Dynamite Brooks, the famous saloon keeper, and prizefighting referee, gambling boss, and notorious racist who once denounced the Klan as a bunch of “nigger lovers”, and Davey “Yiddles” Miller, were both former Colts.¹⁹¹ Men like Hamburg alumnus Joseph McDonough who owned a saloon, a real estate business, and served as Bridgeport alderman, straddled the sporting world, the business world and the political world. As for the 42s, several of their members moved into these worlds where respectability merged hazily with the disreputable. Fat Ricco got into the family saloon (or officially soft drink parlor) business, and in 1931 was trying to make his way into the world of politics. Joe Roberti became a bodyguard of a well-known beer-boss-politician before he was stabbed to death by a rival in a love affair at the age of twenty-three. Landesco was unusually indirect when describing the fate of Sharkey Icola, except to say he had “gone straight on the city payroll under [Mayor] Thompson” and “had married an Italian girl who restrains him from gang life.”¹⁹² Once again, marriage had served to separate a young man from his gangs.

While the CCRR was correct in writing “from the hoodlum ranks come the automobile thieves, the automobile bandits, the hold-up men, the rioters”, in reality, men of all degrees of respectability came from the hoodlum ranks.¹⁹³ Many of these boys engaged in viciously racist activities including violence as children and adolescents. During

¹⁸⁹ Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*.

¹⁹⁰ The ‘sporting class’ participated in disreputable commercial leisure activities and commercial vice during the Progressive Era. See Keire, *For Business and Pleasure*.

¹⁹¹ Sifakis, *The Mafia Encyclopedia*, 272.

¹⁹² Landesco, Manuscript of 42 gang.

¹⁹³ ‘Coroner’s Report.’.

the 1919 race riot, boys from a variety of gangs and SACs had attacked and killed black Chicagoans. They took these memories and attitudes with them into all aspects of Chicago's politics, police forces, and unions. Back on the streets, they left a new generation of children just beginning in gang life.

Conclusion

While the child-savers through playgrounds and organized recreation had largely failed to organize children and transform the swarm into hives of productive citizens, boys proved much more successful at organizing themselves. Punks swarmed on the streets in the 1910s and 1920s, but they longed to join the more organized gangs of the hoodlums. Hoodlums divided the city among themselves, creating unofficial boundaries that limited each other's mobility. As they grew up, hoodlums spent more and more time off the street and in poolrooms, basements, and saloon backrooms. Some created their own institutions such as the SACs which had dues, constitutions, even charters.

The productive power of boys' organizations could be harnessed by outsiders with money or influence. Ward heelers used the SACs and gangs of hoods on election days to drum up support and eliminate opposition. Adult criminal organizations used the 42s to obtain vehicles. It is not unlikely that middle-class housing associations used hoodlums with a reputation for violent racism to intimidate African-Americans moving into neighborhoods like Hyde Park and Kenwood. The Ragen's Colts, for example, clearly had the skills and the materials for bombing. In exchange for their services to adults, youth gangs received money and protection from law enforcement and developed networks which provided jobs and positions as they moved into adulthood.

In *The Gang* in 1927, Thrasher had written: “[The gang is] passed on to a younger group destined to repeat the same cycle.”¹⁹⁴ For several generations this had been true, punks on the street grew into hoodlums in the clubs and poolrooms and then into adults in homes and factories and indoor workplaces. By the late 1920s and early thirties, this cycle was changing. For almost a decade, punks on the streets of the Near West Side idolized the 42s but the gang had started to disintegrate. Many of the original hoods had grown up, married and straightened out, moved on to adult criminal organizations, or been killed. In addition, starting in late 1931, in response to a string of high-profile robberies, Judge Francis Borrelli of the Des Plaines Street Court began to target the gang. Within days, the police hauled one hundred and thirty-four suspected 42s between seventeen and twenty-one into Borrelli’s court. A hundred and fifteen were released without charge, but this moment marked the beginning of a concerted crack down on the 42s. Alongside law enforcement, Landesco also contended that Capone helped to clear up the Taylor Street neighborhood. Gradually, Landesco argued, Capone brought the 42s under the control of the Syndicate, both to make use of 42 talent, but also to control the more unruly elements of the gang like original 42, Paul Battaglia who the Syndicate killed in 1938 after he conducted a series of robberies against them. With this absorption, the youth street gang that had prospered for nearly a decade became just another adult branch of the Syndicate.¹⁹⁵ Punks on the Near West Side continued to transition into street gangs, after the 42s disappeared, but they were less organized, less notorious, and more diffuse.

According to Robert Lombardo, the 42s were the last large-scale thieving street gang of Chicago. More than the other gangs the 42s were a product of their time. They made their name, and a good part of their money, stealing automobiles for the bootlegging gangs

¹⁹⁴ Thrasher, *The Gang*, 242.

¹⁹⁵ John Landesco, ‘Prohibition and Crime’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 163 (Sep., 1932), 120-129; Lombardo, *Organized Crime*.

of Prohibition. For their membership the 42s relied on the swarm of street children aspiring to join and garner the glory and riches of the older hoodlums.¹⁹⁶ In many ways the lives of the life history cohort resembled the swarms of children a generation before who had grown up on the streets of Chicago in the 1890s. Children still went junking, sold newspapers, and played on the streets. Their numbers and their destructive capabilities shocked and appalled many adults in the city. Yet, in certain respects their lives were quite different. New groups, particularly African-Americans and Mexican immigrants as well as the diverse range of Europeans changed Chicago's ethnic and racial landscape. Automobiles moved into the city in ever increasing numbers, changing the city's geography as well as providing youth gangs with new opportunities for crime. A huge array of regulations and institutions sought to control children's whereabouts, while, demographically, the numbers of children and young people declined. And, ever so slowly, concerns over organized gangs replaced the older fear of the swarm in child-saver and academic discourse.

¹⁹⁶ The SACs, unlike the 42s, survived long after the end of Prohibition. The Hamburg Athletic Club, Richard J. Daley's SAC, exists to this day, although adolescents and bachelors have made way for older people and couples.

Chapter 6:

Congestion

The End of the Swarm, 1920-1933

In 1933, E. Clinton Belknap, a master's student at the University of Chicago, conducted a study into the summer activities of boys in the Back of the Yards neighborhood in Chicago. Belknap reported:

Congestion is everywhere present. The streets, the alleys, the vacant lots, 'along the tracks,' the parks, the University of Chicago Settlement playgrounds, every place is jammed with boys and girls, large and small! This is not so unusual, however, when one is reminded that actually hundreds of children live within the boundaries of a single block.¹

This quotation, from 1933, gave the impression that children's street lives, at least in the congested neighborhoods, had changed little in the forty years since the World's Fair of 1893. This excerpt appeared to describe a swarm of children, and indeed Belknap found that children continued in many of the same street activities in the 1930s as generations of children before them. Children played, went junking, foraged, and stole on the streets of Chicago in the 1930s.

But the city had changed around children. By the 1920s, children had to share the streets with vast numbers of interlopers in the form of motorized vehicles. The rise of automobiles has played an important historiographical role in explaining changes to urban America and childhood in the interwar period. The rise of the automobile led to what some urban critics named "the death of the street" or at least the death of the multifunctional street where children had played, worked, and lived.² Even historians of automobility and

¹ Belknap, E. Clinton, 'Summer Activities of Boys Back of the Yards in Chicago', unpublished master's thesis, University of Chicago (1937), 104.

² Baldwin, *Domesticating the Street*, 4. Baldwin, himself, argued that the automobile did not 'kill' street culture but changed it, succeeding in forcing children off the main streets into alleys and sidestreets.

historians of childhood, who are particularly attuned to the contingencies of motorcar ascendancy have frequently reduced children to the obvious victims of the motor age. Historians have repeatedly employed the metaphor of war between children and cars, writing, for example, “not surprisingly, the cars would win the hostilities” and “ultimately, [children] lost the battle.”³

After all, the automobile did cause dramatic changes to urban life. As figure 35 shows, by the 1920s, automobiles lined the streets of Chicago and already caused huge problems of congestion. While pedestrians still used the sidewalk and crossed the street in a semi-disciplined manner, there seemed to many Americans little room in the congested motorized city for the playing child. The automobile also accelerated another trend that changed children’s street life, namely suburbanization. If the overcrowded tenements of the city had been the realm of the swarm, then suburban life encouraged supervision and limited children’s ability to earn and spend an independent income.

³ McShane, Clay, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York, 1994), 175; Chudacoff, *Children at Play*, 134. See also Blanke, David, *Hell on Wheels: The Promise and Peril of America’s Car Culture, 1900-1940* (Lawrence, 2007); Norton, Peter D., *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City* (Cambridge, 2008). The historian who has, more than any other, considered why the advent of the motorcar forced children from the streets of urban America is Viviana Zelizer in her 1985 book, *Pricing the Priceless Child*. Zelizer argued that the sacrilization of childhood by the early twentieth century made child accidental death intolerable to Progressive Era Americans. Looking at railroad, streetcar, and automobile deaths, Zelizer contended that the seeming epidemic of child accidental deaths led to the containment of children indoors. Historians of childhood, while they have built considerably on Zelizer’s conception of sacrilization, have not further examined Zelizer’s thesis that children’s accidental death forced adults to move newly sacrilized children indoors. Simon Sleight has hinted, in his book on children’s use of public space in Melbourne, that this thesis might be too simplistic, briefly mentioning that automobility merely exacerbated trends towards restricting children’s access to public spaces which had existed for decades. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless*; Sleight, *Young People*.



Figure 35: 'Crowds and automobiles and streetcar traffic on State Street, viewed toward the North from Madison Street', *Chicago Daily News*, (1926).

However, Belknap's study suggested that neither automobiles, nor the moral panic over accidental traffic deaths that ensued, destroyed children's street culture. In a variety of ways children, particularly adolescents, integrated automobility into their lives and used motorcars for mobility, leisure, and making money. Moreover, the changes automobility wrought on the city did not affect all children equally. While increasing numbers of middle-class white children moved to the suburbs, black and immigrant children, including growing numbers of Mexicans, continued to live in the city and maintained traditional patterns of street usage.

Yet, while children still did many of the same things on the street in the 1930s that their parents and grandparents had done since the 1890s, these children were no longer a swarm. Crucially, children in Chicago in the Depression Era, no longer dominated the streets as they once had. Whereas in the 1890s, adult labor and leisure mainly took place inside and vast numbers of children swarmed outside, in the thirties, adults increasingly

outnumbered children on the streets. As opportunities for work, marriage, and heterosocial leisure diminished, the cohort of children who reached adulthood during the Great Depression no longer graduated out of street life. This 1910s generation used the strategies of their childhood – junking, newspaper selling, flipping cars – to survive. The swarm, thus grew up, and with it, societal fears about urban disorder changed from swarming children to hordes of unemployed men.

This chapter considers how technological, economic, and demographic changes in Chicago in the 1920s and early thirties affected children’s street culture. If the Depression marked the end of the swarm as America’s city streets became congested with the unemployed, Americans in the 1920s, and even as early as the 1910s, feared automotive congestion and the dangers it posed for young urbanites. The Chicago Tribune even coined a new term, auto-slaughter, for the seemingly unprecedented numbers of children dying from traffic accidents.

Auto-Slaughter

On August 31st 1912, the Chicago Tribune reported the heroic action of Chicagoan Hubert Ludolph who “risked his life” to avoid hitting a child. The previous day Ludolph had been driving his automobile down Halstead Street when a small child ran in front of his vehicle. Ludolph swerved, pulling his automobile to the right, and narrowly missed the reckless child. His auto hit the high curb, but kept going, mounting the sidewalk. Ludolph was thrown from the motorcar, luckily escaping injury. A girl of six, Sophia Pankowski, was less fortunate, however. On the sidewalk, less than a block from her home, Sophia was struck by a wheel of the automobile. Somehow, Sophia also escaped serious injury and the three left the scene more or less unscathed.⁴

⁴ ‘Autoists Flee With Victim’, *Chicago Tribune*, (31 August 1912), 2.

Herbert Ludolph was just one of an increasing number of automobilists in Chicago who had to contend with swarming children at the start of the twentieth century. Automobility began in Chicago right at the peak of children's numbers in the 1890s. The first horseless carriage took to the streets of Chicago in 1892 and the city hosted its first automobile race as early as 1895. Accurate statistics on the numbers of automobiles in Chicago throughout this period remain hard to obtain. Not only do different sources offer quite different numbers of motorcars registered within the city, but, as historian Paul Barrett showed, few Chicagoans ever bothered to register their autos.⁵ Yet automobility certainly took off in the city and, according to Barrett, on the eve of the First World War there was one motorcar for every sixty-one Chicagoans.⁶ Despite fears over safety, the motor age showed no signs of slowing down after the First World War. The ratio of motorcars to people in Chicago narrowed to one in thirty by 1920, and one in eleven by 1925.⁷ A far cry from the elite plaything of the early 1900s, by 1930 the automobile was available to a large number of Americans. At the start of the thirties, one in four Illinois residents and one in six Chicagoans had a motorcar.⁸

Legislatures across the country increased regulation of automobiles and of motor traffic more generally, primarily to ease congestion and create an orderly flow of traffic. Thus in Chicago, in 1926, a new set of progressive traffic lights, staggered at each block, made traffic more ordered and faster.⁹ The city also sought to regulate parking, especially within the Loop, even creating an early "park-and-ride system" whereby shoppers could park in large parking lots at Grant Park and take the streetcar or bus into the commercial

⁵ Barrett, Paul F., *The Automobile and Urban Transit: The Formation of Public Policy in Chicago, 1900-1930* (Philadelphia, 1983).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁸ Committee on Traffic and Public Safety of the City Council of the City of Chicago, *The Greater Chicago Traffic Area: a preliminary report on the major traffic facts of the city of Chicago and the surrounding region* (1932)

⁹ Barrett, *The Automobile*, 157.

district of the Loop.¹⁰ Early efforts at disciplining automobility in the city often had more to do with easing congestion and increasing traffic speeds rather than decreasing traffic accidents.

Traffic deaths were not a particularly new phenomenon in urban America in the 1920s. Prior to the arrival of automotive vehicles, the majority of urban traffic was horse-drawn, and horse-dependence hardly provided a safe environment for city children. Deaths from automobile accidents far outnumbered those from horse-drawn vehicles in Chicago from 1912 onwards, but the number of fatalities from horse-drawn vehicles also rose.¹¹ Furthermore, the monstrous quantities of dung the vast herds of urban horses produced had fatal public health consequences. Although the medical community did not fully understand the processes of contagion and infection, urban dwellers recognized that inhaling horse dung dust hurt their health.¹² Alongside horse powered vehicles, trolleys, street cars, and the railroads all took their toll of pedestrians' lives. In 1920, streetcars and railroads took almost four times and five and half times as many lives as horse drawn vehicles in Chicago respectively, but automobile accidents took seventeen times the number.¹³

By the 1920s, "auto-slaughter" had come to dominate the numbers of traffic accidents and, perhaps most importantly, newspaper coverage of road deaths. The average annual death toll due to motoring accidents in Chicago between 1921 and 1925 was 597 while in 1928 it reached 884.¹⁴ The Chicago Tribune followed the rising number of automobile fatalities, running front-page stories with headline such as "Autos Take Toll of 400 Lives in

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Adler, *First in Violence*, 208.

¹² McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*, 44-52.

¹³ Adler, *First in Violence*, 208.

¹⁴ US Bureau of the Census, Census Statistical Report, (1930) available online at www.census.gov (accessed 05.01.2018).

200 Days”, “Motor Deaths Smash Cook County Record”, “Auto Toll in Year 19,000” (a nationwide total), and “Death Toll of Autos, 503”.¹⁵ To concerned Chicagoans, auto-slaughter seemed to be a particular problem for their city. In 1923, the Tribune reported that Chicago topped all the cities in the United States for automobile accidents.¹⁶ The statistic wasn’t remotely true, but Chicagoans believed it; their city seemed gripped by auto-slaughter.¹⁷

Many of the dead, as much as two-thirds according to one report, were pedestrians.¹⁸ Of these pedestrians, adults feared children were particularly vulnerable.¹⁹ The Tribune’s report on automobile deaths in 1924 noted in the sub-headline, 5,700 of the 19,000 dead in the United States were children.²⁰ In fact, almost every front-page news story the Tribune ran on auto-slaughter in the 1920s noted the seemingly high numbers of children among

¹⁵ ‘Autos Take Toll of 400 Lives in 200 Days’, *The Chicago Tribune*, (20 July 1925), 1; ‘Motor Deaths Smash Cook County Record’ *The Chicago Tribune* (4 May 1925) 1; ‘Auto Toll in Year 19,000’, *The Chicago Tribune* (25 April 1925), 1; ‘Death Toll of Autos, 503’ *The Chicago Tribune* (24 September 1923), 1.

¹⁶ ‘Chicago Motor Killings Speed to US Record’ *The Chicago Tribune* (22 April 1923), 1.

¹⁷ The US Bureau of the Census put Chicago at a distant second to New York in terms of the total number of automobile accidents for the period 1921-1925. Proportionally to population, Chicago was the more dangerous city in term of automobile accidents – having 21.7 automobile-related deaths per 100,000 people annually from 1921 to 1927, compared to New York’s rather better 17.0. Yet 21.7 was hardly the worst in the country, in fact of the fifty-four cities the US Bureau of the Census provided complete statistics for, Chicago came a mediocre twentieth, safer than such cities as Cleveland, Dallas, Pittsburgh, and Salt Lake City. While New Bedford was the safest of the cities considered, the city of Camden in New Jersey actually took the title of most dangerous city with an average of 34.7 deaths per 100,000 in the period 1921 to 1927. US Bureau of the Census, Census Statistical Report.

¹⁸ ‘Autos Take Toll of 400 Lives in 200 Days’, 1.

¹⁹ Statistically children, the most prolific users of the street were no more likely than adults to be run over and killed by automobiles. Consider, for example, the 1922 Chicago coroner’s records. That year automobile accidents killed 736 people. Of those 736, 403 were pedestrians, 180 were passengers in automobiles or trucks, while only 27 were automobile or truck drivers. Of the 403, the Tribune wrote, “no less than 89 children playing in the street were victims”. According to this report, therefore, in Chicago in 1922 the proportion of pedestrians killed who were children playing was around twenty-two percent. Considering Chicago’s youth population (19 and under) in 1920 was at least 35.4 percent, and that, as we have seen, children were perhaps the most prolific users of Chicago street space at this time, these statistics begin to look quite different. Furthermore, just over nine out of 100,000 children in Chicago were killed by automobiles while on the street that year. ‘Chicago Motor Killings Speed to US Record’ *The Chicago Tribune* (22 April 1923), 1.

²⁰ ‘Auto Toll in Year 19,000’, 1.

the victims.²¹ Across the country, people feared that children were paying the cost of the automobile age with their lives. In cities like Baltimore and New York, safety awareness groups held memorials for the child victims of street accidents, erecting monuments and holding parades.²² The winning poster in a Milwaukee safety campaign competition, shown in figure 36, depicted a motor-age pieta: a grief-stricken mother cradling her bleeding son in the shadow of the enormous automobile wheel that ran him over.



Figure 36: George Starkey, 'Keep the Kiddies Off the Street' (poster), reproduced in 'Winning Safety Poster', *Milwaukee Journal* (September 25, 1920).

By an unhappy coincidence, underlining the message of Starkey's poster, the very day the winning poster was announced, three children were killed in Milwaukee in automobile accidents. In one case a truck almost completely decapitated four-year-old Eugene Stuck.²³ Deaths like Eugene's demonstrated to the nation that automobility had drastically changed city streets, making them ever more dangerous places for children.

²¹ For example, 'Autos Take Toll of 400 Lives in 200 Days', *The Chicago Tribune*, (20 July 1925), p. 1; 'Chicago Motor Killings Speed to US Record' 1.

²² Norton, *Fighting Traffic*, 40-42.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.276 n.96.

As in the attractive nuisance cases, adults believed innocent, instinct-driven children could not be held responsible for accidents resulting from street play. Yet, where the attractive nuisance cases had absolved parents, particularly working parents, from responsibility, by the 1920s, American society increasingly blamed parents when children were hurt on the street. For all the sinister symbolism of the automobile in figure 36, the message of the poster was not aimed at the motorist. Instead, the caption, “Keep the kiddies off the street”, put the onus for accident-prevention – and, indirectly, blame for accidents – on to those in charge of children’s whereabouts, namely society in general, and mothers in particular. Parenting guides similarly stressed parents’ responsibilities in keeping their children safe from automobiles. “It is a self-evident fact that if a child is to play he must have a space in which to do so; to-day, with the ever increasing number and speed of automobiles, it is more than ever important to provide a safe place in which children may play,” wrote one author.²⁴ A good parent, therefore, kept a child off the streets and away from traffic.

When children had to be in street space, for such activities as walking to and from school, someone needed to teach them how to behave safely. Clearly, proper street behavior had to be learnt. Prior to the First World War, street safety campaigns, like the National Safety Council’s rather odd publication, *Sure Pop and the Safety Scouts*, had addressed a range of street dangers including a live electrical wire, a fire, railroad yards, and a collapsing bridge alongside automobility.²⁵ After the war safety campaigns aimed at children became increasingly focused on automobile traffic, particularly as automobile

²⁴ Alice Cora Brill, *Your Child and His Parents: A Textbook for Child Study Groups*, (New York 1932), 138. A child study group was a group usually composing of mothers organized to study and respond to problem with their children. These groups tended to be particularly interested in child psychology and in receiving modern, expert knowledge about child rearing. The Child Study Association of America existed from 1892 to 1970 but gained a lot of support during the 1920s and 1930s.

²⁵ Bailey, Roy Rutherford, *Sure Pop and the Safety Scouts* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, NY, 1915).

companies became the biggest supporters of national safety campaigns. Traffic safety entered school curricula, portraying the streets as dangerous places for children. In Chicago, the Board of Education produced safety education texts which included adapted nursery rhymes like this variant on Little Miss Muffet:

Little Miss Muffet,
Instead of a tuffet,
Sat on the curb one day.
Along came an auto,
And soon she got caught,
Her dress having got in the way.²⁶

Schoolchildren learned songs like this one around the country, with over eighty-five percent of elementary schools including traffic safety in the curriculum by 1932.²⁷ As nursery rhymes, these campaigns clearly targeted very young children, teaching them street discipline even before they could read.

Older children, particularly adolescents, failed to follow the street discipline safety campaigns urged. In fact, since the beginning of automobility in the city, children had been perpetrators not just victims of auto-slaughter. On October 14th 1912, the Chicago Tribune reported that Peter Liguriote, a nine-year-old, had been knocked down and killed by an automotive taxicab.²⁸ A quintessential young victim of the motor age, Peter and others like him symbolized the evils of automobility in safety campaigns. But, in this case, the Tribune reported Peter's death below the news of another, quite different, story of automobile death. This story concerned Charles Shultz, a thirteen-year-old Chicagoan, who was not a victim of an automobile accident, but rather the errant driver. Charles had borrowed the motorcar from his father, a contractor from the working-class Polish neighborhood of Bucktown. Reversing to make a turn, Charles hit and killed seventy-year-old Mrs Smith

²⁶ From a 1923 book *Safety Education*, quoted in Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, 40.

²⁷ Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, 42.

²⁸ 'Boy Autoist Kills Woman', *The Chicago Tribune* (14 October 1912), 3.

who was walking to church with her grandson.²⁹ Stories like those of Charles Shultz complicate our understanding of the relationship between children and automobiles. Not all children drove, but then not all children were involved in accidents and many children had a relationship to motorcars that went far beyond victimhood. As numbers of automobiles rose in the 1920s, so did children's access to motorcars. Often children merged cars into their unsupervised street play.

Street Culture

Benny D. grew up on the Near West Side in the 1920s. He reminisced to his life history interviewer about how he and the other punks used to watch enviously as the older boys drove up and down the block, wanting to emulate them when they grew up. As Benny explained: "a hoodlum comes down the street in a new car all dressed up and there are two little boys standing on the curb and one little boy says to the other 'some day I'm going to make a lot of money and get a car like that.'"³⁰ Benny's story demonstrated that boys on the streets valued the ability to drive and access to motorcars, but also showed that children's street culture coexisted with motor driving in the twenties. Despite the automobiles moving up and down the street, Benny and his friends used street space, loitering and playing in much the same ways as previous generations.

Street play even increased in the 1930s. While the economic problems of the decade reduced children's access to commercial leisure, in the depths of the Depression, children often replaced commercial recreation with free street play. Some investigations reported children and adolescents staying inside because they were ashamed of their lack of adequate clothing or in winter because they couldn't afford warm clothes.³¹ But, in the

²⁹ There was no minimum age for driving in Chicago in 1912.

³⁰ 'Life history of Benny D.'.

³¹ Friedman, Laura A., 'A Study of One Hundred Unemployed Families in Chicago, January 1927, to June, 1932', unpublished master's thesis, University of Chicago (1933)

warmer months at least, few children seemed to have let a lack of clothing stop their street play. According to studies of summer activities of boys living in the Back of the Yards in 1933 and in 1938, children continued many of the street activities of previous generations: marbles, playing in water, loafing around, hopscotch, and kick-the-can.³² Unsupervised recreation still constituted the vast majority of boys' waking hours in the summertime in 1933. In an average week, boys spent around seventy hours at unsupervised leisure compared to just six and a half hours supervised.³³ More than two-thirds of the children surveyed in 1938 were spending their leisure time in unsupervised activities outside of juvenile-centered institutions.³⁴ A study of organized recreation in the late 1930s found that children chose street play over organized recreation even in the depths of winter.³⁵ Whatever the season, boys in the thirties still enjoyed shooting craps and gambling in the streets. Flipping streetcars also remained a fun pastime, as well as a useful means for the boys without money for fares to travel around the city. Baseball, if anything, had become more popular in the late twenties and early thirties and, despite increased numbers of baseball diamonds in parks and playgrounds, children continued to convert the street into a pitch. Children near Northwestern University Settlement in the early 1930s, for example, chose to play ball on the street over the park, using sewers as bases.³⁶

Children, both boys and girls, also continued to help with family chores. Inside the home, children contributed by scrubbing, making beds, and caring for younger siblings, among other tasks.³⁷ Children's chores, especially running errands, still took them out of

³² Belknap, 'Summer Activities'; Brown, John L., 'A Survey of Life in the Back of the Yards', (1938), Chicago Area Project Records, Chicago History Museum. See also Reeves, 'Report of Committee on Street Play', 607-618.

³³ Belknap, 'Summer Activities'.

³⁴ Brown, 'Life in the Back of the Yards'.

³⁵ Brown, 'Life in the Back of the Yards'; Belknap, 'Summer Activities'; 'Recreation and Delinquency' EBP, b.38, fol.9.

³⁶ Sociological Term Papers, NUSAR, Series 41/1 b.45 fol.9.

³⁷ For example see Raymond Sayler, 'Notes for lower north side study, inc. Little Italy, 1931.' EBP b.136, fol.6.

the home and into the streets.³⁸ Children continued junking in the Depression Era as well. Many of the boys in the Back of the Yards study sold brass, copper, iron, rags, and paper, as did the children Raymond Sayler studied on the North Side.³⁹ Picking up coal saw a resurgence in the Depression Years. Many families who had had gas and electricity could no longer pay for them and returned to using coal as fuel.⁴⁰ Even young children scoured the city for fuel. Through foraging and junking, children of all ages thus contributed to the family economy.

Just like the generation of the 1890s, junking and playing children in the late twenties and early thirties continued crossing the boundaries between public and private spaces. They often trespassed in the Stock Yards to scavenge for junk. E. Clinton Belknap, the author of the 1933 Back of the Yards study wrote: "There were watchmen at the various entrances [to the stockyards], but the boys had ways of going where they desired."⁴¹ Auto traffic could assist the young trespassers by distracting the watchmen who supervised the traffic in and out of the Yards and by providing cover.

Automobility did change some of children's street activities, providing new opportunities as well as new dangers. Motorcars gave children a new vehicle to "flip" without the troublesome guards to force them off. Flipping cars allowed boys in the Back of the Yards to travel the four miles to and from the Lake to swim in the summer time.⁴² Automobility also gave children new opportunities for foraging, as children chased and pilfered from delivery trucks.⁴³

³⁸ Belknap, 'Summer Activities'.

³⁹ Children's junking was so successful that the federal government even co-opted it during the Second World War see Diamond, *Chicago*; Sayler, 'Notes'; Belknap, 'Summer Activities'.

⁴⁰ Abbott, Edith and Kiesling, Katherine F., 'The Rent Moratorium of the Chicago Relief Agencies, 1931-33, and Housing Deterioration', in Abbot, Edith, *The Tenements of Chicago 1908-1935*, (1936), 441-475.

⁴¹ Belknap, 'Summer Activities', 67.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Jaffe, 'Negro Juvenile Gangs'.

Importantly, automobiles gave young hoodlums a new way to build their reputations. Boys considered driving a symbol of masculine prowess. Historians of the motor age, like David Blanke, have noted the gendered culture of driving. In particular, Blanke has shown how good, measured driving ability became linked to a respectable man's "progressive worthiness".⁴⁴ Disreputable youth, however, linked driving ability to their own version of masculinity. Eddie H., who was fourteen when he stole his first car in 1925 reminisced to his interviewer how good it felt to show off by driving around the neighborhood.⁴⁵ The ability to "whip" a corner at high speed, forty or fifty miles an hour, earned fourteen-year-old Philip F. the admiration of his friends and the title of group's "wheel-man".⁴⁶

Boys learnt to drive at a young age. Philip F. was just ten-years-old when he learnt to drive while Nathan W. was twelve.⁴⁷ Nathan's first attempt at driving was almost comically bad; he crashed into a brick wall and since he didn't know how to reverse the car he had to put it into neutral and push it away from the wall. He then drove over the sidewalk and crashed into a store.⁴⁸ Nathan and his friends sold stolen vehicles to older boys or stripped them for parts, but they primarily stole cars to race each other or get into car chases with the police. For this gang, earning money played a secondary role to riding around having fun. Often the boys would drive an automobile so recklessly that they would simply have to ditch it when it inevitably gave out.

Young drivers' use of the street caused conflict with adults of the neighborhood. When Cuno C., his brother, and some fellow gang members skidded their car up and down

⁴⁴ Blanke, *Hell on Wheels*, 24.

⁴⁵ 'Life history of Eddie H.'.

⁴⁶ 'Life history of Philip F.' This incident took place in around 1926.

⁴⁷ 'Life history of Philip F.' Philip was ten in 1922.; 'Life History of Nathan W.', Nathan was twelve in 1927.

⁴⁸ 'Life History of Nathan W.'.

a block very loudly in the middle of the night, an irate lawyer came out of his house armed with a gun, shouting at the boys to get out of the neighborhood. Cuno's brother, picking up his own gun, shouted back "who owns the street?". The lawyer replied, "It belongs to the public." Cuno's brother disagreed: "nobody owns it and I'm going to tear up and down."⁴⁹ Reckless driving by youths proved such a common occurrence in the twenties that American society came to understand "joy-riding" as a youth phenomenon.⁵⁰

Automobility merged with youth culture and gave both boys and girls a new space and new access to disreputable activities. Girls sometimes sought out "thrills", willingly getting into automobiles and even suggesting places to drive to for sex. This was the case when Angelo S. and his friends used his car to pick up girls. One time they found three girls and took them to a few bars. Afterwards, Angelo suggested that they all head out to "the sticks" – slang for the countryside. One of the girls refused, instead saying she wanted to drive to a hotel she knew in the "colored district". At the hotel each girls slept with one boy, but when the boys decided to swap, two of the girls ran away. The final girl refused to have any more sex and eventually the boys took her home, but not before beating her up.⁵¹ Although the girls began as willing participants, even directing the car to a hotel where they knew they could have sex, they risked, and one experienced, considerable violence from the boys with whom they decided to go driving.

Any girl who got in a car with disreputable boys, but refused to "fuck" often risked retaliation. One nameless girl appeared in Philip F.'s life history. Philip and his friend borrowed his uncle's car and "picked up some broad after riding around a little while". The boys asked "the broad" if she would fuck them to which she replied "I don't do such

⁴⁹ 'Life History of Cuno C.'.

⁵⁰ Adler, *First in Violence*.

⁵¹ 'Life History of Angelo S.' Angelo would have been between the ages of 15 and 17 during this episode which occurred between 1929 and 1931.

things". Philip's friend told her to stop lying, punching her in the face. The girl, crying, agreed to have sex with them and Philip told his interviewer "First Jim fucked her while I was driving then I fucked her and Jim drove the car."⁵² Boys more commonly drove girls out to "the sticks" to have sex or to rape them. Angelo S. and his friends abducted a girl when they saw her about to get into a car with some other young men. They drove her out to the countryside and took turns raping her. When they were later stopped by the police, they managed to convince their victim to cover for them and she, perhaps fearing the consequences of reporting her rape, asked the policeman "since when is it a sin to go out riding with your cousin?"⁵³ The automobile in this story gave boys mobility between the city where they could pick up girls and the country where they could rape them undisturbed. While clubrooms also provided hoodlums with spaces to rape girls, the mobility and anonymity of the motorcar put rapists even more out of the reach of the police and made corroboration harder for victims.

Motorcars also provided hoodlums with a new racket. Boys like Angelo didn't need to rely on access to the family automobile to drive. Some twenty-eight of the life history interviewees admitted to their case workers that they stole cars and stole them frequently.⁵⁴ While probably exaggerating, James P. bragged to his life history interviewer that he had stolen around two hundred motorcars by the age of sixteen.⁵⁵ Before twelve-year-old Nathan W. learnt to drive he was a bicycle thief, but the money to be made in stealing automobiles made him change rackets.⁵⁶ Through the subsequent ten pages of his life history Nathan described in detail the nine automobile thefts he carried out before he was fifteen-years-old. As Nathan knew, motor car theft in 1920s Chicago was big business with

⁵² 'Life History of Philip F.', collected by Raymond Sayler, EBP, b.136, fol.6, Philip would have been around 15 years old at this time, in 1927.

⁵³ 'Life History of Angelo S.'.

⁵⁴ See for example life histories of Joseph P., Angelo M., Philip F., Jerry C., James P., and John K.

⁵⁵ 'Life History of James. P.', this incident would have taken place in 1932.

⁵⁶ 'Life History of Nathan W.' Nathan graduated from bicycle to car theft in 1927.

Prohibition gangsters often relying on stolen autos for their mobility.⁵⁷ The 42 Gang of young hoodlums were so proficient at auto-theft that they became major suppliers of both stolen vehicles and “wheelmen” to Al Capone’s Syndicate in the late 1920s.

African-American children in Chicago did not have the same links to bootleggers as the 42s but even in the Black Belt automobility opened up new rackets. A. Jaffe’s study of black youth gangs in Chicago from 1928 to 1935 revealed that one of the biggest rackets in the Black Belt was stealing from the trucks which came to supply the shops and leisure spots along State Street.⁵⁸ The other rackets that the major Black Belt youth gang, which Jaffe left unnamed, in this era played, such as strong-arming people on the side streets around State Street and “ganging” (robbing) stores, also remained confined within the African-American neighborhood. Wentworth Avenue continued as a dividing line between the black and white South Side communities in the thirties that black Chicagoans outside of rush hour could not cross.⁵⁹

Youth street gangs thus continued into the 1930s. To the west of Wentworth, in Fuller Park, boys continued the tradition of the SACs, meeting in basement and storefront clubrooms.⁶⁰ In the Back of the Yards, with just eight exceptions, all one hundred and four of the boys included in Belknap’s 1933 study stated that they belonged to a gang. Like gangs in the 1910s and 20s, the gangs in this study comprised “boys around de block”, and still divided into younger and older groups. The older gangs monopolized the parks and playgrounds, despite the best attempts of the park directors.⁶¹ The gangs in the study particularly valued baseball and basketball grounds. Gangs also continued to police

⁵⁷ For more on this, see Chapter 5. Bootlegging relied heavily on automobility and even gave rise to stock car racing. Beekman, Scott, *NASCAR Nation: A History of Stock Car Racing in the United States* (Santa Barbara, 2010).

⁵⁸ Jaffe, ‘Negro Delinquent Gangs’.

⁵⁹ ‘Recreation and Delinquency’.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Belknap, ‘Summer Activities’.

territory boundaries in the 1930s. One member of the “Dodgers” related to the author of the Back of the Yards study how he and his gang had waited until dark, crossed into the alley belonging to a rival gang and “beat up on” some members of that gang. The attack was a retaliation since during the day, the rival gang had spotted a Dodger in their territory and “walloped” him. The boys in the study may have passed freely around the whole neighborhood, but they seldom lingered on the blocks of rival gangs.⁶²

The Back of the Yards had changed since the 1910s and early 1920s even though much of the gangs’ activities had stayed the same. Polish boys dominated the neighborhood in terms of numbers, but the next largest group was now Mexican. Just two hundred Illinois residents had been identified as Mexican in 1900, but by, 1920, tens of thousands of Mexicans lived in Chicago.⁶³ As more and more Mexicans settled in Chicago, white children quickly recognized them as “other-than-white”.⁶⁴ Ernie O. remembered his father, a steel mill worker, being on strike, probably during the 1919 Steel Strikes, and Mexican workers being brought in to break the strike. Although the child of Polish immigrants who spoke no English themselves, Ernie differentiated Mexican immigrants from the various “white” immigrants of his South Chicago neighborhood: “everything was alright until they [the steel company] started moving them [Mexicans] in with the white people.”⁶⁵

In the Back of the Yards in the thirties, despite sharing the same neighborhood, and even the same blocks, the Polish and Mexican boys seldom joined mixed gangs. Instead the Poles joined gangs like the Panthers, shown in figure 37, while the Mexicans joined gangs

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ramirez, Leonard G., *Chicanas of 18th Street: Narratives of a Movement from Latino Chicago* (Urbana, 2013)

⁶⁴ Mexicans in the 1920s and 30s also recognized that they “were not whitening on the model of their European neighbors”, see Arrendo, Gabriela F., *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-39* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 2007), 8.

⁶⁵ ‘Life History of Ernie O.’.

like the Maya Juniors, shown in figure 38. Among all one hundred and four boys, only one Mexican boy said he belonged to a Polish gang and none of the Polish boys reported belonging to a Mexican one. Yet the relationships between the Polish and Mexican gangs weren't always hostile, and many occasions saw the two playing ball games together.

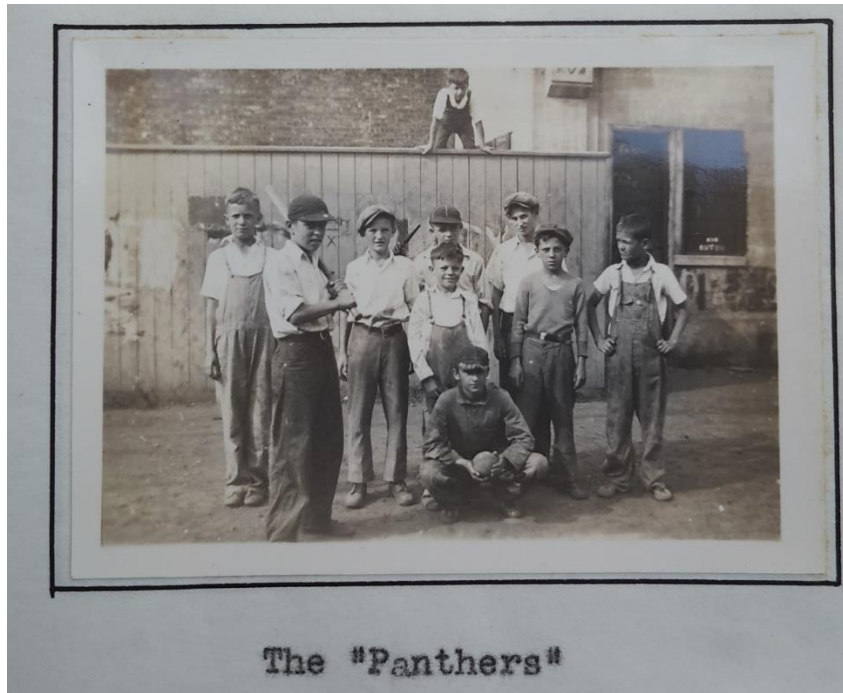


Figure 37: Image of the "Panthers", one of the gangs of boys active in the Back of the Yards in the summer of 1933, in Belknap, 'Summer Activities'.



Figure 38: The combined forces of two Mexican gangs – The Junior Mayas and the Atlas Juniors – active in the Back of the Yards in the summer of 1933, in Belknap, 'Summer Activities'.

Mexican immigrants moved into neighborhoods across Chicago, not just on the South Side. The largest Mexican community, estimated at about 2500 people in 1928, developed on the Near West Side, near Hull House.⁶⁶ By the 1930s, Hull House was offering English and citizenship classes specifically for Mexican immigrants as well as an annual Festival of Mexican culture.⁶⁷ The settlement house also welcomed Mexicans at many of its traditional recreation activities designed to get children off the streets. In 1940, Mexican immigrant Adrian Lozano painted Chicago's first Mexican mural on the wall of the Hull House Boy's Club.⁶⁸

As Mexicans moved into the Hull House neighborhood, some of the older immigrant groups moved out. Sociologists of the Chicago School, like Anita Edgar Jones, understood the changing make-up of the neighborhood in the terms of Park and Burgess's model of ethnic transition.⁶⁹ In zones of transition such as around Hull House, Park and Burgess argued, older immigrant communities made way for wave after wave of newly arrived groups. The older immigrants who left these zones headed for more prosperous neighborhoods, and increasingly, that meant the suburbs.

Suburbs

In 1889, the city of Chicago covered 170 square miles. Four decades later, in 1930, the total incorporated area had expanded to 211 square miles, but the metropolitan area extended far beyond the city boundaries in every direction except towards the lake. Although suburbanization had long existed in Chicago, the automobile opened up large

⁶⁶ Jones, Anita Edgar, 'Conditions Surrounding Mexicans in Chicago' unpublished master's thesis, University of Chicago (1928)

⁶⁷ 'Mexicans and the Hull House *Colonia* in the 1920s and 1930s', *Urban Experience in Chicago: Hull-House and Its Neighborhoods, 1889-1963* <http://hullhouse.uic.edu/hull/urbanexp/> (accessed 05.02.2018)

⁶⁸ 'Mexicans and the Hull House *Colonia*'

⁶⁹ Jones, 'Conditions Surrounding Mexicans'; Park and Burgess, 'The City'.

new areas for commuters.⁷⁰ Progressives like Jane Addams and Jacob Riis welcomed the new technology, believing that it could help reduce overcrowding in cities like Chicago.⁷¹ The new motorcar-suburbs spurred booster literature, focusing on the benefits of suburban life. Foreshadowing the future of the post-WW2 suburban ideal, this literature revolved around domestic life and, particularly, children. By centering childhood, suburban life changed children's leisure and work and, in doing so, altered children's relationship to the streets.

Despite the prevalence of this suburban ideal in booster literature, not all of Chicago's suburbs followed the pattern. Some, like Pullman, housed industrial workers who also worked in primarily industrial, not residential, suburbs. Cicero, seven miles west of the Loop, famously became the home to Al Capone's headquarters in the 1920s thanks to its politicians' accommodating positions on Prohibition and organized crime. The suburb became known as "the wettest" place in the United States. Other suburbs, like Evanston, to the North of Chicago, and one of the oldest of the city's suburbs, developed into the more typical commuter style suburban towns. Although Evanston was more-or-less wealthy and white, even it was more heterogenous than might be assumed. The suburb, for example, became home to one of Chicago's oldest black suburban communities. By 1910, over a thousand African-Americans lived in Evanston, mainly drawn by jobs in domestic service for the wealthy white families who lived there.⁷²

Some who moved to the suburbs, like these domestic servants, did so in search of work. Many who moved to suburbia, however, chose to do so to reap the benefits of a

⁷⁰ For older suburbia see Lewinnek, *The Working Man's Reward*; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*.

⁷¹ See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*.

⁷² Weise, Andrew, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 2004). African-American suburbanization was often stalled by racist buying and selling practices and, from the New Deal on, by Federal Housing Association policies known as 'red-lining' which made it very difficult for African-Americans to get mortgages.

suburban life for their families. Booster literature in the twenties and thirties increasingly cast moving to suburbia as a decision taken to benefit a family's children. A Sears, Roebuck and Co. advertisement for suburban home ownership in 1926 told its viewers to "Give the Kiddies a Chance" by moving to suburbia. In the advert, children played outside on the grass while a man mowed the lawn behind them.⁷³ Following a long tradition in American thought, experts in child development believed the outdoor, semi-pastoral life of suburbia provided children with a much better and healthier environment than the city.⁷⁴ Advertisers also played on middle-class fears of moral contagion. The Kenilworth Company, which developed the exclusive Chicago suburb of Kenilworth, wrote that a suburban home was a necessity to parents "where their children, freed from the confinements and frequently undesirable influences of city life, can revel and thrive physically as well as morally in pure air."⁷⁵ Suburbia was thus the land of the family; few bachelors even considered a suburban life.⁷⁶

The centrality of children and child-rearing to the new suburbia figured prominently within the American psyche in the 1920s and 1930s. According to the White House Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership in 1932, "the detached one-family house on an adequate lot in pleasant surroundings expresses the housing ideas and aspirations of most American families, particularly those with small children."⁷⁷ In the post-

⁷³ Sears, Roebuck, and Co. advertisement pictured in Nicolaides, Becky M., and Wiese, Andrew, (eds.) *The Suburb Reader* (New York, 2006), 175.

⁷⁴ William S. Sadler, 'The Suburban and the City Child', *Suburban Life* 10 (February 1910), extracted in Nicolaides and Weise, *The Suburb Reader*, 51-52.

⁷⁵ Sies, Mary Corbin, "God's Very Kingdom on the Earth": the Design Program For the American Suburban Home, 1877-1917' in Wilson, Richard Guy, and Robinson, Sidney K., (eds.) *Modern Architecture in America: Visions and Revisions* (Ames, IA, 1991) 2-31.

⁷⁶ Single women, often domestic servants, did live in the suburbs. Lundberg, George A., Komarovsky, Mirra, and McNerny, Mary Alice, *Leisure: A Suburban Study* (New York, 1934).

⁷⁷ White House Panel of Experts Depicts the Ideal Home, 1932, reproduced in Nicolaides and Weise, *The Suburb Reader*, 239.

WW2 years when suburbia boomed, “to benefit the children” became the most popular reason for relocating to the suburbs.⁷⁸

The ideal suburban home reflected the family and class values of the new suburbanites. According to the architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright, “the suburban home was part of a strategy to keep children far from the world of the city streets.”⁷⁹ Even for the working-classes, cheaper real estate out of the city meant that housing increasingly followed the trend of the more well-to-do suburbs: larger homes, more space between homes, and single-family dwellings. The ideal suburban house had a big yard perfect for outdoor play. It had individual bedrooms for the children or children of the same sex where they could play or entertain friends. Finally, the suburban home ideally included a designated play room where children could play undisturbed by adults. Together these features fostered children’s recreation within the confines of indoor and outdoor domestic space.⁸⁰

Of course, in suburbia, children did still play away from adults outside the home and on the streets. In fact, some children, particularly from middle-class families, found greater freedom in the suburbs than they had been afforded in the city. Suburbanite Ethel L. Swift, writing for *Outlook* in 1928, told readers of her son who played in the vacant lot, and her daughter attempting to lure birds into the garden. She contended “The children romp around the neighborhood unsupervised. In the city children cannot be permitted to go far from home alone.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Strickland, Charles E., and Ambrose, Andrew M., ‘The Baby Boom, Prosperity, and the Changing Worlds of Children, 1945-1963’, in Hawes, Joseph M., and Hiner, N. Ray, (eds.) *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut, 1985), 533-586.

⁷⁹ Wright, Gwendolyn, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, 1988), 109.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Swift, Ethel L., “The Defense of Suburbia”, *Outlook* 148 (April 4, 1928), 543.

Influential architects of some of the first American suburbs had favored curving streets over the grid-system for aesthetic reasons, but with the rise of the motorcar suburb, reducing traffic took precedence.⁸² The Federal Housing Administration published design standards in 1938, demonstrated in figure 39, which strongly discouraged grid street plans and urged developers to build along curving streets and cul-de-sacs.⁸³ Together, curving streets and cul-de-sacs, would push traffic towards thoroughfares, and thus, according to the FHA, reduce hazards for children.⁸⁴

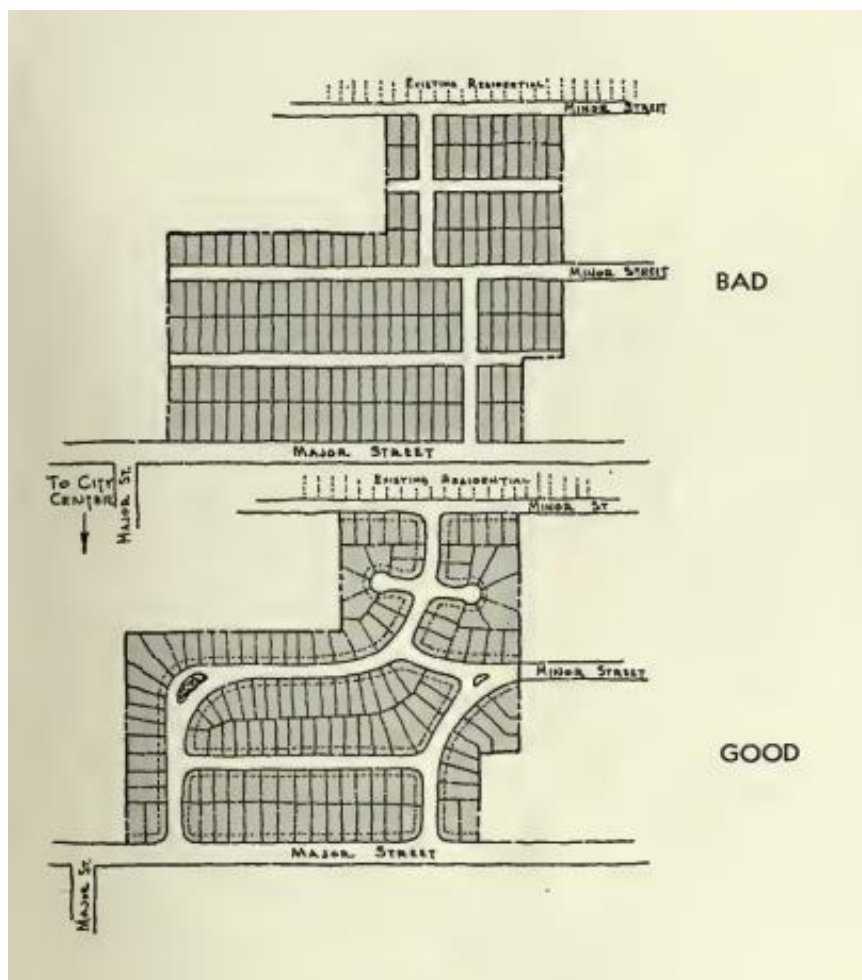


Figure 39: Federal Housing Administration guidelines on street planning. FHA, *Planning Profitable Neighborhoods*.

⁸² Ross, Benjamin, *Dead End: Suburban Sprawl and the Rebirth of American Urbanism* (Oxford, 2016), 43-44.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁸⁴ Federal Housing Administration, *Planning Profitable Neighborhoods* (Washington, D.C., 1938).

Back in the city, reformers tried to implement something akin to the suburban cul-de-sac. As early as 1911, child-savers had advocated designated play streets, supervised and closed to traffic for the use of children.⁸⁵ Settlement houses took up the idea. In 1919, Northwestern Settlement ran street games in the evenings on the street outside the house. The settlement would close the chosen play street to traffic so that children could play in peace.⁸⁶ A year later Hull House began a street games club, where they closed three of the side streets near Hull House for street games for two evening a week. Hundreds of children attended these events.⁸⁷ These play streets created a micro-suburban road within the congested neighborhoods of Chicago, providing supervision and safety from automobiles.

On the whole, however, leisure outside the home in suburbia differed to that in the city. Whereas children and young people could walk or take the streetcar to commercial amusements in the city, reaching commercial leisure spaces in suburbia more often relied on access to an automobile and an adult's willingness to drive it.⁸⁸ Middle-class parents in the suburbs restricted their children's, especially daughters', access to cars far more than working-class immigrant parents in the city. When Juvenile Court Judge from 1923 to 1933, Mary Bartleme, was asked for her views on automobiles she advised their families to restrict daughters' use of the "family Ford". Bartleme advocated strict rules when it came to girls using the automobile:

No use by girls under 18 years without the consent and approval of parents as to time, place, companionship, etc. They should not drive alone into county or lonely places. Should never pick up strangers. If a group of girls were together they should return before dark. No racing or speeding. Only young people known to and approved of by

⁸⁵ CCWE, b.2-3.

⁸⁶ The Neighbor, May 31st, 1919 and July 12, 1919, NUS, The Neighbor, b.2, NUL.

⁸⁷ Hull House Year Book, 1921, HHC, b.44, fol.438.

⁸⁸ See Lundberg, Komarovsky, and McInerney, *Leisure*. The book concerns several suburban community in Westchester County, New York, but was portrayed as typical demographically and geographically to many suburban areas in the US.

parents should accompany them and if boys and men are in the party on a long drive, proper chaperonage.⁸⁹

The dangers automobiles posed girls in this construction were not as “death machines” threatening life and limb, but as morally suspect spaces where men could lure girls into immorality. Restricted from using motorcars on their own, automobility contributed to suburban youths spending their leisure time with their parents. Families used the car to go for hikes, for picnics, for accessing commercial leisure spaces, and simply for the fun of “motoring”.⁹⁰

The rise of suburbia transformed the ways children worked as well as the ways they played. Newsboys bore the brunt of this change. The numbers of newsboys and girls diminished for a variety of reasons in the first decade after the First World War. The end of the war itself marked an end of a boom-time for newsboys. While the rest of the country celebrated, one newsboy from Portland, Oregon, published a poem in *The Hustler* in February 1918.⁹¹ Entitled “Post-Bellum”, the poem lamented the end of the war:

A newsboy with his papers sat sighing on the street
For the cruel war was over and the foe had met defeat
And the scare-heads in the dailies, they had vanished like a spell,
And the liveliest thing the newsie had was market heads to yell.
“O, maybe Sherman had it right”, said he, “but wars must cease”
And Sherman never tried to peddle papers when ‘twas peace.”⁹²

As newspaper sales declined, publishers and their advertisers began to recognize the benefits of subscriptions, particularly to the rising numbers of suburban commuters. Subscriptions divorced sales from the unpredictability of weather or sensational headlines. Subscriptions also removed a particularly troublesome element from the sale: the newsboys themselves, who were prone to striking and often failed to turn up if, for example, the

⁸⁹ Mary M. Bartelme, ‘Letter to Victor P. Arnold’ (8 October 1923), Mary M. Bartelme Papers, b.6, fol.75, SCUA, UIC. Emphasis is Bartelme’s own.

⁹⁰ Lundberg, Komarovsky, and McInerney, *Leisure*.

⁹¹ Nasaw, *Children of the City*, 79-80.

⁹² Extracted in Nasaw, *Children of the City*, 79-80.

weather was bad. Home subscriptions required an alternative workforce to deliver the papers to the door and thus the paperboy or delivery boy, quite a different type of child laborer to the newsboy, gradually took over.

Paperboys' relationship to their work and to the streets differed dramatically from the newsies'. Unlike newsies, who worked independently, buying their papers from the newspaper and selling them for a profit, the newspapers employed delivery boys directly, paying them a wage. Thus, the companies could regulate the paperboys much more than they ever could the newsies. Paperboys had to follow certain rules of conduct and had to have good grades in school. These rules contributed to the fact that paperboys were far more likely to be from middle-class families than the newsies. Paperboys moved through space rather than loitering and playing on sidewalks and streets of the downtown. Importantly, delivery boys didn't hang around all night in the old newspaper alleys waiting for the morning paper, creating peer bonds and engaging in all sorts of disreputable activities. Paperboys worked alone, separated from the swarm of other child laborers. When they did socialize with other delivery boys, they did so at events, such as picnics and outings, organized and supervised by their adult employers. Lastly, they worked in residential areas, often the suburbs, where watchful parents could supervise. In fact, circulation managers tried to use parents to help oversee their young workers, giving jobs only to the boys whose parents were "supportive" and willing to undergo an interview. Each paperboy was thus separated from his co-workers by the practicalities of the route and surveilled by both parents and his adult manager.⁹³

For both children's labor and children's play, suburbanization held important consequences. In both cases, suburbanization tended to restrict children's independent

⁹³ Postol, Todd Alexander, 'Creating the American Newspaper Boy: Middle-Class Route Service and Juvenile Salesmanship in the Great Depression', *Journal of Social History* 31:2 (Winter, 1997), 327-345.

mobility. With leisure, children could more easily play in the suburban home and yard; with labor, paperboys were disciplined and supervised as they worked. The trend from newsie to paperboy began in the 1920s, but it was the economic upheavals of the 1930s that finally moved the newsie from the streets and into the history books. By the end of the decade, Americans no longer bought their newspapers from boys on the streets and not even a second World War would bring them back.

Depression

The Great Depression, and the accompanying mass unemployment, profoundly affected all areas of American's lives in the 1930s. Although many aspects of children's street culture continued in the 1930s, they suffered homelessness, hunger, and hardships on a scale not felt for decades in urban America. Young people also faced reduced opportunities for work, marriage, and leisure as they grew up. As opportunities dwindled, young adults relied on the strategies of their youth to survive. Whereas for forty years, the swarms had left street spaces as they aged, making way for a new generation, the cohort coming of age in the 1930s could not and did not. By forcing adults to remain on the streets, the Depression ended the swarm.

The first intimations of economic upheaval racked Chicago two years before the Wall Street Crash of 1929. As early as 1927, at least 100,000 men were out of work in Chicago. By March 1928, the jobless demonstrated in front of City Hall with signs reading "200,000 Men Out of Work in Chicago".⁹⁴ Chicago, as a center of industry, felt the effects of the Depression keenly. By 1932, seventy percent of American Federation of Labor members in Chicago were unemployed, whereas in some sections of the Black Belt unemployment

⁹⁴ Wright, Christopher C., 'Down But Not Out: The Unemployed in Chicago During the Great Depression', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Illinois at Chicago, (2017).

approached ninety percent.⁹⁵ Families lost their entire savings and even those in work found their wages dramatically reduced. A study of one hundred families in Chicago showed the average yearly wage of *in-work* fathers dropped from \$1,682 in 1927 to just \$616 in 1931.⁹⁶ The methods families used to cope with dramatically depleted incomes necessarily affected children and reversed some of the trends of the 1910s and 1920s.

Many families found that they could no longer afford rent during the Depression. Eviction cases in the Renters' Court jumped from an average of just under 19,000 per year during the 1920s to an average of just over 43,000 per year between 1930 and 1935.⁹⁷ Evictions became such a feature of children's lives that Gertrude Springer, an associate editor at *The Survey*, reported that children in Chicago played at "Eviction".⁹⁸ Evicted families relied on networks to support them, often moving in or "doubling-up" with friends and relatives.⁹⁹ But even with doubling up (which increased overcrowding in individual homes), the population density of most tenement districts decreased considerably between 1920 and 1934. Except, that is, in the Black Belt where continued migration and the more solid boundaries of the neighborhood led to ever more congested housing.¹⁰⁰ But even in the traditionally white tenements where population density of the neighborhood as a whole decreased, overcrowding, or "household congestion" continued – children often shared rooms with adults and families took in lodgers.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ 'The Negro in the Industrial Depression', *Monthly Labor Review* June 1931, 60-61; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*.

⁹⁶ Freidman, 'One Hundred Unemployed Families'.

⁹⁷ Abbott, Edith and Kiesling, Katherine F., 'Evictions During the Depression Period, in Abbot, Edith, *The Tenements of Chicago 1908-1935*, (1936), 433

⁹⁸ Gertrude Springer, "Shock Troops to the Rescue," *Survey*, 69, (Jan., 1933), 11-54.

⁹⁹ Lindenmeyer, Kriste, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up: American Childhood in the 1930s* (Chicago, 2005), chapter 1.

¹⁰⁰ Abbott, Edith and Zahrobsky, Mary, 'The Problem of Congestion', in Abbot, Edith, *The Tenements of Chicago 1908-1935*, (1936), 237-271.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 237-271.

As had been the case forty years before, overcrowding meant little room for children inside tenement buildings. For many children in the Depression, play continued to take place outside the home, in play institutions as well as on the streets. With the onset of the Depression some recreational places for children closed. In Chicago, the dramatic funding crisis of the public schools resulted in swimming pool closures as the Board of Education sought to rein in costs (a budgetary nightmare that included not paying their teachers for years on end).¹⁰² Yet as the New Deal got underway, children often had more organized recreation opportunities, not fewer. From 1933, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the largest New Deal agency that provided employment to millions of people, built playgrounds, athletic fields, swimming facilities, picnic areas, and other recreational spaces. By 1939, almost one in fifty WPA personnel worked as a recreation leader.¹⁰³

Radios had also changed children's leisure by the 1930s. A 1939 study of recreation and delinquency among boys in Chicago found that most children "spent a great deal of time listening to the radio."¹⁰⁴ Of the one hundred and four boys included in the study of summer activities of boys in the Back of the Yards, seventy-seven had radios in their home. Although the boys' parents didn't always permit children to use the radio, for a significant proportion, radio offered a new form of recreation inside the house. Outside of the home, radios even affected street play. In the Back of the Yards, one group of boys and girls told the sociologist they enjoyed going to someone's backyard and putting on a pretend radio show.¹⁰⁵ Thus, even when radios did not draw children in search of fun off the streets, it could still affect street activities.

¹⁰² Burbank, Lyman B., 'Chicago Public Schools and the Depression Years of 1928-1937', *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 64:4 (Winter, 1971), 365-381.

¹⁰³ Pangburn, Weaver W., 'Play and Recreation', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 212 (Nov., 1940), 121-129.

¹⁰⁴ 'Recreation and Delinquency'.

¹⁰⁵ Belknap, 'Summer Activities'.

Fears that the mass unemployment of adult men would cause families to revert to children's labor, renewed interest in child labor reform. The anti-child labor movement had stalled, especially on a national stage, after the failure of the child labor amendment. With the Depression, American adults of all classes rallied behind the belief that any employment should go to adults not children. This support resulted in legislative victories for the anti-child labor movement. For the first time, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1937 set a basic minimum age of employment at sixteen years across the country.¹⁰⁶

By the 1930s, however, child labor was by-and-large not an urban problem. The vast majority of child laborers worked in agriculture and were often members of migratory families.¹⁰⁷ Despite the Depression, only a minority of urban working-class children worked in Chicago. Of the ten- to fourteen-year-old boys included in the Back of the Yards summer activities study, under a third earned an income, despite the fact that the study was done out of school term-time and fewer than half of the boys' fathers had employment. Boys that did work made a pittance, usually under a dollar a week. Only three of the one hundred and four boys in the study sold newspapers, while a further two delivered newspapers along a specific route; a dramatically different pattern from previous generations.¹⁰⁸ During the five-and-a-half-year duration of the study of one hundred unemployed families in Chicago, only twenty-six children worked at any period while under the age of seventeen, and only two of them sold newspapers.¹⁰⁹ Child street labor, which had supported countless children from the 1890s through the 1920s, had all but disappeared.

¹⁰⁶ Although there were still some exceptions for certain jobs. Children's stage labor for example continued, as did farm labor. Lenroot, Katherine F., 'Child Welfare, 1930-40', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 212 (Nov., 1940), 1-12.

¹⁰⁷ Fuller, 'Child Labor – Continued', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 212 (Nov., 1940), 146-152; Lenroot, 'Child Welfare', 1-12.

¹⁰⁸ Belknap, 'Summer Activities'.

¹⁰⁹ Friedman, 'One Hundred Unemployed Families'.

In urban areas, the specter of youth unemployment overshadowed the problem of child labor. According to historian of childhood Kriste Lindenmeyer, it was twice as difficult for older teens and young people in their early twenties to find employment than for adults and the situation was worse for African-Americans.¹¹⁰ Many young people, especially young men took to the roads and the rails, journeying around the country in search of work.¹¹¹ In 1931, nine black teenagers between 13 and 19 who had been hoboing in Tennessee were arrested and (falsely) accused of raping two young white women, one just seventeen herself, who had also been riding the rails.¹¹² While some adolescents took to the rails, adult hoboes vastly outnumbered children.

Adults outnumbered children everywhere in the 1930s, not just on the hobo trails. The 1890s had seen the peak of children's numbers in the city with at least forty percent, possible fifty percent, under twenty-years-old. By 1930, the youth population had been falling for four decades; the census placed the proportion of Chicagoans under twenty-years-old at thirty-three percent. During the thirties and forties the number of children fell further still, dropping to under thirty percent.¹¹³ Americans in the Depression Era simply had fewer children. Some young men and women put off marriage, knowing their wages were needed at home, or not wanting to begin a family when the economic situation was

¹¹⁰ Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation*, 28. See also Lenroot, 'Child Welfare' 1-12.

¹¹¹ See Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation*; Breckinridge, Sophonisba P., 'Government's Role in Child Welfare', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 212 (Nov., 1940), 42-50.

¹¹² Ruby Bates, the seventeen-year-old white girl who accused the boys of raping her, later admitted she had lied about who had raped her. See Keire, Mara, 'Rape in Modern America' (forthcoming) in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*.

¹¹³ Board of Education, Annual Report of 1900, Illinois State Archives, Springfield Illinois; US Bureau of the Census, *United States Life Tables, 1890, 1901, 1910, 1901-1910*, (1921); US Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing*, (1890-2010) accessed online at <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> (04.29.2018).

so fragile.¹¹⁴ In addition, new developments in birth control became increasingly available. By 1937, the American contraceptive business was worth \$250 million a year.¹¹⁵

Mass unemployment during the Depression years also affected adults' use of the streets. Suddenly, hundreds of thousands of men who had worked indoors and spent their earnings in indoor leisure spaces, found themselves without work and without money to spare on indoor recreation. Unemployed men used the streets and parks to gather, hold meetings, and protest about their lack of jobs, as well as to loaf about.¹¹⁶ These meetings were political but also served as a form of recreation. Figure 40, taken in 1932, was one such protest when thousands of men gathered at a park just West of the Loop.



Figure 40: Keller 'Thousands of unemployed demonstrating near Monroe and Sangamon, 1932', Chicago History Museum, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org>

Unemployed men and women used the streets to look for work. African-American women in Chicago mainly worked as domestic servants. During the Depression many

¹¹⁴ Freidman, 'One hundred Unemployed Families'.

¹¹⁵ Himes, Norman E., 'A Decade of Progress in Birth Control', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 212 (Nov., 1940), 88-96. See also Tone, Andrea, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York, 2002)

¹¹⁶ Friedman, 'One Hundred Unemployed Families'.

didn't have regular jobs and offered their services every morning at one of the city's many so-called "slave markets". On these street-corners, black women would await the white housewives who arrived daily to pick their servants and try to force down wages.¹¹⁷ Other Chicagoans trudged the streets all day looking for work, many walking ten miles a day.¹¹⁸

Young people across America faced higher unemployment rates than older workers. A study of Pennsylvania in 1934 put the unemployment rate for thirty-five- to forty-four-year-olds at nineteen percent, for twenty- to twenty-four-year-olds at thirty-six percent and for fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds seeking work at sixty percent.¹¹⁹ According to the National Youth Administration, young people between sixteen and twenty-four out-of-school and out-of-work accounted for one-third of all the unemployed in the United States.¹²⁰ Unsurprisingly, the settlement houses struggled to secure employment for their probation boys. A typical case file at the Northwestern University Settlement House during the Depression, for example, read "10.30.29 Henry still out of work...11.27.29 Working...12.4.29 Henry was laid off...1.8.30 Henry is still out of work..."¹²¹ Despite the help offered by the settlement house, at most Henry worked just four out of ten weeks in this period.

With jobs for young adults in such short supply, they earned money through activities on the streets that children had typically dominated. Unlike in previous generations, when children had given up street labor on reaching adulthood to take indoor jobs, the 1930s cohort continued the money-earning activities they had done as children. Street sellers, for example, got older. The National Child Labor Committee supported this move and argued

¹¹⁷ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*.

¹¹⁸ Bakke, E. Wight, *The Unemployed Man: A Social Study* (Boston, 1933) 64-67.

¹¹⁹ Margo, Robert A., 'The Microeconomics of Depression Unemployment', *Journal of Economic History*, 51:2 (Jun., 1991), 333-341. I could not find statistics on age and unemployment in Chicago.

¹²⁰ Lindley, Betty and, Lindley, Ernest K, *A New Deal for Youth: The Story of the National Youth Administration* (New York, 1938).

¹²¹ Delinquent Boys Case Files, 1929-31, 1938-89, NUSAR, Series 41/3, b.1-5.

that buying from child laborers was indefensible when so many adults needed work.¹²² Adults also took jobs selling papers in all-weather booths which competed with the traditional newsboys, giving adults a new advantageous method of holding the corner. By the end of the Depression, the traditional newsie working a corner downtown was a rarity; they had grown into the adult newspaper sellers.¹²³

Other traditionally children's activities also saw increased numbers of adult participants. The city dumps saw men alongside children looking for junk to sell. In earlier decades, begging had also been dominated by children. Out of four hundred and eighty-eight beggars University of Chicago student Roger Freund documented in 1925: one hundred and seventy six were children soliciting alone; one hundred and forty-seven were children accompanying adults; one hundred and fifteen were adults accompanied by children and just fifty were adults on their own.¹²⁴ By the midst of the Depression, however, adults, particularly homeless men participated in begging in large numbers.¹²⁵ Many adults also turned to selling apples on the street for five cents a piece to avoid panhandling.¹²⁶

Unable to find steady employment if they left school, some young people stayed in school longer, hoping that a high school education would help them find work later.¹²⁷ Although the National School Lunch Program wouldn't be founded until 1946, the Chicago Board of Education established a free lunch program in 1934. Using food donations and volunteers, the city operated lunchrooms in over half of its schools, providing an extra

¹²² Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation*.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ See for example Freund, Roger Henry, 'Begging in Chicago', unpublished master's thesis (1925)

¹²⁵ Kusmer, Kenneth L., *Down and Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American History* (New York, 2001), 315-320.

¹²⁶ Feinstein, Stephen, *The 1930s: From the Great Depression to the Wizard of Oz*, rev. ed. (Berkeley Heights, NJ, 2006).

¹²⁷ Wright, *Down But Not Out*.

incentive for young and hungry Chicagoans to remain in school.¹²⁸ Thus, the economic problems of the thirties resulted, for the first time in American history, in the majority of seventeen-year-olds attending high school.¹²⁹

The Depression limited older adolescents' access to the traditional social spaces of adulthood, not just the workplaces. Families, who previously had disposable income for commercial recreation, found they needed to save every dime.¹³⁰ Boys and young men who usually kept their earnings and paid only for board now found they had to hand over their whole pay package, if, of course, they were lucky enough to have a job at all.¹³¹ According to one study of unemployed families in Chicago "Recreation, with the exception of street play, was stopped entirely."¹³² This lack of disposable income reduced both young men and women's access to heterosocial indoor leisure spaces.

With little money of their own, young men found it difficult to treat and thus date girls. Parents reported to sociologists like B. Dimkoff that their sons "never go with girls now, because [they] do not have money or good clothes."¹³³ This cohort of young people also put off marriage. Without jobs, many young men simply did not have the money to start a family. Even employed young men faced pressure not to marry, as parents relied upon their income.¹³⁴ For previous generations of young men, marriage had served as the catalyst for leaving street life and the largely homosocial worlds of gangs and clubs. Before the Depression social athletic clubs had rarely included older men. But as young men

¹²⁸ Levine, Susan, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton, NJ, 2008).

¹²⁹ Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation*.

¹³⁰ Todd, Arthur, *Chicago Recreation Survey*, vol. v (Chicago, 1940) 'Summary of Findings'.

¹³¹ Cavan, Ruth Shonle, and Ranck, Katherine Howland, *The Family and the Depression: A Study of One Hundred Chicago Families* (Chicago, 1938), 171.

¹³² Friedman, 'One Hundred Unemployed Families'.

¹³³ Dimkoff, 'Materials on the effects of depression in Chicago', EBP, b.131, fol.4.

¹³⁴ Cavan and Ranck, *The Family and the Depression*.

postponed marriage in the Depression, they remained in their old SACs even into their thirties.¹³⁵

Young bachelors with few ties to a home made up the largest part of the transient population that exploded during the Depression. While all the practice boys had flipping cars had helped delinquent boys to escape from reform institutions in the 1910s and 1920s, now hundreds of thousands of young men and some young women used those same skills to ride the freight trains.¹³⁶ Although women and children certainly suffered homelessness and lived transient lives during the Depression, Chicago's Depression Era shanty towns, "Hoovervilles", were typically the domain of single men.¹³⁷ In 1931, the Chicago Tribune reported that 600 men were living in Grant Park.¹³⁸ Whereas children had dominated street spaces in the 1890s, jobless, homeless men now swarmed on the streets, in middle-class Chicagoan's minds if not in reality. As one writer reported in the midst of the Depression, "The horde of 'boes and pan-handlers infesting the Loop makes New York's Times Square parasites seem like a coterie of philanthropists in comparison"¹³⁹

In some ways, the Depression had pushed children back onto the streets in search of play and money, but by 1933 children no longer dominated Chicago's street spaces. As opportunities for employment, marriage, and access to adult leisure spaces diminished, young men and women found themselves using the strategies of their youth to survive. The swarm of the 1920s grew up but, unlike previous cohorts, this swarm did not graduate

¹³⁵ McBee, *Dance Hall Days*, 169.

¹³⁶ Numbers of female hoboes increased a lot during the Depression, apparently reaching over a hundred and fifty thousand. Reitman, *Sister of the Road*, 7.

¹³⁷ For women hoboes see Reitman, *Sister of the Road*; Abelson, Elaine S., 'Women Who Have No Men to Work for Them': Gender and Homelessness in the Great Depression, 1930-1934', *Feminist Studies* 29:1 (Spring, 2003), 104-127.

¹³⁸ *Chicago Tribune* (Oct. 1, 1931)

¹³⁹ Wright, 'Down But Not Out', 48,

off the street. The Depression thus replaced swarms of children with hordes of unemployed men as the urban crisis of the day.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1930s the swarm was gone. Technological, cultural, demographic, and economic changes had converged to kill it. Children were victims of horrible street accidents, sparking adult panic about children on the streets. But, although the extensive safety education campaigns of the twenties and thirties sought to discipline children's street usage, children's activities on the streets continued much the same in the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, children and young people participated in the new age of automobility, stealing cars, racing them, and driving out to the sticks for sex. In some ways, children's presence on the streets of Chicago actually increased in the thirties as the Depression caused families to economize on leisure activities.

Yet the swarm of the 1890s was no mere group of children on the streets – it was defined fundamentally by its domination of street spaces. By the mid-thirties children no longer dominated the streets. Hundreds of thousands of unemployed adults now thronged the city, walking around looking for jobs, holding meetings and rallies, and living in shanty-towns. Children on the streets were now outnumbered and demographic trends to smaller and smaller families intensified this process. As children of the swarm reached adulthood in the Depression, they could no longer graduate into the indoor worlds of adult work and leisure. Young men, in particular, relied on their childhood relationship to the streets and remained unmarried, in homosocial gangs, clubs, and “Hooverilles”. In parks, on trains, and on the streets, these young men gathered in large groups. The urban crisis had changed from swarming children to hordes of unemployed, disaffected men.

Conclusion

Frederic Thrasher's *The Gang* published in 1927 crystallized much of Progressive Era reformers' views on juvenile delinquency. Thrasher argued that gang boys weren't inherently bad, rather gang behavior was simply natural boyish misbehavior in the unsupervised interstices of the city. Thrasher endorsed typical Progressive anti-delinquency techniques arguing that, given proper supervision and places to play, children would avoid delinquencies and grow up to be productive citizens.¹ Following the publication of his book, Thrasher moved to New York and set about proving just that.

Receiving support from the Rockefeller funded Bureau of Social Hygiene, Thrasher set up a research group to study the Jefferson Park Boys' Club located in one of the "toughest" blocks of East Harlem. The Jefferson Park Study was an impressive piece of early twentieth century research. Its methods represented a pinnacle of Progressive Era-style optimism and faith in expertise and data. Thrasher and his team of researchers collected information in minute detail concerning East Harlem, the Boys' Club, and the boys who frequented it. The amount of data collected was astounding. The key of one particularly detailed map produced by the team had over a hundred different symbols representing, among other things, cabarets, pawn shops, undertakers, shooting galleries, Y.M.C.A.s, soda fountains, shoe shiners, and candy stores. Thrasher's ground-breaking first book had posited an environmental cause of crime. Now in New York, Thrasher was keen to prove that the boys who lived in the neighborhood of Jefferson Park were not

¹ Thrasher, *The Gang*.

intrinsically criminal. Given supervised recreation in the Boys' Club, Thrasher believed the children would escape their delinquent fates.²

Things did not go quite to plan. The study proved extremely expensive and dragged on for years, causing tension between Lawrence Dunham, the director of the Bureau of Social Hygiene, and Thrasher, taking a toll on Thrasher's deteriorating health. The gathering of knowledge on this scale was just not feasible within the time and budget provided. Even more importantly, the study's results were shocking and disappointing. For years, child savers, urban reformers, and Thrasher himself had sung the praises of recreation centers, primarily for their roles in getting boys off the street and thus out of delinquency. Thrasher's study, however, far from providing proof for this long-cherished assumption, dramatically challenged it. Thrasher and his team of researchers uncovered a link between boys' attendance at recreation centers and increased delinquency. A tone of despair seeped into the reports. "If anything definite may be concluded," Thrasher wrote, "it is that delinquency-truancy rates prior to two year membership periods seem to be less than during membership; while the rates for periods subsequent to two year membership periods are, on the whole, increased, rather than decreased."³ The Jefferson Park study was never published, and while Thrasher continued to write about juvenile delinquency, he gradually turned his attention to motion pictures and popular culture rather than the city streets' effects on children.

Thrasher's findings were not anomalous or confined to New York. All over the country, faith in the old Progressive methods of anti-delinquency faltered. In Chicago, a study funded by the Chicago Recreation Commission in the late 1930s into organized recreation and delinquency concluded "supervised recreation, as such, does not appear to

² Frederic Thrasher, 'The Jefferson Boys' Club Study' (unpublished manuscript), BSH, Series 3, Subseries 3, b.13 fol.6 RAC.

³ Ibid.

be a preventative for delinquency... The findings of the project indicate that on the average, delinquent children who participate in recreation programs spend more time in such activities than do non-delinquents.”⁴ Popular culture also began to mock child-savers’ faith in organized recreation. The 1938 James Cagney film, *Angels With Dirty Faces*, for example, featured Pat O’Brien’s character trying to save a gang of boys from entry into crime by giving them a basketball club. The plan failed, however, as the boys idolized gangsters, Cagney in particular. The gang, after all, was played by the “Dead End Kids” – a group of young actors who routinely played characters stuck on a dead end street, with no way out of the life of poverty and crime.⁵

Juvenile courts also suffered from failing optimism in Progressive methods. A study of one thousand juvenile delinquents in the 1930s in Boston who appeared before the juvenile court showed a staggering eighty-eight percent offended again within five years.⁶ Dunham, who led the Bureau of Social Hygiene, wrote in 1933: “The failure of the Juvenile Court to accomplish anything like what its proponents anticipated is now pretty generally understood.”⁷ In 1936, Grace Abbott asked rhetorically whether the Juvenile Court of Chicago had proved a success or a failure and concluded pessimistically that “the findings of all the recent studies made [about the court] have been very discouraging to those who hoped the juvenile court would, if not prevent, at least greatly reduce, delinquency.”⁸ The reputation of the reform schools by the thirties had also plummeted. A 1931 Chicago Daily Times article paraphrasing juvenile court judge Mary M. Bartleme on the subject of

⁴ Shanas, Ethel, Nov 1940, ‘Certain Relationships between Recreation and Delinquency in Chicago’ EBP, Series 3, subseries 1, sub-subseries 6, b.38, fol.1, 9, SCRC, UC.

⁵ *Angels With Dirty Faces* (1938), directed by Curtiz, Michael, [Film], USA: Warner Bros; Wojcik, *Fantasies of Neglect*.

⁶ ‘Crime as a Major Social Waster’, BSH Series 3_4 b.18, fol.292, RAC.

⁷ BSH Series 3_3, b.11, fol.214, RAC.

⁸ Abbott, Grace, ‘The Juvenile Court and a Community Program for Treating and Preventing Delinquency’ (1936) EGAP, b.33, fol.6, SCRC, UC.

delinquent children observed “we can’t send you to St Charles, because the boys there might make a tough out of you faster than the streets will.”⁹

While older Progressive environmental methods did continue into the 1930s, especially under Clifford Shaw in Chicago, American society had by-and-large lost faith in transforming the city to save the swarm. Delinquency experts increasingly turned to psychiatry to explain and treat criminal behavior. In doing so, experts conceived of young offenders as individual deviant personalities not as swarms. According to one report which called for psychiatric clinics in the treatment of crime in 1928, “The criminal must be studied as a separate personality and not as a large group. The psychiatric clinic is peculiarly adapted to provide just this method of study.”¹⁰ Grace Abbot put the failures of the juvenile court down to a lack of psychiatry and called for trained psychiatrists in every neighborhood echoing reformers’ calls for playgrounds in earlier decades.¹¹

As reformers advocated individualized treatment of delinquent personalities, on the streets, changing priorities of policing increasingly and aggressively targeted children of color. Since the start of the Great Migration, police brutality had particularly targeted black Chicagoans. Between 1910 and 1920, African-Americans comprised just three percent of the city’s population but made up twenty-one percent of those killed by police.¹² When the city’s crime rate increased in the 1920s, calls for more aggressive policing intensified. Black Chicagoans resisted violent police tactics which targeted their communities, and in 1931, a thousand black Chicagoans attended a meeting with the Mayor to raise their

⁹ ‘The Case of Danny Dull’, *Chicago Daily Times* Wednesday June 24, 1931, MBC, S.2, b.8, fol.122, SCUA, UIC.

¹⁰ ‘The Need of a Psychiatric Clinic’, (1928) BSH s.3_4, b.31, fol.433, RAC.

¹¹ Abbott, ‘The Juvenile Court’.

¹² Police had just one percent chance of being convicted of homicide when they killed and police were three times more likely kill someone than be killed in this period. Adler, Jeffrey S., ‘Shoot to Kill: The Use of Deadly Force by the Chicago Police, 1875-1920’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38:2 (Autumn, 2007), 233-254.

concerns over police brutality.¹³ As inner-city youth became more and more synonymous with minority youth, the urban child seemed increasingly outside the realm of “saving” and middle-class white Americans responded to black youth’s corner culture with intense policing and urban flight, not playgrounds and child-saving.¹⁴

Thus, by the 1930s, the spatial solutions proposed by the Progressive child-savers had failed. Environmental causes still played a factor in understandings of delinquency, but it was an increasingly limited one. Individual deviance replaced the swarm in reformers’ rhetoric and the optimism about reforming and preventing juvenile delinquency disappeared with it. But the legacy of the Progressive Era lived on in the broad range of institutions and regulations reform-minded adults had created to try to change the environment of urban childhood and stop delinquency. With playgrounds, recreation clubs, anti-child labor laws, compulsory schooling, and juvenile justice, the legacy of the child-saving movement still affects children today both in the USA and around the world.

Progressive Era child-saving, particularly anti-delinquency, had been rife with contradictions. The Progressives’ attempts to solve delinquency had criminalized much of working-class, immigrant children’s behavior. On the other hand, Progressives had refused to accept that juvenile delinquents, especially white boys, were inherently bad, irredeemable, or “superpredators”.¹⁵ Laying the blame at the door of modern, industrial, urban society, child-savers adopted a pragmatic, optimistic approach to delinquency that was at once admirable, naïve, and invasive. It sent thousands of children to abusive and

¹³ ‘Mayor Cermak Says Police Must End Terrorist Drive’, *Chicago Defender*, (Dec. 5, 1931), 2.

¹⁴ Wolcott, *Cops and Kids*; Agyepong, *The Criminalization of Black Children*; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*.

¹⁵ Conservatives and liberals alike in the 1990s feared a coming generation of “superpredators”: “radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters, including more preteenage boys who murder, assault, rape, rob, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, join gun-toting gangs, and create serious communal disorders.” The term was almost exclusively applied to young boys of color. Bennett, DiIulio, and Walters, *Body Count: Moral Poverty – and How to Win America’s War Against Crime and Drugs* (1996), 27.

terrible institutional homes but saved thousand more from abusive and terrible family homes. It condemned other ways of life as ignorant and inadequate, but believed that children of immigrants could be full and equal American citizens. It was deeply flawed, helped institutionalize racism across America and treated victims of rape as criminals. Even at its most progressive, child-saving could never solve the multiple problems of urban childhood in the long Progressive Era. Saul Alinsky, a Chicago community organizer who once worked for Shaw, reflected on the work of Chicago's Institute of Juvenile Research as "making surveys of all those kids in cold water tenements – with rats nibbling their toes and nothing to eat – and then discovering the solution: camping trips and some shit they called character building."¹⁶ While child savers acknowledged that poverty and inequality in urban America lay behind juvenile delinquency, their proposed solutions of playgrounds and juvenile courts did little to address these larger structural problems.

The metaphor of the swarm contained many of these contradictions. The very idea of the swarm suggested children should be feared, but could be saved. It pointed to the solution to all the threats street-frequenting children embodied in the creation of institutional "islands" of childhood where children could work, play, and live, supervised and sheltered from the adult world. But child-saving institutions didn't stop children's use of the streets, much less solve the problem of juvenile delinquency. The swarm challenged the running of institutions from the start, causing them to fail or adapt. Children in Chicago in the long Progressive Era refused to let adults confine them to institutional islands. They swarmed around the city, in and out of public and private spaces, institutional and non-institutional places. Even the most closed of juvenile-centered institutions, the reform schools, had semi-permeable boundaries that children frequently crossed. Institutional

¹⁶ Quoted in Salerno, *Boyhood*, 28.

logic struggled to cope with children's geography, often failing to even recognize the irrelevance of adult boundaries for children.

Centering children's geography forces us to rethink the organization of the history of childhood. Historians have tended to structure their work around institutions, bounded by the logic of institutional archives, and prioritizing adults' understanding of spaces over children's. Even those few historians who have looked at children on the city streets have usually treated children's places in the outdoor spaces of the city as cut off from "places-for-children." Furthermore, using a children's geography also allows us to move beyond debates over social control that have dominated the history of Progressive Era child-saving since Anthony Platt's *The Child Savers*, published in 1969.¹⁷ Regardless of the motives of child-savers, new institutions and regulations proved ineffectual. Neither the state nor the quasi-state actors in new institutions had the ability to eliminate or control the swarm. Historians such as Gary Gerstle have correctly characterized the new government programs of the Progressive Era, particularly those aimed at Americanizing immigrants and their children, as a dramatic expansion of coercive state power.¹⁸ Yet, this dissertation has demonstrated that, even in the face of the coercive state, immigrant children could disrupt, appropriate, or simply ignore most of the programs adults employed to control them. Thus, while institutional changes undermined the swarm, only a combination of technological changes, demographic trends, and economic upheavals in the 1930s finally ended the swarm's dominance of the streets of Chicago.

¹⁷ Platt, *The Child Savers*.

¹⁸ Gerstle, 'Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans', 524-58; See also McGerr, Michael E., *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in American, 1870-1920* (New York, 2003); Balogh, Brian, 'The State of the State Among Historians' *Social Science History* 27 (Fall 2003), 455-463. Canaday, Margot, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton, 2009); Fass, Paula, 'Foreword', in Marten, James, (ed.), *Children and Youth during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (New York, 2014), vii-ix; Ewert, Cody Dodge, 'Schools on Parade: Patriotism and the Transformation of Urban Education at the Dawn of the Progressive Era', *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 16 (2017), 65-81.

The refocusing of this dissertation from institutional spaces to the streets has rendered Chicago of the Progressive Era – “the known city” – unfamiliar, and demonstrated that children, who remain peripheral in urban history, were central to the Progressive Era urban experience. On the streets, children were at their most powerful. They did not resist adults but, rather, used their own destructive, violent power, to enforce their geographies. The power of the swarm could be harnessed by adults, as was the case with athletic clubs and the urban machine, but this always involved adult negotiation and compromise with children’s and young people’s desires. By highlighting children’s voices and children’s reactions to the child-saving movement, *The Swarm* argues that new institutions and regulations depended on children’s actions and children’s geographies as much as adult ideas about what urban childhood should be.

On the streets of Progressive Era Chicago, it was the adults who were marginalized and the adults who adapted to children’s activities. The 42 gang ensured that most people were scared to walk down the street because they thought the gang might rob them.¹⁹ But adults also had to contend with less overtly violent groups of children when they tried to quiet playing children, or got in the way of a snowball fight or ball game, or simply tried to get where they wanted to go. As Arthur Leland asked the Second Annual Recreation Congress: “Have you ever driven a timorous horse on city streets during the hours when the savage hoards are no longer cooped up in the schoolroom?”²⁰ Children had different priorities and motivations to adults, so children’s geographies differed from and sometimes conflicted with adults’ plans for the city. Because children liked to use private spaces like railroad tracks for work and play, adults had to invest substantial resources in preventing trespass and theft. The spaces children valued gave everyday racial violence its texture and provided the scaffolding for gang territories. As children grew up, their geographies

¹⁹ ‘Life History of Cuno C.’.

²⁰ Goodman, *Choosing Sides*, 15.

changed and the adult world drew them more and more inside, leaving room for a new swarm generation. Only the Depression broke this cycle and allowed adult geographies to eclipse children's understanding and uses of the streets.

Since the Progressive Era, scholars have described the streets and other outdoor spaces of early twentieth century urban America as the "interstices" of the city – literally "the spaces between". Frederic Thrasher argued that gangs developed from boy-life in the interstitial spaces of the city: the streets, alleys, and vacant lots, while urban historian, Elizabeth Wilson, wrote "Although women, along with minorities, children, the poor, are still not full citizens in the sense that they have never been granted full and free access to the streets, industrial life still drew them into public life, and they have survived and flourished in the interstices of the city."²¹ The portrayal of the streets as "in-between" suggests that other places in the city are more important historical sites which the streets simply lie between. Because the marginalized are confined to the interstices of the city, the rendering of the streets as "in between", reinforces their historiographic sidelining.²² The marginalization of the street in American historiography has thus contributed to the marginalization of children.

From the point of view of children's geography, the streets of Chicago in the long Progressive Era were hardly interstitial. Only homes rivaled the streets for capturing the greatest part of children's time, and children spent more of their waking hours outside. On the street children could play, make money, socialize, and simply hang around, waiting for something to happen. But even for adult Chicagoans, streets existed as more than "spaces between". To get to work, or home, or to the shops, or to leisure spaces, adults used the

²¹ Thrasher, *The Gang*; Wilson, *Sphinx in the City*, 8.

²² Even those urban historians which have been most attuned to the traditionally marginalized have seldom included children in their stories. For example Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*; Blair, *I've Got To Make My Livin'*; Wilson, *Sphinx in the City*.

streets on a daily basis. Black Chicagoans knew the importance of access to the streets when swarming children stopped them from getting to work or school or leisure places. Not just in-between, the streets served as the binding that held the disparate parts of the city together. Unlike the other parts of the city, everybody had to use the streets. Anti-child labor reformer E. N. Clopper described the democratic potential of the city streets in 1913. People on the streets, according to Clopper, “rub elbows with all the elements making up their little world [and] absorb the principles of democracy, - for the street is a great leveler.”²³ As urban theorist Spiro Kostof argued, without the street as a public space “there is no city... the fundamental reality of streets, as with all public spaces, is political ... the street structures community. It puts on display the workings of the city and supplies a backdrop for its common rituals.”²⁴ The streets often stand as a metaphor for the city as a whole. Just as Chicago was the model for all urban sociology, the streets of “the known city” represented urban American life more generally.²⁵

If the street symbolized the dangerous and seductive city, the swarm was crucial to the perception of Chicago as dangerous and disorderly. While Americans worried for the innocent country boy and girl lured into vice in the city, the urban child seemed so removed from innocence as to threaten society in its own right. It was the streets where adults encountered the swarm and the usual fear of the rabble on the streets was multiplied by adults’ fears of generational change.

As the swarm disappeared and the automobile ascended, nostalgia for street childhood and the multi-functional street itself grew. According to a broad range of commentators, the twentieth century saw the change in the streets from multifunctional

²³ Clopper, *Child Labor*.

²⁴ Kostof, *The City Assembled*, 194.

²⁵ Anderson, David D., ‘Chicago As Metaphor’, *Great Lakes Review* 1:1 9Summer, 1974), 3-15

public spaces to monofunctional traffic networks.²⁶ Although, as this dissertation has argued, the automobile did not destroy children's street cultures, from the 1930s onwards, many Americans believed it had. Edith Abbott, who had spent most of her career trying to get children into juvenile-centered institutions, wrote nostalgically about the automobile's destruction of street life, and particularly play opportunities in Chicago in the thirties.²⁷ As early as the 1940s, Americans like Sophie Ruskay, who had grown up the child of Russian immigrants in New York City, looked back on their childhoods and believed "Children owned the streets in a way unthinkable to city children of today ... [and] we gloried all the more in our freedom from restriction."²⁸

Nostalgia for an independent childhood particularly emerged in middle-class American society. Parenting guides, such as one from 1932 by Mary Buell Sayles, warned parents against limiting their child's freedom too greatly. Sayles brought up the example of one "problem child" who was so "molly-coddled" by her parents, she "was not allowed to go on the street alone, even to do an errand for her mother at the nearby grocery."²⁹ When the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* published a special issue on "Children in the Depression", one of the authors, Roy Helton argued that children in the thirties were healthier and better educated than previous generations, but also more disciplined street users who had better supervision and benefitted from organised playgrounds. However, the situation did not completely satisfy Helton. In fact, the title of his piece expressed his concern – "Are We Doing Too Much For Our Children?". He urged parents that among the many things they could do for their children, one of the best was

²⁶ Jacobs, Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Harmondsworth, 1964); Marshall, Stephen, *Streets & Patterns* (London, 2005); Gehl, Jan, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (New York, 1987).

²⁷ Abbott, *The Tenements of Chicago*.

²⁸ Quoted in Chudacoff, *Children at Play*, 130.

²⁹ Sayles, M. B., *The Problem Child at Home: A Study in Parent-Child Relationships* (New York, 1932), 33.

“letting them alone when they needed to be let alone” and “allowing them to make mistakes and experience hardships”.³⁰ Above all, Helton argued, Americans should not treat their children like “precious possessions”.³¹ According to Helton, then, the “hiving” of children had been too successful. While Helton was one of many American observers who felt childhood had become too regulated and too supervised by the end of the thirties, gone from the discourse surrounding childhood was any mention of the swarm: not one out of the thirty-one articles in this edition mentioned children on the streets at all.

Since the 1930s, nostalgia for a lost, romanticized, outdoor childhood, even an outdoor urban childhood, has grown. These days, it has taken the form of a movement known as “free range parenting.” The term was coined by columnist and mother Lenore Skenazy in 2008 who allowed her nine-year-old son to ride the New York subway alone. Billed as a “commonsense approach to parenting in these overprotective times,” free-range parenting urges parents – explicitly including urban parents – to allow their children independent mobility outside of the home.³²

On the other hand, working-class children of color, especially those who live in the “inner-city”, continue to be treated as delinquent or neglected when they use street spaces. Poor parents, especially those from minority groups, risk arrest when they allow their children to roam independently. Black working mother, Debra Harrell, for example, was arrested in 2014 in South Carolina for allowing her nine-year-old daughter to play in a park

³⁰ Helton, Roy, ‘Are We Doing Too Much For Our Children?’, *Children in A Depression Decade*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, v. 212 (November 1940), 232.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 232. Helton’s assessment of the state of American childhood by 1940 corresponds to the work of sociologist Viviana Zelizer whose ground-breaking work on the sentimental value of children, *Pricing the Priceless Child* argued that between 1870 and the 1930s American children transformed from economically useful to economically worthless yet sentimentally priceless. See Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*. While Zelizer does show that some adults resisted the economically useless child, her analysis of the backlash against the priceless child mainly considers child labour defenders. Here, Helton is not calling for children to be sent to work, but rather that children should be less supervised, more independent.

³² <http://www.freerangekids.com> (accessed 13.04.2018)

near Debra's workplace. In addition to her night in jail, the state placed Debra's daughter in foster care.³³ Marginalized children face violence if they use urban spaces, even "places for children", as was the case for twelve-year-old Tamir Rice who police officers killed for playing with a toy gun at Cudell Recreation Center in Cleveland in 2014. When Lenore Skenazy's nine-year-old free-range son rode the subway in New York in 2008 he was able to (and did) ask strangers for directions, but a decade later, Brennan Walker, a fourteen-year-old African-American schoolboy, was shot by a stranger who thought Brennan was a burglar when he knocked on a door asking for directions after he missed his bus and needed help finding his way to school.³⁴

But, in Chicago, young people of color are organizing against the violence they face in public spaces. Young people's organizations like Black Youth Project, Fearless Leading by the Youth, and Assata's Daughters are fighting to improve the lives of young Chicagoans of color, particularly from police brutality and the criminalization of black street use. As these young people recognize, access to public spaces is fundamentally political: "being a citizen, in the full sense of the term, implies not being disturbed, challenged or persecuted for one's mere presence in public space."³⁵ The citizen has a "right to the city."³⁶ Children's, particularly marginalized children's, lack of ability to use public spaces undisturbed, unchallenged, and unpersecuted is thus a symptom of their lack of full citizenship. Furthermore, because adults no longer encounter children in public spaces,

³³ Calarco, Jessica McCrory, 'Free-Range Parenting's Unfair Double Standard', *The Atlantic* (April 3, 2018), www.theatlantic.com (accessed 13.04.2018)

³⁴ Mathis-Lilley, Ben, 'Man Arrested in Detroit Suburbs for Firing Shotgun at Black 14-Year-Old Who Knocked on Door to Ask for Directions to School'. *Slate* April 13, 2018 <https://slate.com> (accessed 13.04.2018)

³⁵ Di Masso, Andres, 'Micropolitics of Public Space: on the Contested Limits of Citizenship as Locational Practice', *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 3:2 (2015), 65-66

³⁶ Gilbert, L., and Phillips, C., 'Practices of Urban Environmental Citizenships: Rights to the City and Rights to Nature in Toronto', *Citizenship Studies*, 7:3 (2003), 313-330; Butler, Chris, *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City* (Abingdon, 2012).

they do not view young people as legitimate members of the public.³⁷ In protecting children from the city, and the city from children, American society has made age play a fundamental role in how Americans experience their world.

Nowadays children are marginalized in public spaces, but this was not always the case. *The Swarm* reveals a world where children dominated city streets and adults were peripheral. Even the coercive apparatus of the state was unable to completely tame the disorderly, teeming streets or confine children to institutional islands. Outdoors and away from adult supervision, children molded the city to suit their wishes. Destructive, violent, vulnerable, and diverse: children swarmed at the heart of urbanizing, industrializing America.

³⁷ See Valentine, Gill, *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood* (Burlington, 2004)

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