Shuttered Schools in the Black Metropolis: Race, History, and Discourse on Chicago's South Side

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Shuttered Schools in the Black Metropolis:

Race, History, and Discourse on Chicago's South Side

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Introduction

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

-Gwendolyn Brooks: "The Pool Players. Seven at the Golden Shovel," 1963.

In the hazy cataloguing of my literary mind, this is the first poem I remember.

To grow up as a school child in Chicago is to know the name of Gwendolyn Brooks,

most likely as the woman who wrote the short tale of a group of "real cool" young

people leaving school and ends with their early deaths. Brooks was the first African-

American to win a Pulitzer Prize, and she was the Poet Laureate of Illinois. But to

many, she will be remembered best as the bard of Bronzeville, the poet who dedicated

herself to chronicling daily life in the community she called home. Bronzeville has been

lucky in this way, blessed with an undue share of storytellers and dreamkeepers, poets

and bluesmen, journalists and freedom fighters. A review of their names—names like

St. Clair Drake, Ida B. Wells, and Nat King Cole—makes the prospect of trying to tell a

Bronzeville story seem like perhaps a foolish errand.

In a 1983 reading, Brooks described her motivation for the poem. She was

passing a pool hall one afternoon and saw a group of young boys inside. Upon seeing

them, she said, "instead of asking myself, 'why aren't they in school?' I asked, 'I

wonder how they feel about themselves.'" It is this sort of question, with its attention to

agency, to speaking one's own truth, and to the presumption that a community may contain within its own wisdoms the answers to all its many conundrums, which has made me brave or unwise enough to try to write the subsequent chapters. While they represent many hours of reading, reflection, and questioning, they also—much like Brooks's poem—result from one fundamental moment of dissonance. It was 2013, and I was alone, sitting on the edge of the bed with the door closed, tightening my grip on the small glowing rectangle of my phone as I read a *Chicago Sun-Times* article with the list of Chicago Public Schools that would be closing at the end of the year. When I got to the name of the school in Bronzeville where I had been a teacher, I had to read it and re-read it and read it again to ensure I wasn't missing something. But surely this was a mistake? My eyes flitted upward to the statement from the school CEO, Barbara Byrd-Bennett. Three words emerged, and I read them, too, over and over: the schools, she said, were *underutilized* (yes, my school had extra classroom space that we used for special activities, storage, or special district events), *underperforming* (a moving target of test scores, one which I didn't believe in but was accustomed to), and *underresourced*. "But," I said aloud to myself, "that doesn't make any sense." How could the person charged with doling out resources condemn an institution for not having enough resources? I read it again, and again, and I grew sadder and angrier and more confused.

This moment of dissonance led me down the path of what would become a three-year attempt to understand a very basic question: why were the schools being closed? In particular, why were so many black schools being closed? The explanations offered by the district struck me as inconsistent at best and illogical at worst, and left

me tongue-tied when my fellow education researchers at Harvard asked me to clarify what, exactly, was happening in Chicago. The researcher in me was intrigued and puzzled, the teacher in me was mourning, and the Chicagoan in me—witness to a seemingly bottomless tradition of corruption, political abuse and dishonesty—was skeptical. At the intersection of these identities, I became obsessed with teasing out something deeper. How did race, power, and history play a role in what was happening in my hometown? Behind the numbers and the maps and the graphs, who were the people—the teachers, the children, the neighbors—who would be impacted by the decision to close so many schools? And, as Brooks asked, how did they feel about themselves—about their lives, about the machinations of the city around them, about hope or despair? I chased the story to boarded-up schools and dusty library archives, to City Hall and to Saturday picnics, to the empty lots where public housing projects once stood and to the brown-brick complexes where they remained. When I felt like I had answered one question, it inevitably led me to another. Early on, a principal I knew and trusted, when I asked him to describe the school closure process, took a sharp breath before calling it "a headlong rush into a spinning fan." This characterization could describe, as well, my research process, and to orient myself I tried to always keep an eye on the center in order to understand the rapid movement that happened around me.

The four chapters that follow are the result of this process—this headlong rush, guided by obsessive questioning. In Chapter 1, I begin by presenting a historical sociological analysis of segregation and public housing in Bronzeville, and how those phenomena relate to the claim the contemporary public schools are underutilized. In Chapter 2, I conduct a critical discourse analysis of school closure hearings, to better

understand the way Bronzeville school community members framed the role of race and

racism in the closure process, and how this framing contrasted that of district officials.

In Chapter 3, I present a narrative case study of Dyett High School, which was slated

for closure and phased out, and inspired community members to hold a hunger strike in

an effort to see it reopened. Finally, in Chapter 4, I present a theory I call institutional

mourning as a way of understanding community members' emotional responses to

school closure, based on interviews I conducted with parents, teachers, students, and

Bronzeville residents.

Each of these chapters uses a different methodological approach to share a

different corner of the same, broader Bronzeville story. I view them as layered atop one

another, resembling segments of a pyramid: we begin with a historical understanding

that creates a necessary foundation to understand all else, which leads us to the heated

moments of the closings themselves, followed by the challenging possibility of a re-

opening, before we examine the emotional aftermath of closure. In reverse, one might

view these chapters backwards, as an archaeologist does: the most recent, most

observable phenomena at the surface—the emotional devastation of school closure—

leading us, as we dig deeper, to the evidence that lies at the foundation of things: the

underpinnings of racism in Bronzeville's history.

In Chapter 4, I quote Martin, a young man who has seen both his grammar

school and his high school close, as he discusses the threat school closure poses to a

sense of community memory and legacy. "And as you're getting older," he says, "and

you're listening to these stories, at some point you still gotta move on and you can't—

you're not going to remember everything your parents told you. So that's how you get

black history to go away. That's how you get black history to go away." Here, standing on the shoulders of the many storytellers who have made Bronzeville's reputation the stuff of legend among black Chicagoans, is where I hope to intervene. I began this inquiry because I wanted to understand something that confounded me, but in the end, what I hope is to have documented the injustice and resilience and desire and agony of this singularly important community. What I hope is that I can keep black history from going away. What I hope for is to help us understand, and to remember.

Chapter 1: A Street in Bronzeville

We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,
Grayed in, and gray….
> \- Gwendolyn Brooks, "kitchenette building"

The kitchenette is the funnel through which our pulverized lives flow to ruin and death on the
city pavements, at a profit.
> \- Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (p. 111)

The wood-paneled room was packed with parents, students, and teachers. A smattering of applause stirred the crowd as the regional science fair winners sat back down, guided gently to their seats by teachers. David J. Vitale, the president of the Chicago Board of Education, overlooked the scene from a wooden dais, seated beneath an oversized painted seal of the City of Chicago. "We will now proceed with the business portion of the meeting," he said, looking down at a piece of paper and holding the microphone gingerly with his left hand. "And, uh, with the CEO's report. Barbara?"

Barbara Byrd-Bennett, the superintendent of the district (termed the "Chief Executive Officer") took the podium, reading glasses balanced low on the bridge of her nose. Appointed almost one year prior by the city's mayor, Rahm Emanuel, she was now facing a crucial moment in her tenure as leader of the nation's third-largest school district: explaining why the district was considering the closure of 54 schools at the end of the academic year, despite the ire of community members. Two weeks prior, Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis had held a press conference in front of Mahalia Jackson Elementary School on the city's South Side, calling the planned closures "outrageous" and explicitly racist: "There is no way people of conscience will stand by and allow these people to shut down nearly a third of our school district without putting up a fight. Most of these campuses are in the Black community…. And this is by

design" (CTU Communications, 2013). Amidst the criticism by Lewis and others, Byrd-Bennett maintained her stance that the school closings were the right choice for the city, and the statement she was about to make to an audience of Board members, parents, and teachers was an opportunity to explain why.

"I believe that every child in every community in Chicago deserves access to a high-quality education that will prepare them for success in college, career, and in life. I believe that that's the purpose of public schools. But for too long, children in certain parts of our city have been cheated out of the resources they need to succeed in the classroom because they are trapped in underutilized schools. These underutilized schools are also under-resourced. Today, Chicago has 145,000 fewer school-aged children than it did in the year 2000. This has affected student enrollment, especially in the city's South and West sides, which saw significant population declines and now have the most underutilized schools" (Chicago Public Schools, 2013).

Later, Byrd-Bennett addresses the accusations of racism more directly, dismissing them on both personal and historic grounds:

"But what I *cannot* understand, and *will* not accept, is that the proposals I am offering are racist. That is an affront to me as a woman of color. And it is an affront to every parent in our community who demands a better education for their children. First, the overwhelming majority of students in CPS are children of color. Any significant change in the status quo, therefore, is going to affect those children. This is not racist, it's simply a fact. Second, the greatest population losses in our city over the past decade

have taken place in the South and the West sides. Underutilized schools in these areas are the result of demographic changes and not race."

The statement with which Byrd-Bennett closes ("demographic changes and not race") is somewhat paradoxical given that "demographic changes" would generally be construed to include changes in the population of a particular racial group or groups. Further, like the phrase "under-resourced schools," the term "underutilized schools" suggests an actor who remains invisible, unnamed and therefore free from culpability. Thus, in the end, a speech intended to answer a question with a straightforward explanation—*why are the schools being closed? Because they are underutilized*—instead provokes a series of further questions. What happened to drive down enrollment in these schools? And who is the invisible actor suggested by the participial adjectives *underutilized* and *under-resourced*; that is, how was utilization managed and resources allocated such that we find the present results?

In this chapter, I will explore these questions in the context of the South Side community of Bronzeville. By focusing on this community, where four schools were slated for closure in 2013 and 16 schools have been closed or entered into a "turnaround" process since 1999, I aim explore the historical context behind the underutilization which the district cited as the reason for closures.

Constructing an Effective History: A Transdisciplinary Approach

I contend that it is not possible to fundamentally understand the 2013 school closings in Bronzeville without understanding the history of the community, and in presenting this argument I draw on the tradition of *historical sociology.* Historical

sociology is "an ongoing tradition of research into the nature and effects of large-scale structures and long-term processes of change… a transdisciplinary set of endeavors" (Skocpol, 1984), uniting sociological theory with evidence from historical analysis bolstered by a reflexive stance (Dean, 1994). My approach is transdisciplinary in that I am concerned as a sociologist with the function and structure of social systems and the impact of those social systems on individuals and groups within a specific community, but I do not think it possible to understand these social systems by only looking at a static view of their operation in the contemporary era. By thinking historically, and seeking to understand how these social systems have arisen over time, we can develop a more intimate comprehension of their functioning. I find such analysis especially necessary for thinking through possibilities for social change, transformation, and justice; that is, in analyzing society as we know it I hope to see not only how things are, but how they could be other than as they are, and doing so requires an understanding of how they came to be. As Calhoun (2003) notes, historical sociology is important for the obvious fact that studying social change is important, but also because "it is a way of dispelling the illusions of false necessity…. Seeing the present in relation to the past is an important way of recognizing its contingency, and pressing oneself to attend not simply to surface phenomena but to the underlying causes and conditions that produce those phenomena" (p. 384). By viewing the Bronzeville of the present in relation to the Bronzeville of the past, I hope to enact a space of possibility that things could be otherwise.

In particular, I hope to construct an *effective history*: historical analysis that "historicizes that which is thought to be transhistorical," acknowledges the unique

context surrounding historical events rather than attempting to create global theories, and challenges "the necessity of the present" by problematizing its inevitability (Dean, 1994, p. 1). In contrast to the way in which traditional historical methods presume that the noblest ideas are developed from the greatest distance, and rendered with the greatest abstraction—a tendency Foucault characterizes as "the surreptitious practice of historians, their pretension to examine things further from themselves," effective history "shortens its vision to those things nearest to it," and "studies what is closest" (Foucault, 1984, p. 89); in my case, the object of my study is close temporally (in that these events are recent), spatially (taking place in my hometown of Chicago) and relationally (in a community for which I feel a personal affinity, where I once worked as a public school teacher myself).

Further, Foucault suggests that that the historian ought to affirm his or her personal knowledge of and perspective on an event. Instead of attempting to "erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy—the unavoidable obstacles of their passion," those undertaking an effective history should be explicit in their subjective view of events (Foucault, 1984, p. 90). In the case of this inquiry, I enter from the perspective of multiple intersecting positions: as an African-American woman and a Chicago native, as an educator who once taught at a now-closed school in this very community, and as a scholar concerned with the policies governing American public schools and the impact of those policies on youth, particularly African-American youth. As I am grounded not only in a particular time and place but also in my own subjective personhood, I aim to construct an effective history rather than an "objective" history. Indeed, as critical race

theorists have argued, claims to objectivity can often serve as "a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society" (Yosso, 2005, p. 74) and the experiential knowledge of people of color is not only a legitimate source of evidence, but is in fact critical to understanding the function of racism as a fundamental American social structure.

Portrait of a Community

I present this study in the form of a *portrait* of the Bronzeville community. Portraiture is a sociological qualitative research method that intentionally seeks to join together tenets of empirical soundness and aesthetic quality by artfully portraying the voices and experiences of research participants, as well as the voice and experience of the researcher. The portraitist endeavors to create a "painting with words" by "merging the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 4).

As a method rooted in phenomenological perspectives, portraiture pays close attention to the *context* surrounding the subject, data collection, and the research endeavor overall, and presumes that the experiences recounted by research participants are profoundly shaped by the context of their lives. Thus, "the setting—physical, geographic, temporal, historical, cultural, aesthetic—within which the action takes place... becomes the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 41). Additionally, in deliberate response to a disciplinary history of locating pathology in individuals, communities, and organizations, portraitists engage in a search for goodness as part of their process, with the understanding that "assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with

imperfections" and "that there are myriad ways in which goodness can be expressed" (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9). Thirdly, portraiture requires the researcher to construct a narrative, listening carefully to participants' accounts and closely observing events and surroundings with close attention to the themes and metaphors that will ultimately lie at the foundation of the story. The portraitist makes strategic decisions about when and how to include her own voice in a fashion that strengthens the narrative without drowning out the voices of the participants. For instance, the researcher's voice may enter the portrait as a witness, as a source of interpretation, or as a voice in conversation with others (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2007). Lastly, portraiture is written for a broad audience, not solely for academic readers. In constructing a portrait, the researcher seeks to "speak in a language that is not coded or exclusive, and to develop texts that will seduce the readers into thinking more deeply about issues that concern them" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 10).

In uniting all of these elements—the empirics and aesthetics of portraiture, the transdisciplinary approach of historical sociology, the ethical commitments of effective history—my goal is a simple one: to bring together my own voice, the voice of community members, and voices from history to tell you about a community that is important to me and, I argue, to the city, and to the country. In so doing, I hope to offer insight to Chicago stakeholders facing the post-closure landscape, and to provoke a new set of questions for district leaders and community members to consider as they evaluate the effectiveness of school closings as a policy. But, more than anything, I hope to tell a Bronzeville story.

Welcome to the Black Metropolis

Standing on the corner of 47th and King Drive, I feel like can look backwards into time almost as easily as I look down the street. If I turn my attention away from the cars rushing by and the rumbling noise of the Green Line train, symbols of this intersection's past are everywhere. On the four corners of the intersection stand four tall pillars, and atop of each is a bronze statue of jazz musician—one is on sax, one on a long-necked bass guitar, one on clarinet, and one is the bandleader, his hand raised triumphantly to keep time. A man in a suit, carrying an issue of the *Defender* under his arm, slows his stride to check his reflection in the mirror of Peach's Restaurant and adjusts his collar before continuing on his way.

On the southwest corner there is an empty lot where someone has constructed raised-bed garden boxes and painted wooden pillars with images of the sun, plants, and inspirational faces and messages from black history. Adjacent to the lot is a three-story graystone with an enclosed stone balcony; once stately, it is now boarded up. On the southeast corner is the Harold Washington Cultural Center, where the inscription on a statue of Chicago's first black mayor reminds us that he was a "consummate statesman, a political genius." On the northeast corner sits a burger and hot dog restaurant, H-Dogs, owned by chef Cliff Rome. Rome also owns Peach's, as well as a catering business, an art gallery, and the historic Parkway Ballroom.

Pedestrian traffic is light but steady, and cars speed along the wide, heavily landscaped boulevard. When the 47th Street bus pulls up at the same time as the King Drive express, there is a chorus of honks, whistles and calls as people try to get the bus driver to hold for a woman in scrubs rushing across the street to catch her transfer. A

man pulls over and asks me if there is a Jewel grocery store further east on 47th; I tell

him there's not, but he can go up to the one on 35th. "I hate that one!" he exclaims,

before driving away. Everyone else I encounter—a man in a blue workman's uniform, a

woman smiling in a pink skirt waiting to cross the street, three men seated on the

median watching traffic go by—greets me with a smile, a "how you doin," or "hey,

pretty girl."

I'm hungry for lunch, so I step into Peach's, open daily from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.,

serving breakfast and lunch. A sign on the restaurant's exterior shows an illustration of

a young girl with soft eyes, hair braided in pigtails, looking over her shoulder. I

recognize Akilah, the hostess—she is my brother's close friend and neighbor, and her

daughter Subira often plays with my niece. A large painted chalkboard wall displays the

specials and I know right away that I want chicken wings and French toast, which I eat

while I chat with my waitress, Merrianne, about the special menu Peach's served on

Father's Day (ribs and gumbo).

As I eat, I open a thick, heavy book as a reminder that I am not the first

sociologist to document my time at this intersection. In their classic study *Black*

Metropolis (1945), St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton describe the corner this way:

> "Stand in the center of the Black Belt—at Chicago's 47th St. and South
>
> Parkway.[i] Around you swirls a continuous eddy of faces—black, brown, olive,
>
> yellow, and white. Soon you will realize that this is not 'just another
>
> neighborhood' of the Midwest Metropolis. Glance at the newsstand at the
>
> corner…. [Y]ou will also find a number of weeklies headlining the activities of
>
> Negroes—Chicago's *Defender, Bee, News-Ledger,* and *Metropolitan News,* the

Pittsburgh *Courier*, and a number of others. In the nearby drugstore colored

clerks are bustling about….Two large theaters will catch your eye with their

billboards featuring Negro orchestras and vaudeville troupes….On a spring or

summer day this spot, '47th and South Park,' is the urban equivalent of a village

square. In fact, Black Metropolis has a saying, 'If you're trying to find a certain

Negro in Chicago, stand on the corner of 47th and South Park long enough and

you're bound to see him. There is continuous and colorful movement here…."

(pp. 379-380).

Given the 70-year difference in our observations, it is striking how much about

Drake and Cayton's description mirrors my own—businesses owned and staffed by

black people, the familiar faces, the *Defender*. But in other ways, our descriptions

differ. How did the beautiful graystone residence end up boarded-up and vacant? While

cars pass me playing songs by Rihanna and Future, why is it that these artists are not

likely to come play in the community the way Lena Horne and Louis Armstrong once

did—memorialized by the bronze statues of musicians that tower over the street? How

did the hum of black social life—the friendly faces, the "how are you" greetings—quiet

down from the "continuous eddy" that Drake and Cayton describe? As it turns out, the

story of this community is a story of continuous demographic change, to use Byrd-

Bennett's phrase. But to understand what 47th and King Drive looks like in 2015, we

have to begin our story much earlier.

Becoming Bronzeville

For the first decades of the existence of the City of Chicago, its black residents were few in number (despite the fame of its first permanent resident, Jean Baptiste Point Du Sable, a black man). In 1900, the city was home to about 30,000 black residents—about 1.8% of the total population (Drake & Cayton, 1970, p. 8). Facing segregation, excluded and ignored by the city's business community, these residents concentrated—like most of the other citizens in Chicago, a city of neighborhoods and ethnic enclaves—in one area.

The other ethnic groups (including Polish, German, Italian, and Scandinavian Chicagoans) who arrived in Chicago at the beginning of the twentieth century followed the same pattern familiar to immigrants across the country: as generations established themselves in the United States and learned English, they "steadily moved away from these areas of first settlement into more desirable areas of second settlement" before assimilating into the general population (Drake & Cayton, 1970, pp. 9-10). But black Chicagoans were different. During the first Great Migration, as World War I drove hundreds of thousands of African Americans northward in search of industrial employment opportunities (and in flight from the social and political persecutions of the South), Chicago's black population swelled to about 109,000 in 1920—3.6 times what it was two decades prior, while the city's population overall was 1.6 times its level in 1900. Labor recruiters traveled by train throughout the South, urging black people to move north. Drake and Cayton describe the recruiters' techniques: "They sometimes carried free tickets in their pockets, and always glowing promises on their tongues…. And as each wave [of laborers] arrived, the migrants wrote the folks back home about

the wonderful North. A flood of relatives and friends followed in their wake," and the weekly Negro newspaper the *Defender* published open letters imploring migrants to join their kin in the big city and turn their back on the South. "Have they stopped their Jim Crow cars? Can you buy a Pullman sleeper where you wish? ... [T]o their section of the country we have said, as the song goes, 'I hear you calling me,' and have boarded the train singing 'Good-bye, Dixie Land'" (Drake & Cayton, 1970, pp. 58-59).

Notably, these residents did not disperse across the city like their European counterparts—they stayed in one place. While the same cultural homophily that united ethnic enclaves in other parts of the city doubtlessly played a role, African Americans were also bound by the fear of racial violence. Between 1917 and 1921, 58 bombs struck the homes of black residents, bankers who loaned them mortgages, or real estate agents who sold them property. As the Chicago Commission on Race Relations[ii] noted, these bombings resulted in two deaths and $100,000 of damage, and amounted to violence at the rate of one bombing every 20 days over a period of three years and eight months. These bombings were part of "a general scheme to close the channels through which the invasion [of Negros] proceeded" (Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 1922, p. 123). The Commission report describes the bombing of the home of Jesse Binga, founder of the first black-owned bank in the city, who often provided mortgages to black residents denied by other banks:

> "On November 12, 1919, an automobile rolled by [Binga's] realty office and a bomb was tossed from it. It left the office in ruins…. Twenty-one days later an automobile drew up in front of Binga's home at 5922 South Park Avenue, and its occupants put a bomb under the front steps. It failed to explode. When the

firemen arrive they found it sizzling in the slush beneath the porch. The police

declared that this was an expression of racial feeling. Twenty-five days later the

bombers reappeared and left a third bomb. It tore up the porch of Binga's home.

Again the police found that the explosion had been caused by 'racial feeling,'

white men having said that 'Binga rented too many flats to Negroes in high-

class residence districts'" (p. 125).

After the third bombing, police were assigned to guard Binga's home in shifts; during a

shift change on February 28, 1920, a police guard's late arrival on his shift left an

interval during which a fourth bomb was thrown at the house. It landed in a puddle.

Binga's home was bombed a fifth time three months later, and the resulting explosion

completely destroyed the front of the house and shattered windows in surrounding

houses. Despite Binga offering a $1,000 reward to determine who was behind the

bombings, a sixth explosion struck his property in November of that year, and no one

was ever arrested for any of the attacks.

     This campaign also included the harassment of such real estate owners in the

media, where they were labeled "unclean outcasts of society to be boycotted and

ostracized in every possible manner" because they had violated "a gentleman's

obligation to his community in selling a home to a Negro" (p. 124). For their part,

current and potential black homeowners faced threatening phone calls and letters. One

man, Crede Hubbard of 43rd and Vincennes, told the police that he received a phone call

the day he was to move into his new house. A man identifying himself as "Mr. Day of

the Hyde Park and Kenwood Association" told him, "We have spent a lot of money and

we want to keep this district white." He pressured Hubbard to sell his property; after

Hubbard refused, he received a visit a week later, during which another homeowners'

association member named Mr. Austin told him: "You will understand that you are not

welcome in this district…. Why do you persist in wanting to live here when you know

you are not wanted?" and, as the men left the home, "You had better consider this

proposition." Later, Hubbard was told by a railroad clerk that he had received a letter

from Mr. Austin, instructing him to "use whatever influence you have to induce him to

sell and find out for us his lowest figures." The following week, during a trip to

Milwaukee, Hubbard read in the newspaper that his home had been bombed while his

children slept.

Similar patterns emerged in each of the 58 bombings, and the conclusion of the

investigating commission on the matter was indicting: "In all these fifty-eight bombings

the police have been able to accomplish nothing definite. Practically every incident

involved an automobile, descriptions of which were furnished by witnesses. The

precautions taken to prevent bombings, even if they were well planned and

systematically carried out, failed lamentably" (Chicago Commission on Race Relations,

1929, p. 123).

Given this context, wherein violence and intimidation were used to patrol and

maintain the borders between the Chicago's black residential corridor and the rest of the

city, it is no surprise that African American residents remained bound together in one

area. By the 1920s, this region of Chicago between 22nd and 51st Streets was known as

the "Black Belt," the "Black Ghetto," or, worse, "Darkie Town." James J. Gentry,

theater critic for the black newspaper *The Chicago Bee*, suggested to the paper's owner

Anthony Overton that the *Bee* use the more favorable term "Bronzeville" instead.[iii]

When Gentry left the *Bee* in 1932 and pitched his idea for a "Mayor of Bronzeville"

contest to Robert Sengstacke Abbott, publisher of the *Chicago Defender*, the name

stuck (Dempsey, 2004).

Strictly speaking, Bronzeville is not one of Chicago's officially-designated 77

"community areas" [iv]—that is to say, it's not a neighborhood per se. Comprised of two

different community areas (Douglas and Grand Boulevard), Bronzeville is, as journalist

Natalie Moore has noted, "a social construction," reflecting boundaries rooted in shared

culture and shared struggle.[v] For the purpose of my analysis, I define the community as

bounded by 51st Street on the south, Cermak on the north, Cottage Grove on the east,

and State Street on the west.

The Invisible Fence

In addition to physical violence, restrictive covenants—private agreements

between property owners and real estate agents that homes not be sold to or occupied by

black residents—made it extraordinarily difficult for African-Americans to find housing

in other parts of the city. One member of the Chicago Real Estate Board (CREB) called

restrictive covenants "a marvelous delicately-woven chain armour…[excluding] any

member of a race not Caucasian" (Jones-Correa, 2001, p. 559). The CREB took an

active role in encouraging restrictive covenants, sending advocates and speakers across

the city to sing the praises of the strategy to white property owners (Hirsch, 2005). The

Board also took a vote to expel any of its members who rented or sold to black people

on a block otherwise occupied by white residents (Pattillo, 2007). Aside from directly

preventing black residents from finding homes in white areas, restrictive covenants also

served as informal signals influencing institutional gatekeepers. As Brooks (2002)

argues, even once they were legally unenforceable, "lawyers, lenders, realtors, insurers

and government agencies continued to rely on covenants as proxies for the racial

exclusivity and class of neighborhoods" (p. 12). By the time they were outlawed in the

1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* Supreme Court ruling, restrictive covenants had "served their

purpose" (Jones-Correa, 2000, p. 559) by cementing in place a sort of invisible fence

around Bronzeville. Ironically, even though this fence was created and forcefully

maintained through fear, violence, and discrimination, it also set the stage for a certain

degree of economic, political, and creative vitality for black Chicagoans.

As a consequence of its spatial isolation, Bronzeville became a semi-

autonomous residential and business district. Bronzeville residents also enjoyed some

political autonomy; in 1928 they elected Congressman Oscar DePriest, making him the

north's first black member of the U.S. House of Representatives after a successful

political career begun as the community's alderman (Commission on Chicago

Landmarks, 1997).

The community also became a hub of black artistic and intellectual production.

Jazz clubs peppered State Street beginning in the 1920s, as King Oliver, Louis

Armstrong, and Jelly Roll Morton brought their talents from the South (Commission on

Chicago Landmarks, 1997). Bronzeville was home to the *Defender*, which, through

nationwide distribution, played a role in both articulating and shaping the political

opinions of African Americans across the country. Cultural luminaries Ida B. Wells,

Richard Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sam Cooke, Nat King Cole, and Mahalia Jackson

all called Bronzeville home at some point in their lives.

But the relative economic autonomy of Bronzeville also left the area especially vulnerable to the financial fortunes of its community members. As the 1920s came to a close, the Great Depression shattered the economic prospects of many black Chicagoans, while new white-owned business developments and chain stores along 47th Street began to entice shoppers who previously kept their consumer dollars within the community (Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 1997).

Furthermore, Bronzeville increasingly had another problem, alongside economic disinvestment: housing. The first Great Migration slowed during the years of the Depression as work dried up, but began to pick back up again after World War II. Soon, Bronzeville's swelling population, combined with the limitations of violence and restrictive covenants, inevitably meant that a skyrocketing density that made life hard for residents. Property owners began dividing buildings into tiny "kitchenettes," single rooms with a hot plate in lieu of a real kitchen, where multiple family members might share the space and also share bathrooms with neighbors down the hall. Richard Wright brought the kitchenette to life in *Native Son* through the eyes of his fictional protagonist, Bigger Thomas, but he also described his own experiences living in one in *12 Million Black Voices* (1941)*:*

> "What they do is this: they take, say, a seven-room apartment, which rents for $50 a month to whites, and cut it up into seven small apartments, of one room each; they install one small gas stove and one small sink in each room. The Bosses of the Buildings rent these kitchenettes to us at the rate of, say, $6 a week. Hence, the same apartment for which white people—who can get jobs anywhere and who receive higher wages than we—pay $50 a month is rented to

us for $42 a week! And because there are not enough houses for us to live in,

because we have been used to sleeping several in a room on the plantations in

the South, we rent these kitchenettes and are glad to get them…. The kitchenette

is the author of the glad tidings that new suckers are in town, ready to be

cheated, plundered, and put in their places. The kitchenette is our prison, our

death sentence without a trial, the new form of mob violence that assaults not

only the lone individual, but all of us, in its ceaseless attacks" (pp. 104-106).

By 1940, Bronzeville's population had reached over 150,000, squeezed into an

area of about three square miles—a density twice that of the city average (Wirth and

Bernert, 1949). Inevitably, two municipal institutions would have to confront the rising

population numbers in Bronzeville: the public school system, and the public housing

system.

Phantoms on State Street: The Rise and Fall of Public Housing in Bronzeville

I remember very clearly the conditions at 41st and King: roach-infested, vermin-infested. I used to sit up nights and chase the mice away from my younger brothers. There were three of us, nd it was a one-room kind of a situation, maybe two. It was a three-story building, which would have been a six-flat, and each of the flats was subdivided at least once. We had twelve families living in a structure that was designed to accommodate six. It was a lot of people and minimal privacy. And I remember moving into Ida B.—the new shiny stoves and refrigerators, and then a living room and a kitchen. It was nice and spacious clean and well-lit, and it was home! Ida B. Wells was a step up.
    - Bennie L. Crane, Ida B. Wells resident, 1943-1954 (Fuerst, p. 42)

When the Ida B. Wells homes officially opened in Bronzeville in 1941, its first

residents had no way of anticipating that it would be the first of many such public

housing developments, that they would come to define the landscape of the Bronzeville

community so prominently or so notoriously—or that, by the time they were torn down, they would have become, in the eyes of the public, a symbol of the worst kind of violence and urban decay. For children like Bennie L. Crane and their families, "Ida B." was simply home, and it was a marked improvement from kitchenette living.

The Ida B. Wells homes were built as part of an effort at "slum clearance" by the four-year-old Chicago Housing Authority, founded in response to the 1937 Housing Act that set out to reform America's poorest residential communities by providing federal support to locally-established housing authorities. The project was built on the site of razed housing deemed "substandard" by the city, with high-density construction of thirty to forty units per acre to compensate for the high cost of clearing the land (since the CHA was bound to federally-determined cost guidelines) (Hunt, 2009, p. 45).[vi]

Oscar C. Brown Sr. (father of the renowned performer and activist of the same name) was appointed the first manager of Ida B. Wells. In an oral history, he describes how he used principles of collective responsibility in his approach to tenant management:

> "The social work people thought that we should take each tenant separately and tell them how to behave. I said, 'I won't do it that way. I'll take the tenants from each building and have a conference with all of them and say, 'Here's what we are supposed to do.' …So I said, 'You've contracted among yourselves that we will make a success of this thing.' That's how I did it" (Fuerst, 2003, p. 11).

Brown instituted flower competitions, brought medical services to Ida B. Wells, and

sent out congratulatory newsletters highlighting residents who were contributing positively to the community.

The head of the CHA, Elizabeth Wood, was well-respected among her staff for being detached from the corruption and patronage that plagued other arenas of city politics, and for being a committed proponent of fair housing. Wood believed that the CHA as a public institution could spur social change; her director of tenant selection observed that she her beliefs "were formed by the Depression and the New Deal, which simply involved doing something for the people who were temporarily down on their luck," while her director of planning said that she "believed in public agencies being catalytic agents outside the narrow field of their assigned jobs" (Fuerst, pp. 15-16). Given Wood's leadership, there was a possibility in its early years that the CHA could represent an opportunity to erode the city's severe racial segregation. However, Wood, fearing reprisals from white families or even a resurgence of the violence Chicago saw in 1919, declared that the CHA "would not permit a housing project to change the racial make-up of the neighborhood in which it is located" (Hunt, 2009, p. 55).[vii] Until 1949, this declaration was met with a formal regulation, the so-called "neighborhood composition rule" established by Interior Secretary Harold Ickes (Ziemba, 1986). Further, given the extreme overcrowding experienced by black residents, the CHA determined that even though "slums" existed elsewhere in the city (including in Italian and Polish neighborhoods), African-Americans were in most need; the agency resolved that it would be "guilty of dereliction of duty if it failed to utilize every opportunity provided for taking steps towards its relief" (Hunt, 2009, p. 71). As a result, the construction of new CHA developments served to entrench and concentrate segregation rather than undermine

it, creating what Hirsch (1983) has called "the second ghetto," a "new, vertical ghetto [that] supplemented the old" and was "reinforced with taxpayers' dollars and shored up with the power of the state" (p. 10).

Any hope that CHA projects might be integrated dissipated when, in 1954, Wood was fired in favor of William Kean, a former Korean War brigadier general; many other CHA officials resigned in protest of her departure. Emil Hirsch, who worked in public relations in the agency from 1942 to 1955, recounts the change this way:

> "I think the city fathers, as part of a compromise with the people who were
>
> opposed to the whole program [of public housing], must have made a deal and
>
> said, 'We'll get rid of Elizabeth Wood and the people supporting her if you won't
>
> kill the whole program.'…The people who were really concerned about the
>
> welfare of the tenants were replaced by a staff that saw this as a nine-to-five job.
>
> We had tried to maintain some sort of integration of the projects in the face of a
>
> mounting black application list. When [Wood's] successor, Kean, was confronted
>
> with this huge buildup of black applications, he handled it just the way an army
>
> general would" (Fuerst, 2003, p.p. 21-22).

Ted Greenhalgh, a CHA project manager who had also worked under Wood, felt similarly. "[Kean], as far as we knew, had no background, understanding, or expertise in public housing management" and had no opposition to all-black projects, which Greenhalgh called "counter, in my opinion, to the whole philosophy of public housing as an institution that both serves those who are in need and maintains integrated communities" (Fuerst, 2003, p. 25). Thirty years later, a *Chicago Tribune* reporter would praise Wood's principles in an article about the CHA entitled "The Road to Hell": "Her

ultimate goal was to see Chicago and its suburbs become open communities to all races, destroying the ghettoes and bringing about true integration" (Mullen, 1985). Wood, now in her eighties, admitted that her practice of leaving units vacant rather than renting to the black families on the waiting list was imperfect, but stood by her policy: "It may have been offensive to some of the population, but it worked. I made it work with the quota system. I was never ashamed of what I was trying to do. I have a great confidence in mankind if people are just given a chance."

Tenant selection was not the only factor that contributed to the segregation that persisted in Bronzeville, concentrated by CHA developments. As Hunt (2009) describes, white members of the City Council engaged in "aldermanic horse-trading," wherein throughout the 1950s Kean and CHA officials presented racially diverse sites for proposed public housing construction, only to have white aldermen negotiate internally to strike from the list any potential new developments poised to be built in white neighborhoods. This arrangement allowed the CHA to maintain a sort of plausible deniability that it was intentionally creating or perpetuating segregation, holding up its initially diverse lists as evidence that it intended to integrate. This strategy was roundly criticized by Richard B. Austin, the judge who ruled in the *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority* case filed as a class action segregation suit in 1966:

> "It is incredible that this dismal prospect of an all-Negro public housing system in
> all-Negro areas came about without the persistent application of a deliberate
> policy to confine public housing to all Negro or immediately adjacent changing
> areas…. No criterion, other than race, can plausibly explain the veto of over 99
> 1/2% of the housing units located on the White sites which were initially selected

on the basis of CHA's expert judgment and at the same time the rejection of only

10% or so of the units on Negro sites" (Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority,

1969).

However, by the time the *Gautreaux* decision was handed down, the CHA had already

completed construction on thousands of units of densely-concentrated public housing in

Bronzeville.

Chicago Housing Authority Projects in Bronzeville

Name	Location	Number of Units	Year Constructed
Ida B. Wells Homes & Extension	Pershing (39th Street) & King Drive; 37th & Vincennes	1,652; 647	1941; 1955
Dearborn Homes	27th & State	800	1950
Harold L. Ickes Homes	22nd & State	803	1955
Stateway Gardens	35th & State	1,644	1958
Robert Taylor Homes	State Street, Pershing to 54th	2,208	1962
Clarence Darrow Homes	38th & Langley	479	1961
Madden Park Homes	Pershing & Ellis	452	1970

Sources: Chicago Housing Authority Statistical Reports; Hunt (2009).

Many have criticized the architecture and design of Bronzeville's public housing

based on the idea that its sparse, institutional character contributed to the social

stigmatization of its residents. As construction was taking place, there were debates

regarding what kind of design would be most beneficial to families. High-rise apartments

enabled greater residential density, accompanied by large, open grassy areas as opposed

to the smaller front yards associated with row houses. Elizabeth Wood, criticizing high

rises in 1952, argued that high rises violated a child's natural "need for nearness to his

mother," whereas with rowhouses, "indoor-outdoor activity takes place closer to where

the mother is at work. The child can keep in touch with her. She can hear him if he cries or gets into a fight" (Hunt, 2009, p. 132). Some residents were also opposed to high-rises. Feldman and Stall (2011), in their study of black women's activism in Wentworth Gardens (a CHA development located across the highway from Bronzeville), quote residents who found the architecture suspect and dangerous for children, such as this resident, Juanita Brown:

"It's too many people stacked up on each other. Okay, I was a young woman when they

were building them [developments], all highrise. And I said then, 'That's trouble.'

You cannot stack too many peoples in one place. You got trouble. And honey,

we've been having trouble ever since" (p. 73).

Another resident, Dorothy McMiller, rejected a CHA placement in Bronzeville's Stateway Gardens, preferring to remain on the waiting list until she could be placed in Wentworth. "I wouldn't keep my kids in no [high-rise]," she explained, calling Stateway "not good for raising children. A place with just one door, no porch, no place for kids" (Feldman and Stall, 2011).

However, federal cost restrictions kept the CHA from constructing rowhouses along the State Street Corridor. The CHA took other arguably drastic steps to reach such price caps—such as including only two elevators for 4,000 apartment units in the 1959 construction of the Robert Taylor Homes.

While many have criticized the CHA's architecture for its perceived impact on residents' quality of life, another aspect of the projects' architecture would have important implications for the public school system: the high density of youth

populations. "The urgent question should have been this: How *many* children can successfully live in a high-rise building?" (Hunt, 2009, p. 143). The CHA favored large families and even excluded childless families in its tenant selection policies, arguing that children were the most important beneficiaries, and responding to the difficulties families encountered in securing affordable three- and four-bedroom apartments in the private market (Hunt, 2009). "Led by its market-failure logic and with astonishing little forethought, public housing drifted into building communities comprising enormous numbers of children" (Hunt, 2009, p. 150). Hunt includes an analysis of youth-adult ratios[viii] in his study of CHA's challenges to make a point about cycles of social disorder (i.e. that the unusually high proportions of young people in public housing had a catalytic effect on both facilities and social conditions in the projects), and I do not necessarily disagree. However, I include these ratios to argue that CHA policy created a startlingly dense region of children and youth in a very small geographic area, creating conditions for what would ultimately be a sort of "boom and bust" in Bronzeville school enrollment.

Bronzeville Public Housing – Age & Racial Characteristics

Residential area (construction year)	Year	Population[a]	% Black	Population under 18	Ratio of minors (under 18) to adults (18 or older)
City of Chicago	1950	3,659,721	14	914,663	0.33
	1960	3,550,404	23	1,104,175	0.45
	1970	3,369,359	33	907,433	0.37
	1980	3,005,072	40	852,875	0.40
Ida B. Wells Homes & Extension (1941, 1955)	1950	6,949	100	3,771	1.19
	1960	9,361	100	5,774	1.61
	1970[b]	11,130	100	7,245	1.86
	1980	6,730	100	3,790	1.29
Dearborn Homes (1950)	1950	2,642	95	1,452	1.22
	1960	3,282	100	2,039	1.64
	1970	3,000	100	1,890	1.70
	1980	2,585	100	1,615	1.66
Harold Ickes Homes (1955)	1960	3,711	98	2,448	1.94
	1970	3,310	100[c]	2,305	2.29
	1980	2,675	100	1,670	1.66
Stateway Gardens (1958)	1960	7,927	100	5,302	2.02
	1970	7,145	100	5,025	2.37
	1980	6,075	100	4,160	2.17
Darrow Homes (1961)	1980	2,610	100	1,910	2.73
Robert Taylor Homes (1962)	1970	26,690	100	20,440	3.27
	1980	19,785	100	14,165	2.52
Madden Park Homes (1970)	1970	2,120	100	1585	2.96

[a] All officially-reported CHA residential populations should be considered underestimates, since on-the-ground surveys have historically reported significant numbers of squatters and "off-the-lease" residents.
[b] CHA-reported figures for this year include the Clarence Darrow Homes, annexed to Ida B. Wells in 1961.
[c] In fact, one of the Ickes Homes' 788 families in this year was white, comprising less than 1% of the resident population.

Sources: Chicago Housing Authority Statistical Reports; Chicago Statistical Abstract; 1990 Census of Population and Housing.

From the 1950s through the 1980s, the CHA turned the Black Metropolis into a city of children. Where restrictive covenants, violence, and segregation had hemmed thousands of black Chicagoans into Bronzeville in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, the CHA—through a combination of well-intentioned social policy and draconian federal policy—now brought tremendous numbers of African-American children into the confines of the area, at proportions that far exceeded the rest of the city.

"We Build Schools Where There Are Students": Overcrowding in Bronzeville Schools

> *"There are only two things of which the Chicago schools have always had more than enough—children and crises!"*
>
> - Mary J. Herrick

By 1962, attempts to open public facilities to serve Bronzeville's children—such as a federally funded preschool program, a tutoring program, and even the conversion of apartments in the Ickes Homes and Robert Taylor Homes into mini-branches of the public library system—were met with huge numbers, far more young people than could be accommodated. CHA officials wrote to their counterparts at the federal government requesting assistance for more playgrounds, because children at the Robert Taylor Homes were lining up "seven and eight deep just waiting to use a piece of play equipment" (Hunt, 2009, p. 162). One resident of the Robert Taylor Homes recalled this frustration from a child's perspective: "I'd have this ice cream cone in my hand, you know, that I'd bought from the ice cream man, and I wanted to wait till I got on the merry-go-round to eat it. But the line was around the block for one merry-go-round!

Every day, all day and night. That ice cream would just melt down my hand before I could get on" (Venkatesh, 2002, p. 24). As Hunt (2009) put it, the CHA projects had become residences with concentrations of youth "several magnitudes greater than any previously seen in the urban experience" (p. 147).

But, given this overcrowding, why were these children restricted to attending school *in* Bronzeville, rather than relocating across the city? The answer lies in another sort of "invisible fence," a pervasive system of school segregation that kept the community's schools as segregated as its housing.

As Neckerman (2010) describes, overcrowding began to be an issue for black Chicago youth as early as the period between 1930 and 1940, when the combined enrollment of 24 Bronzeville schools rose by 65 percent (p. 89). Black students were not allowed to transfer to white schools in other areas of the city; Board president James McCahey argued that there were no grounds to complaints of inequality because black students were fortunate to no longer attend the dilapidated shacks that served as schools for African-Americans in Mississippi. In response, Edwin Embree, chair of the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, stated "It is not a proper answer to point out that children receive a better education in Chicago than they do in rural Mississippi…. Education in Chicago must be judged by Chicago Standards" (Neckerman, 2010, p. 91). Nevertheless, "Chicago standards" included the inviolability of the color line. To address the overcrowding issue while preserving segregation, district officials created "double-shift" schedules, wherein black students attended school for only part of the day, then traded off with their classmates, creating both a deficit of instructional time and an easy opportunity for truancy.

In 1947, the Supreme Court declared restrictive covenants illegal, and in the subsequent decade the density in Bronzeville eased somewhat. By 1964, combined enrollment in the area's schools had declined by 42 percent (Neckerman, 2010, p. 95). However, segregation had worsened, and documentation from the NAACP and the *Chicago Defender* inspired African-Americans to complain to Benjamin Willis, the superintendent who had been elected to lead CPS in 1953. In response, Willis called segregation "a circumstantial thing" (presaging, oddly, Byrd-Bennett's assertion that school closings' disproportionate impact on black students was "not racist, simply a fact") and stated that the district was "not concerned with race when we build new schools. We build schools where there are students." Alvin Rose, executive director of the CHA, made an analogous claim to race-blindness. "It is essential to plan housing units for areas where there is a need for them. We can't help it if whites move out when Negroes move in…. What can we do, force people to live in a certain place to integrate the area and the schools there? It's impossible" (Defender, "Jones Blasts Segregation in Chicago Public Schools," Robert Cram, Sept 27 1958).

In 1960, Willis found himself facing accountability for his actions—to an extent. In 1960, the CHA notified CPS that the school district should expect an enrollment increase of over ten thousand students in the area surrounding the Robert Taylor Homes, which would see construction completed in 1962. Willis announced the construction of three new schools, which displeased some black parents who felt that "new schools in Negro areas had been put there to perpetuate segregation. Their location seemed to be based on continued containment within the ghetto, particularly when the system took no action to promote integration" (Herrick, 1970, p. 312).

Furthermore, Chicago Urban League researcher Noel Naisbitt became aware (via CHA whistleblowers) that Willis's plans would only account for 7,765 students (Hunt, 2009). When Naisbitt complained to the school board, CPS's retort was that the 10,000 student estimate was overblown, and that the planned schools could accommodate as many as 40 students in the classroom. Furthermore, CPS argued, additional students could be accommodated in auxiliary trailers, and ground-floor CHA apartments could even be converted into extra classrooms. Meanwhile, despite their overcrowding, schools for black students were receiving less in per-pupil school funding than white schools, as well as higher numbers of substitute teachers rather than experienced teachers, and lower allocations for maintenance and operation costs (Herrick, 1970). When Board members requested an accounting of all unused spaces to determine possibilities for reallocation, they were met with what historian and former CPS teacher Mary J. Herrick calls "frustrating postponements and unclear figures":

> "Some unused rooms in white schools were still not listed, as they were assigned to extra services (such as nurses) for which the Negro schools had no comparable space…. Busing children at public expense, a practice in use in several large Northern cities, was ruled out by a majority of the Board as too expensive…. [Willis] felt that the established pattern of neighborhood schools should not and could not be changed" (Herrick, 1970, p. 312).

Before long, tensions were flaring between district leadership and black Chicagoans. Parents laid down in the dirt in overnight protest occupations to prevent bulldozers from preparing the ground for more trailers (Dickson, 2013). For weeks, students and parents marched and protested against Willis, culminating on October 22,

1963, designated as "Freedom Day" by local activists and organizers. Over 220,000 students stayed out of school (about 48% of the total district), many marching in the streets or attending community-organized Freedom Schools in churches across the city. "KEEP YOUR CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL for this one day! Let them know you want a better future for them," exhorted one flyer. "Help us put an end to inferior, overcrowded schooling! Help to end the ruinous segregation of our children!" A flyer for another boycott, to be held June 10 and 11 of 1965, decried a system "run by a Board that has FAILED to desegregate Chicago Schools," and asked, "are we afraid of missing two days of NOTHING??" (School Boycott Collection, 2015).

The *Defender* called Willis "the Gov. Wallace of Chicago standing in the doorway of an equal education for all Negro kids in this city—a one-man educational John Birch Society, incarnate and inviolate" (Stone, 1963, p. 1). In one *Defender* cartoon, the superintendent was referred to as "Massa Ben Willis" (*Chicago Defender*, 1963, p. 8).

In 1964, the Board commissioned a report from five researchers led by Philip Hauser, head of the sociology department at the University of Chicago, to prepare a report on segregation in the district. Hauser and his team made several recommendations, including that the district provide free transportation for students from overcrowded schools to schools with space, as well as build new schools and draw attendance boundaries in ways that would foster integration, given that 90% of black students were attending schools that were at least 90% black (Herrick, 1970, p. 324). Hauser also argued that there were 26,000 immediately-available vacant seats in the city where black students could be transferred, while Willis claimed that there were only

12,809.

However, the recommendations of the Hauser report (as well as those of a second survey focused on overall school quality in the district, conducted by Robert S. Havighurst) went unfulfilled. In 1966, a Board member resigned, telling reporters that Willis approached the matter of integration with "despair and defeatism" ("Clement hits at Willis," 1966). Meanwhile, protests continued, even after Willis left his position in 1966. "Why would students boycott their school? Primarily out of necessity," wrote two high school students in 1968. "…What we are seeking is a means of communicating on an adult level. The please we've made are just. Our student majority in my school is black and we need black representation!" (Woodard and Dassie, 1968). One school leader, writing anonymously in the *Chicago Principals Reporter*, argued that CPS leadership should be held accountable for students' actions.

"These young people have seen in their formative years the elected and appointed

> officials in this country abdicate their responsibility in the face of popular power pressure. This has been particularly true in the Chicago Board of Education…. The young militant Afro-Americans who are behind the recent high school walkouts and demands of the students have learned their lessons well and cannot be criticized for their pragmatism" (Chicago Southside Principal, 1968).

In an analysis of CPS's historical segregation, Lauen (2006) argues that there was never a "credible effort" to desegregate schools, largely because the district was never forced to do so:

"To analyze school desegregation in Chicago is to study policy *inaction* rather than

policy *action*. Despite calls for action from community groups, policy

recommendations in reports by academic experts, student boycotts, and the

constant threats of federal civil rights enforcement, the Chicago school board

consistently refused to implement any substantial school desegregation policy"

(Lauen, 2006, p. 39).

The closest thing to a credible effort came in 1980, when CPS—as the CHA had with

Gautraux 14 years prior—found its racially discriminatory practices facing a legal

challenge. The United States Department of Justice alleged that the district was illegally

segregating students through a series of practices that included creating and altering

school attendance boundaries, adjusting grade structures, failing to institute

"educationally sound measures to relieve student overcrowding," maintaining "severely

overcrowded and thereby educationally inferior schools in such a way as to identify…

those schools as intended for black students and less crowded schools as intended for

white students," permitting white students to easily transfer to avoid their assigned

schools in favor of majority-white schools, and "the association of segregated schools

with segregated housing projects" (Flicker, 2011, pp. 315-316). The Justice Department

claimed that these practices were illegal and unconstitutional, "resulting in immediate,

severe and irreparable harm." To address these allegations, rather than go to trial, the

district entered into a Consent Decree, committing to desegregate as many schools as

possible. In 2009, the Consent Decree was dissolved, with the court determining that

CPS had put forth good-faith efforts at compliance in the prior decades. Arguably, this

dissolution had more to do with the changing demographics of the district—which now enrolled only 8% white students—than with the achievement of desegregation per se. In 2009, the average black student in the Chicago region attended a school where 13.3% of the population was white (Orfield, Kucsera and Siegel-Hawley, 2012), leading authors of a report from UCLA's Civil Rights Project to call Chicago "noteworthy for its extremely unequal schools and virtually no effort to offset the problems" (Orfield, Kucsera and Siegel-Hawley, 2012, p. xvii), as 71.8% of black students in the metropolitan area were attending schools that were 90-100% comprised of students of color, and 48.5% attended what the authors called "apartheid schools," where 99-100% of the school population was comprised of students of color (p. 58).

In short, during the years when Chicago's segregated housing concentrated remarkable numbers of children in Bronzeville, the city's segregated school system kept them from going elsewhere for their education. As new projects went up, so too did the number of children attending the area's schools—and in the coming years, as the walls of CHA residences would come tumbling down, so too would enrollment.

Bronzeville Elementary Schools: Enrollment & Closures

School	Location	Annual Enrollment								Closure
		1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	2000	
Attucks	3813 S. Dearborn	716	642	645	623	609	673	630	441	Moved to Farren in 2008; closed in 2015
Donoghue	707 E. 37th	750	701	681	762	743	775	784	611	2003
Doolittle Intermediate	535 E. 35th	499	509	573	538	496	460	452	415	Open
Doolittle West	521 E. 35th	876	879	916	774	701	684	666	681	2004
Douglas	3200 S. Calumet	602	568	581	552	574	549	550	621	2004; Pershing West moves in 2005
Drake	2722 S. King Dr.	412	382	368	410	381	365	388	388	Open; relocated to former Williams building
Einstein	3830 S. Cottage Grove	505	470	465	456	511	441	398	-	1999
Farren	5055 S. State	906	886	838	831	787	802	787	430	2006; Attucks moves in 2008
Fuller	4214 S. St. Lawrence	542	549	588	556	522	539	468	444	Entered "turnaround" process in 2012
Mayo	249 E. 37th	682	638	628	614	587	591	576	497	2013
McCorkle	4421 S. State St.	545	490	509	483	537	549	470	360	2010
Mollison	4415 S. King Dr.	501	473	444	499	528	550	511	514	Open
Overton	221 E. 49th	1,021	979	915	900	870	835	873	787	2013
Pershing [East]	3113 S. Rhodes Ave.	288	279	267	276	273	268	274	269	Open; becomes Pershing East in 2005; moves to Pershing West/Douglas building in 2013
Pershing West (opens 2005)	3200 S. Calumet	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2013
Raymond	3663 S. Wabash	814	813	809	801	761	823	783	583	2004
Woodson North	4414 S. Evans	434	369	363	340	335	372	346	343	2003; reopened as charter
Woodson South	4414 S. Evans	672	548	550	501	433	569	534	518	Entered "turnaround" process in 2012

Sources: Chicago Public Schools Data Books; Chicago Tribune; Chicago Public Schools 2011 Transition Report; Catalyst Chicago

Paradise Lost and the Plan for Transformation

The 1970s and 1980s saw a troubling shift in the world of Bronzeville's projects

and the rest of the city's public housing. Theories for why this occurred are as abundant as narratives of the decline; social scientists, journalists, and residents attribute the changes to a tangled mass of social ills: broader economic challenges, gang violence, spatial isolation, unemployment, a culture of poverty, the influx of crack cocaine, the failures of policing, the moral failings of tenants, the departure of the black middle class, and many other causes. As Venkatesh (2002) notes, "even gang members active at the time freely cast aspersions on youth involved in *other* gangs, who in their minds were the real perpetrators of crime and unrest" (p. 119). While there are likely degrees of truth in many of these proposed causes, the fact is that social life in the realm of public housing had come to a period of severe challenges. One resident who grew up in Ida B. Wells described a return visit by saying he "could not even relate to it. I could not remember anything ever looking that way" (Fuerst, 2003, p. 174). Another describes visiting the Dearborn Homes, where he had grown up: "About 1984 or 1985—I came back and I just walked through Dearborn Homes. It was eleven-thirty, twelve at night, and I went up to the apartment that I had lived in. The elevators were broken, so I walked up the stairs to see what it's like today. It's horrible, it's terrible. I couldn't imagine anybody living there" (Fuerst, 2003, p. 146).

In 1986, the *Chicago Tribune* ran an eleven part series called "The Chicago Wall," detailing the troubling story of the CHA. The "wall" referred to the State Street Corridor "a physical and psychological barrier that divides the city in an abundance of ways and stands as a perverse monument to decades of misdirected public policy and race-conscious political decision-making" (Reardon & Brodt, 1986). Describing the State Street Corridor, Theophilus Mann—then the only African American member of

the CHA board—commented, "We have extended this ghetto too far, and I think it is going to have repercussions when I am gone. I think someone will come out and spit on my grave because I should have done something" (Hunt, 2009, p. 240).

LeAlan Jones, a teenager who became famous for producing a radio documentary about himself, his best friend Lloyd Newman, and their lives in and around the Ida B. Wells homes, said the area resembled a "concentration camp. All you have is steel. Dirt and iron. Metal. That's all. Concrete and mortar. That's all. Nothing else. A kid deserves something better than that. *I* deserve better than that" (Jones and Newman, 1997, p. 145). Jones and Newman interviewed the president of the Ida B. Wells tenant organization, who had been a resident since 1968, asking her to describe how the area had changed:

> "From good to bad…. All the kids played, you could sit out on your porch all night long. Now it's almost like living in hell. Especially with the gang war that's going on now. Last week I was standing on my front porch and got shot. I could have been killed but I was lucky—the bullet just skinned my ankle. So the community is running scared, but now it's too late" (Jones and Newman, 1997, p. 163).

The projects' dense youth population presented particular challenges as CHA officials struggled to keep up with physical maintenance and upkeep. Lacking adequate safe places to play, children amused themselves as best as they could in stairwells, in lobbies, in hallways—and, above all, in elevators. "We used to ride them like was as at [Six Flags] Great America. Popping them buttons, loading as many kids as we could,

trying to climb out of them if we could" (Venkatesh, 2002, p. 26). A report from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development criticized CHA management, proclaiming that "No one seems to be minding the store. What's more, no one seems to care" ("Chicago Housing Agency Called One of Worst in U.S.," 1982).

Tribune reporters wrote, "Chicago is at a moment in history when it could start to dismantle its great wall. It is possible. But it is unlikely. …. Public housing has permitted Chicago to ignore the humanity of CHA residents and to view them instead simply as stereotypes--to see the crime and poverty and violence and aimlessness and not to see the human beings" (Reardon & Brodt, 1986). Even Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor and a renowned reformer with a commitment to social justice, expressed a sense of frustration and hopelessness, saying that "those ugly buildings were home" for thousands of people, the CHA's high-rise projects were "obscene" and "should never have been built in the first place," and lamenting that "nobody can make the CHA work—the only solution is just to get rid of it" (Miller, 1989, p. 310).

National attention on the CHA and its residents fueled further social stigma. A *New York Times* editorial entitled "What It's Like to Be in Hell" painted a grim and dramatic portrait; the author, described as a "a New York lawyer who recently visited Chicago's housing projects," misspelled the name of the street where the project he visited was located:

"The illusions end on Damon Street…. Firefights may erupt at any time. Children dodge machine-gun crossfire as they leave the school. Sudden bullets smash through windows into apartment walls. Watch the residents walk; they

have the affinity for ground of seasoned infantry soldiers" (Walinsky, 1987).

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) took control of the CHA out of the city's hands, rendering the agency subject to new federal guidelines requiring that all public housing under HUD control undergo a "viability assessment" to determine levels of distress present in a housing development, calculate the cost of renovation, and—if renovation would exceed the cost of providing residents with Section 8 vouchers to find housing elsewhere—demolish the residence. In 1999, Mayor Daley negotiated with HUD to seize mayoral control of CHA, as he had acquired mayoral control of CPS in 1995; HUD agreed to return public housing to municipal control based on a memorandum of understanding that the city-controlled CHA would demolish nearly 22,000 units—including all of the high-rise residences— and build or renovate an additional 25,000 units over ten years at the cost of $1.56 billion (Bennett, Smith, and Wright, 2006).

In 1999, Mayor Daley announced that the CHA would be completely overhauled in an effort that would be a decade in the making: the Plan for Transformation (referred to simply as the Plan) was born. The CHA touted it as a socially symbolic effort, one that went beyond physical changes to the city's housing stock: "[the Plan] aims to build and strengthen communities by integrating public housing and its leaseholders into the larger social, economic and physical fabric of Chicago…. Where there were once isolated superblocks, the street grid is being recreated to seamlessly integrate the new developments into the surrounding neighborhoods" (Chicago Housing Authority, 2015). In other words, the CHA promised to tear down the invisible fence. Or, as Mayor Daley put it somewhat troublingly, he wanted to do more than rebuild residents' homes: "I

want to rebuild their souls" (Austen, 2012).

The Plan granted a "right of return" to 26,199 households, meaning that they could be granted a space in a new or redeveloped residence, or provided with an affordable housing voucher. As of March 2010, fewer than half of these households remained in the system: 5,755 families and 46 senior citizens lived in new or renovated CHA sites, an additional 2,217 seniors lived in specially-designated senior housing; another 4,060 families and 231 seniors received vouchers to find privately-owned affordable housing elsewhere in the city (Vale and Graves, 2010, p. 10). Additionally, those families that did return were subject to a variety of eligibility requirements to stay within the CHA system, from a mandate that they work 30 hours per week to provisions that they have adequate childcare, a good credit rating, as well as being subject to drug screening and background checks (Rogal, 2007).

And just like that, the Black Metropolis was a city of children no more. From 1990 to 1995, Bronzeville lost 272 children; from 1995 to 2000, the community lost over 6,000.

Change in Number of Bronzeville Residents Under 18

1990-1995	1995-2000	2000-2005	2005-2010
+117	-6,159	-7,683	-2,685

Source: Chapin Hall Center for Children.

A 2007 report from the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall noted that Bronzeville had lost a great deal of its child population between 1990 and 2005, and predicted that those drops would continue at least through 2010, with the northern end of the community in particular projected as losing 27-40% of its children under 18. The

authors of the report also point out that "school closings do not map exactly onto child and youth population losses. Although West Town saw the largest numerical drop in child and youth population (it lost over 10,000 children between 1990 and 2005), there were no school closings in this community area between 2002 and 2006" (p. 22).

The Plan for Transformation has been widely debated, lauded, and critiqued by politicians, journalists, and scholars, and the process provokes many questions: Will the CHA ever successfully find new homes for *all* displaced residents? Will moving from the hyper-segregated projects present new opportunities for residents, or will they land in communities beset with similar social and economic challenges? Did the Plan lead to a decrease in overall city crime, or simply disperse crime across the city, as critics have alleged? These questions, though worthwhile, are beyond the scope of this study; my purpose is not to assess the outcomes of the Plan itself. I do, however, contend that the Plan represents at once the imperfect response to and the culmination of a century of racially-motivated housing policies. Further, the tremendous impact of the Plan on the very face of a community—a community which, for better or for worse, had come to be largely defined by the towering presence of public housing—includes an impact on its schools in ways that have gone largely undiscussed by CPS.

For instance, Venkatesh, Çelimli, Miller, Murphy, and Turner (2004) found that four years after the demolition of the Robert Taylor Homes, about a quarter of the families they spoke with continued to have their children attend their old schools near Robert Taylor because they hoped to maintain existing relationships with teachers they trusted—even when they had relocated far away—sometimes even sending their children to live with relatives in the old community to keep them at the same school.

Given the rate of school closure in Bronzeville, it is likely that those same children would see their schools closed in the subsequent ten years, in which case they would experience the loss of a home and a school in a very short period of time.

Conclusion

"As the CHA gets out of the business of housing the poor, it's only a matter of time before CPS gets out of the business of educating their children. It's almost as if that were the plan all along."
    - Ben Joravsky, *Chicago Reader*

I am sitting down for lunch with Martin, an 18-year-old Bronzeville resident who has seen both his grammar school and his high school close, and I startle myself when I do the math and realize that he may be too young to recall life before the Plan for Transformation. I ask him if he remembers the projects. He tells me that he does not, but that he knows where they all were. "You can't ride around this area with my parents or with any older adults without them pointing it out, telling you—'this right here, this used to be Ida B. Wells! This used to be…!'" In the minds of many Bronzeville residents, vivid memories remain of the CHA high-rises and the large-scale public housing that once dominated the physical and social space of the community. And yet, in the official justifications for school closures issued by CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett, Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and others representing the district and the city, there was no acknowledgment of the role the Plan for Transformation may have played in school enrollment declines.

This absence is especially notable when one considers the claim that 2013 school closures were colorblind, race-neutral, or otherwise not racist; an honest discussion about the history of the CHA and CPS in Bronzeville, in particular, would

have necessitated a tacit admission that both agencies were complicit in constructing what I have referred to as the "invisible fence"—the social boundary that kept Bronzeville's schools and housing deeply segregated across the durée of the twentieth century. I have argued that, contrary to the statements from Byrd-Bennett with which I opened this chapter, in Bronzeville the phenomenon of "underutilization" in schools has *everything* to do with race. Once upon a time, Bronzeville was so besieged by overcrowding that its schools being empty would have seemed inconceivable. But empty school buildings did not arise spontaneously; rather, they are the result of decades of racism that impacted the residents of Bronzeville in new and compounding ways generation after generation. From the violent bombings and restrictive covenants that kept those who arrived in the Great Migration hemmed into Bronzeville, to CHA site selection that succumbed to the limitations of racism and politics in Chicago and thereby perpetuated segregation rather than integration, to Willis-era policies that maintained segregated and overcrowded schools, to a Plan for Transformation that displaced many thousands of Bronzeville residents in a very short period of time and has made it difficult for them to return home, the story of the community's empty school buildings is one that has deep—and, I contend, deeply racist—roots.

The idea that public housing and public schools would be intimately related is not unique or surprising among scholars or policymakers (or realtors), nor should it be surprising that racism serves as a link between them. Saporito and Lareau (1999) have found that white families avoid schools with black students in favor of majority-white schools even when the latter have poorer academic and safety records; further, white and Latino parents are more likely to leave public schools as the percentage of black

students in a district increases (Fairlie, 2002; Saporito & Sohoni, 2006). Meanwhile, when it comes to housing choice, white residents prefer neighborhoods with proportionately fewer Black residents, even when public services, school quality, and housing values are held constant (Emerson, Yancey, and Chai, 2001) and tend to believe that black neighborhoods are more dangerous, more likely to lose property value, and more likely to have poor-quality schools (Krysan, Couper, Farley, and Forman, 2009).

Setting aside scholarly perspectives or the relationship between schools and housing writ large, CPS and city leaders may have had a practical reason to question how the Plan for Transformation would impact the school district: Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the vocal public advocate for the closures and in many ways the ostensible overseer of the school district (given that CPS's governing CEO, school board, and board president are all determined by mayoral appointment, with no legislative or electoral confirmation process) was the vice chairman of the CHA from 1999-2001, giving him a singular perspective on the Plan and the way it might impact the rest of the city—including its schools. As Pattillo (2008) puts it, on the South Side in the 1990s, "in the cases of public housing and school reform the strategies were basically the same: clear the high-rises of their residents and the poorly performing schools of their students and then start from scratch" (p. 153). For Bronzeville, such strategies represent more than the denial of high-quality affordable housing or the violation of civil rights, and even more than the abdication of the responsibility to provide children with a high-quality education. The troubling history of racism within housing and schooling as paired institutions in the community—at once parallel and circling one another, like the

strands of a double helix—is an affront to the aspirations of those black migrants who came north a century ago, to their flight from the violence and the indignities of life in the Jim Crow South, to the hope in their hearts when they called out, in the words of Richard Wright, "Good God Almighty! Great Day in the Morning! It's here! Our time has come! We are leaving! We are angry no more; we are leaving! We are bitter no more; we are leaving!" Those first black residents came to Chicago in search of freedom; they made a home where they could and called it Bronzeville. Whether Bronzeville can, in the century to come, continue to be a home for their great-grandchildren, and the children of those children, remains to be seen.

Chapter 2: "I'm Begging You to Keep My Family Together"

"Children see things very well sometimes — and idealists even better."
- Joseph Asagai in A Raisin in the Sun, *by Lorraine Hansberry (1959)*

In the last chapter, I discussed the historical context of race in Bronzeville, particularly through the lens of public housing and its relationship to public schools. In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which Bronzeville community members addressed the 2013 school closings as they were actually occurring. In particular, I return to the statement from superintendent Barbara Byrd-Bennett with which I opened the previous chapter, in order to explore further the implicit claims about race and racism that emerge from her discourse. In turn, I ask: for their part, how did those affected by proposed school closure (teachers, students, parents, principals, and community members) frame issues of race and racism and their role in the closings? How is this similar to or different from how district representatives frame the role of race and racism? Moreover, in examining district officials' and community members' statements about school closings, what can we come to understand about what constitutes goodness and value in the eyes of these stakeholders, and the criteria that should ultimately be considered when determining whether to close a school?

I address these questions through critical discourse analysis of statements made at closing hearings for three Bronzeville schools closed in 2013: Mayo Elementary, Williams Elementary, and Overton Elementary. To assess community perspectives, I analyze statements made by students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members who spoke at public closure hearings held by CPS. To assess district perspectives, I analyze statements made by CPS officials at these same hearings, as well

as Barbara Byrd-Bennett's statement on the justification for school closings presented at an April 2013 Board of Education meeting.

I find that Byrd-Bennett makes use of discourse arguing that the school closings are not racist. This discourse is complemented by the trial-like nature of the closure hearings: evidence based on the criteria of *performance* and *efficiency* is presented, intended to prove that the closing school is objectively not a good school. This evidence works in consonance with the argument that the school is inferior based on objective criteria, and is not being targeted for racialized reasons. In contrast, community members' discourse both re-centers the conversation around racial disparities and suggests an alternative set of criteria through which these decisions should be made. This discourse suggests that 1) school closures cause a disruption of *familial relationships* that is especially salient in a black community, 2) despite its claims at objectivity, the district presents an *unreliable narrative*, 3) the goodness of a school lies in its *history and legacy* as much as in its performance on quantitative metrics, 4) the district is violating both *safety and trust* through the closure decision-making process.

I conclude by suggesting that these discourses reflect divergent figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998) with divergent concepts of both what constitutes racism and what factors ought to be considered in school closing decisions. Building on Fairclough's (2010) argument that critical discourse analysis enables us to not only identify and describe structures, but also to define strategies for challenging those structures, I contend that community members' discourse presents us with counterhegemonic imaginaries for how we might make school policy decisions.

Conceptual Background: School Closings and the Workings of Race Talk

Before presenting the data used for this study and, subsequently, my analysis, I will begin by presenting the broader context of the extant empirical research on school closings in Chicago, and theories regarding how people talk about (or, more often, do not talk about) race and racism.

Academic Effects of CPS Closings

There is a relative paucity of scholarship exploring the consequences of the CPS school closings. An analysis conducted by de la Torre and Gwynne (2009) assessed district officials' argument that by relocating students from substandard schools into more effective educational environments, school closings are academically beneficial. The authors compared 5,445 CPS students aged eight and older whose schools were closed between 2001 and 2006 against a comparison group of students at similar schools (matched for attributes including capacity utilization, test scores, truancy, proportion of low- income students, mobility, and other key characteristics that indicate the likelihood of closure).

The authors found that students attending closed schools experienced a drop in academic achievement during the year *before* the school actually closed, amidst the turmoil of the announcement. After leaving, displaced students on average saw no statistically significant change in their math or reading outcomes, retention rates, or special education referrals. Eleven percent of displaced students changed schools a *second* time within their first year post-closing, and 30% of displaced students changed schools during the following summer, perhaps suggesting dissatisfaction with the

schools in which they enrolled after displacement.

Importantly, de la Torre and Gwynne found differences in academic effects based on the quality of the new schools in which displaced students enrolled. Students relocated to schools with standardized test scores in the bottom quartile saw losses in reading and math; students who enrolled in top quartile schools saw small gains in achievement. However, the former group— those in a bottom-quartile receiving school—comprised 42% of displaced students; 38% enrolled in second-quartile schools, 13% in the third quartile, and only 6% in the top quartile. Furthermore, nearly 40% of displaced students were enrolled in schools on academic probation. Of the 6% of students who enrolled in top-quartile schools after displacement, only 17% attended schools in their attendance area; most students attended a new school that was an average of 3.5 miles away from their residence.

Post-Closure Enrollment Patterns

Perhaps informed by these findings, during the 2013 closings CPS officials determined that each closing school would have a designated higher-performing "welcoming school" for students to attend, though in practice parents did not have to enroll their children in this designated receiving school. In a follow-up study, de la Torre, Gordon, Moore, and Cowhy (2015) used a mixed-methods approach to analyze 1) where students actually enrolled after the 2013 closures, and 2) their reasons for enrolling in the school that they chose. The authors found that the closed schools served disproportionately vulnerable student populations when compared to the rest of the district, including more low-income students, more students with disabilities, students

with higher residential mobility, more students who had experienced grade retention at least once, and more students who receive special education services. Of students who remained within CPS, two-thirds attended their designated welcoming school, one quarter enrolled into other traditional public schools, and the remaining students enrolled in either charter schools or magnet schools. Students were more likely to enroll in the designated receiving school if it had a higher safety rating on a district-wide climate survey, and if it were relocated to the same site as their closing school. Somewhat startlingly, the academic performance of the designated welcoming school bore little relation to enrollment decisions; the authors report that "students assigned to higher-rated welcoming school were less likely to attend these schools than students assigned lower-rated welcoming schools," and "students who enrolled in other [non-designated] CPS schools often chose a school with a lower performance policy rating than a designated welcoming school" (p. 2).

In addition to their quantitative analysis, the authors interviewed 95 families across the city impacted by school closure. Those who enrolled their children in the designated welcoming school reported that they did so because they felt it was academically strong, it was close to home, they had personal connections there (e.g. friends or staff from closed schools), or in some cases because they believed they had no choice. Some families enrolled in the designated welcoming school because practical barriers made it hard to do otherwise; these challenges included lack of admission into other schools where they applied, transportation hurdles, the special services needed by children with disabilities, and a lack of time to weigh alternatives.

Those parents who did not enroll their children in the designated welcoming

school cited proximity to home, transportation difficulties, being blocked from doing so because their addresses fell outside of the attendance boundaries, the perception the school was academically lower-performing, safety concerns, negative opinions of the welcoming school from families and friends, or the fact that the school had previously been designated for potential closure (even if it had ultimately remained open). Further, the authors report that many families defined "academic quality" as "something different than a schools' performance policy rating," including the availability of extracurricular activities, a positive school climate, or class size (p. 3).

Parents' Perceptions of 2013 Closings

At the conclusion of the first academic year following the school closings, Lipman and Gutierrez (2014) reported results from interviews conducted with parents whose children were displaced by school closings. They interviewed 23 parents who were residents of the city's West, South, and Near West side regions and reported five key findings. First, "parents believe school closings had a negative impact on their children, and most believe their new schools are not better" (Lipman & Gutierrez, 2014, p. 9). They criticized the academic offerings, extracurricular options, and resources of their children's new schools, and remarked that school closings severed relationships they had with school personnel and created emotional duress for their children. Second, "closed schools had deep meanings for children, parents, and communities" (p. 13) and left children with a sense of loss. "For parents we interviewed," Lipman and Gutierrez report, "schools were more than buildings that provided academic services. They were a web of human connections" (2014, p. 13). They desired the familiarity of the closed school and its faculty, staff, and extended

community.

Third, "parents made many vital contributions to their schools, were proactive, and have a holistic vision of education" (Lipman & Gutierrez, 2014, p. 15). Parents reported volunteering at their children's closed schools in a variety of roles. During the school closing process, they participated as resistors, attending public hearings and participating in protest and organization efforts. Many worked to lessen the impact of closings, arranging practical resources (such as safe transportation options) as well as social resources (such as meetings between community members from closed schools and receiving schools). However, the authors' fourth finding was that many parents felt excluded with regard to their children's new schools; they felt "powerless" during the closing process, as though district leaders "didn't really care" and "didn't give the parents or the staff a chance" to explain their allegiance to their closing school (Lipman & Gutierrez, 2014, p. 19). At their new schools, many parents felt alienated from events, meetings, and opportunities to participate or volunteer at school, or generally discouraged, and therefore disinterested in attempting to forge new relationships at the new school.

Lastly, Lipman and Gutierrez find that "parents distrust CPS, have a critical analysis of the reasons for school closings, and want a voice in CPS decisions and the Board of Education" (2014, p. 22). Many parents interviewed overtly discussed their view of the racism inherent in the closings, stating that CPS decision-makers "don't care about African American communities. They don't care if we get an education" (2014, p. 22). Others expressed suspicion about the motives behind school closings, believing that they were designed to expand charter schools and displace low-income residents to the

periphery of the city or beyond its borders. Parents expressed desire for a more powerful democratic policy-making voice within the structure of CPS, through the strengthening of Local School Councils (LSCs) or through the development of an elected school board rather than a mayorally-appointed one. In sum, these parents presented a version of events that stands in challenge to the dominant district narrative, one in which they were not listened to despite active attempts at participation.

Race Discourse, Race-less Discourse, and Racialized Social Systems

Byrd-Bennett's assertions about what does and does not constitute racism (e.g. the argument that sharp population decreases on Chicago's South Side and West Side have to do with "demographic changes, and not race") stand in stark contrast to the rhetoric from Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis, who called the school closings racist and classist. They also diverge from highly-publicized local voices such as community organizer Valerie Leonard, who remarked: "[Mayor Rahm Emanuel] wants to turn around the city of Chicago, make a new Chicago. Does that new Chicago mean no black folks?" (Krauser, 2013) These discordant views reflect the broadly contested nature of racism as a concept, which scholars have addressed from a variety of theoretical perspectives that provide a useful analytic lens for understanding the broader social significance of these discursive claims.

Bobo, Kleugel, and Smith (1997) have observed that in the decades since Jim Crow, as racist ideology has become less tightly or observably coupled with formal institutional arrangements, racism has become more difficult to identity or define. Bonilla-Silva (2001) describes a theoretical framework for understanding what racism is

and how it functions; this framework is meant to account for the "society-wide,

organized, and institutional character of racism" and is therefore termed the *racialized*

social system approach:

> "This term refers to societies in which economic, political, social, and
> ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial
> categories or races…. [This placement] involves some form of hierarchy that
> produces definite social relations among the races. The race placed in the
> superior position tends to receive greater economic renumeration and access to
> better occupations and prospects in the labor market, occupies a primary
> position in the political system, is granted higher social estimation (e.g., is
> viewed as 'smarter' or 'better looking,') often has the license to draw physical
> (segregation) as well as social (racial etiquette) boundaries between itself and
> other races, and receives what W.E.B. Du Bois calls a 'psychological wage.'
> The totality of these racialized social relations and practices constitutes the
> racial structure of a society" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p. 37).

Bonilla-Silva's framework stands in contrast to an *idealist* concept of racism—

the view of racism that is arguably predominant in mainstream discourse, in which

racism is seen as "prejudice, ignorance, or a disease that afflicts some individuals and

causes them to discriminate against others just because of the way they look" (Bonilla-

Silva, 2001, p. 21). Instead, he puts forth a "materialist interpretation of racism rooted

in the fact that races in racialized societies receive substantially different rewards….

Therefore, *the foundation of racism is not the ideas that individuals may have about*

others, but the social edifice erected over racial inequality" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p. 22,

emphasis mine).

As racial structures become hegemonic over time, stratified racial groups

become invested in either overturning or maintaining the racialized social system

(contingent upon whether it grants or denies them resources), and "social relations

among the races become institutionalized (form a structure as well as a culture) and

affect social life whether or not individual members of the races want it to" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p. 42). *Racial ideology* is one vehicle through which the racialized social system becomes operationalized in social life—as images, ideas, and stereotypes of racialized subjects emerge, they provide an internally-coherent rationale that renders interactions between racialized groups apparently logical. Racial ideology "acquires relative autonomy in the social system… [it] becomes 'common sense'; it provides the rules for perceiving and dealing with the Other in a racialized society… an organizational map that guides actions of racial actors in a society" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, pp. 43-44).

In this view, acts of racism are not the result of individuals' psychological deviance, social maladjustment, or immorality (as suggested by oft-used colloquial phrases intended to explain acts of racism, e.g. "there are just some sick people out there"), but rather "the 'normal' outcome of the racial structure of a society" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p. 45). Put differently, "racially motivated behavior, whether or not the actors are conscious of it, is regarded as 'rational'—that is, based on the given race's individual interests" in maintaining or acquiring resources (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p. 46).

The socially prominent idealist stance toward racism is complemented by what Gallagher (2003) calls the "normative ideology" of colorblindness, which includes both "the perception among a majority of white Americans that the socio-economic playing field is now level" and "whites' belief that they have purged themselves of overt racist attitudes and behaviors" (p. 25). In a sense, idealist views of racism establish the necessary conditions for colorblind ideology: if one believes that racism is a disease of the mind, one's self-assessment of whether one has the disease becomes the only relevant

criterion for definition. Colorblindness "acknowledges race while disregarding racial hierarchy" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 25). The analog of colorblindness in discourse can take the form of what Pollock (2009) calls *colormuteness*—the intentional exclusion of explicit racial terms from public dialogue, and the concomitant belief that to mention race is to reveal oneself as racist. A similar analog lies in what Davis (2007) labels *muted racism* and *muted racializing*, which can take three discursive forms: deflection (arguing that some other social dysfunction, rather than racism, is at the root of a problem), indexicality (using code words to index racialized categories without explicitly mentioning race), and omission (analyzing data that shows quantifiable racial disparities without discussing racism as a plausible reason for those disparities).

Thus, the tension between community members' assertions that Chicago Public School closings are racist and Byrd-Bennett's response that she "cannot understand" and "will not accept" (Chicago Public Schools, 2013) such accusations reflects broader societal tensions about whether racism lies in individuals or in structures, whether it must be readily visible and legible in order for us to assert definitively that it exists, and whether it is racist to discuss race, or racist *not* to discuss race.

Methods

As Fairclough (1995) describes it, discourse analysis can reveal the taken-for-granted ideological representations that lie beneath an individual's speech; these ideological views are naturalized as neutral or *non*-ideological "common sense" (p. 27). Furthermore, rather than having solely descriptive importance, the task of uncovering these implicit propositions allows the researcher to understand the broader social structure within which a speech act takes place. "Verbal interaction is a mode of social

action…. [Social] structures are not only presupposed by, and necessary conditions for, action, but are also the *products* of action; or, in a different terminology, actions *reproduce* structures" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 38).

In this study, I employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) in particular. This form of discourse analysis is not psychoanalytic in nature, in that I do not intend to make claims on the intentions of individuals or unpack what they "really mean" when they make a statement. Rather, I analyze what broader social Discourses[ix] (Gee, 2014) they are evoking, and what they doing with language—put differently, what social actions are occurring through discourse. CDA is "critical" in that it invites attention to power, social relations, inequality, and political institutions, with the goal of not only describing them, but also critiquing them. According to Fairclough (2010), this critique is a prerequisite trait of CDA; this methodological approach is, by definition, "not just descriptive, it is normative. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them" (p. 11). By identifying the social practices that are enacted through language in the events described here, I hope to bring to the fore insights about the social conditions that produced them.

Data Selection

I conducted a critical discourse analysis of statements made during seven events (see Table 1). The first is a Board of Education meeting that took place on April 3, 2013, during which CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett delivered prepared remarks to members of the Board and assembled members of the public. I used a video recording of this statement (22 minutes in length) to conduct this analysis.

Additionally, I analyzed audio recordings of six other events, community meetings and public hearings held for Bronzeville elementary schools slated for closure in 2013: Overton, Williams, and Mayo.[x] At the two-hour community meetings, stakeholders were given the opportunity (after registering to speak) to share two minutes' worth of comments, questions, and concerns regarding the proposed closure. District officials moderated the events and a court reporter recorded the proceedings, with assurances that questions would be answered a few days thereafter via a website. At the public hearings, representatives from the district read prepared statements offering a formal justification for why the school was being slated for closure, followed by another open-comment period for stakeholders; each hearing was presided over by an independent hearing officer. These individuals were retired judges, tasked with reviewing the testimonials presented by the district and the community and making a (non-binding) recommendation to the CEO as to whether the school should be closed or not.

I chose these events for analysis because they provide a unique formal opportunity to observe how community members and district officials interact with one another when offered a designated space to do so using prepared responses. Because community meetings, hearings, and press conferences offer a chance to make public declarations in support of closing a school or keeping it open, they allow a view into the evidence these parties marshal in support of their claim—and a view, therefore, into the underlying logics of value that they find convincing and important for consideration.

Each of these audio recordings was made by journalists from the local

public radio affiliate, WBEZ, and posted (along with all such events for schools

slated for closure citywide) on a publicly-available site for streaming or download. I

also obtained digital copies of the materials distributed to attendees at these events

(e.g. the notice sent to parents about the process, maps of proposed attendance

boundaries, et cetera) and the official hearing officer's determination for each

school, issued to the CEO after the public comment period and hearings were over.

Table 1: Data Included in Analysis

Event	Date	Format
Prepared statement read by Barbara Byrd-Bennett to the Board of Education	April 3, 2013	Video
Community meeting for William J. & Charles H. Mayo Elementary School (Mayo) *Proposed receiving school: Ida B. Wells Preparatory Elementary Academy*	April 13, 2013	Audio
Public hearing for Mayo	April 22, 2013	Audio
Community meeting for Anthony Overton Elementary School (Overton) *Proposed receiving school: Irvin C. Mollison Elementary School*	April 12, 2013	Audio
Public hearing for Overton	April 19, 2013	Audio
Community meeting for Daniel Hale Williams Multiplex Elementary School & Williams Preparatory Academy Middle School (Williams) *Proposed receiving school: John B. Drake Elementary School*	April 10, 2013	Audio
Public hearing for Williams	April 26, 2013	Audio

Focal Schools

Each of the Bronzeville schools included in this analysis had a similar

demographic, historical, and academic profile (see Table 2). Mayo, opened in 1951,

was intended to provide models for family-community partnership that would serve

as demonstrative for the rest of the district, including programs for parents to

observe classroom learning and work with an in-house representative from the local

YMCA (Amazaki, 1967). Overton, opened in 1963, was named for Anthony

Overton, leader of a successful cosmetics conglomerate and publisher of the *Chicago

Bee*, the black newspaper where the term "Bronzeville" was first coined. The

school's architecture was unique compared to others in the district; three three-story

towers connected by corridors were designed to leave wide hallways and classrooms

with ample natural light (*Chicago Tribune*, 1965). Williams, named after the black

doctor who was the first person in the nation to perform open-heart surgery, opened

in 1952 (*Chicago Tribune*, 1952). The school building sits among the Dearborn

Homes, the only high-rise public housing in Bronzeville that was renovated during

the Plan for Transformation rather than demolished. All three schools served an

almost entirely African-American student population. Additionally, all three schools

had their designated independent hearing officer determine that they should *not* be

closed, and were ultimately closed regardless. This is a notable coincidence (I did

not select on this criterion and was not aware of this fact until after my data analysis

had already begun) and is comparatively unusual—across the city, only in 12 of 53

did hearing officers recommend to the CEO that a school stay open.

Table 2: Selected Characteristics of Focal Schools, 2012-2013

School	Opened	Enrollment	% Black	% Receiving Special Education Services	% Free/Reduced Lunch
Mayo	1951	408	92.9 [a]	8.3	94.6
Overton	1963	431	91.9 [b]	8.1	95.4
Williams	1952	383	98.4	16.4	90.9

[a] District data reports for Mayo indicate 1% of students (n=4) reporting as Latino, and 6.1% "not available."

[b] District data reports for Overton indicate 1.2% of students (n=5) reporting as Latino, and 6.7% "not available."

Source: Chicago Public Schools, 2015c.

Data Analysis

I began by listening to each of these recordings without coding, in order to capture my initial impressions and thoughts and to become familiar with the internal process and structure of each event. (In the case of the video of Barbara Byrd-Bennett's statement, I watched and listened at least a dozen times, because her statement hadprovoked much of my early analytical thinking for this project.) I then listened a second time for transcription purposes. I transcribed each of the first recordings to further orient myself with the style and format of the hearings, then used a professional transcription service for the remaining files. I then listened again to review the professional transcriptions and make amendments; because discourse at each event included a considerable amount of insider knowledge and important references that might

not be apparent to someone not familiar with Chicago or the Chicago Public Schools. This second listening also allowed for further reflections, nascent ideas for codes, and memo-writing.

I then conducted open coding on each transcript. I began with a small set of etic codes based on my familiarity with the literature and based on my impressions and emergent ideas from the first listen and the transcription. Entering with these codes and conducting *in vivo* coding using NVIVO qualitative coding software, I generated a list of 253 total initial codes. In this coding phase, I also used several reflective questions proposed by Gee (2011; 2014) to guide my thinking:

- How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?

- What practice (activity) or practices (activities) is this piece of language being used to enact?

- What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating (i.e. what is being communicated as to what is taken to be "normal," "right," "good," "correct," "proper," "appropriate," "valuable," "the way things are," "the way things ought to be," "high status or low status," "like me or not like me," and so forth)?

- How is what the speaker is saying, and how he or she is saying it, helping to create or shape (possibly even manipulate) what listeners will take as the relevant context?

After an additional phase of reflective memo writing, re-reading the transcripts, and analyzing the salience and frequency of these codes, I identified key themes for

further analysis and revisited the transcripts to view, review, and analyze instances of these themes. Within this process of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), a theme is, quite simply, an observable pattern of occurrences within a social event; themes can be descriptive or interpretive, directly observable or latent, generated inductively or deductively.

Findings

In each of the school closure hearings and meetings, participants are discussing, in broad strokes, the same factual series of events. However, the *interpretive repertoires* (Willig, 2013) they use are notably different. Interpretive repertoires include the "terminology, stylistic and grammatical features, preferred metaphors and figures of speech" (p. 120) that together aid the speaker in constructing a certain version of events or representation of reality, in order to ultimately pursue social objectives. District representatives—including CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett and the attorneys and managerial staff who present data and statements at each of the school meetings—present the following perspectives:

- School closings have nothing to do with race and are a natural byproduct of unforeseen circumstances.

- The schools proposed for closure are on trial, and a presentation of the evidence will demonstrate that the closings are reasonably justified.

- In assessing the quality of a school, the primary criteria are *performance* and *efficiency.*

In contrast, community members—school personnel, students, parents, and community

residents—present the following perspectives:

- School closings are racist in that they disproportionately harm black communities, particularly through the disruption of familial relationships.

- Despite its claims at objectivity, the district presents unreliable evidence and an erroneous narrative.

- In assessing the quality of a school, its *history and legacy* are as important as its performance on quantitative metrics.

- The district is threatening students' safety by proposing school closure.

- The district and its representatives are not to be trusted, based on prior experiences of broken promises.

Schools on Trial

Before the public comment period of each closing hearing begins, CPS staff members share prepared statements as representatives of the district and of Byrd-Bennett (prefacing their comments with the phrase "on behalf of the CEO"). Throughout these statements, the speakers repeatedly refer to specific guidelines and processes that led to the closure proposal. By using these interpretive repertoires, the speakers portray the decision as one based on neutral, objective factors, not based on any particular ideology or value bias. The first such statement is made by a Brittany Meadows[xi], who introduces herself as a "CPS portfolio planner." Meadows presents an identical statement at each of the hearings, with the respective quantitative figures filled in as applicable for each school.

> To understand the enrollment efficiency range of a facility, Chicago Public Schools utilizes its space utilization standards which are located in your binder at Tab 14. The enrollment efficiency range is plus or minus 20% of the facility's ideal enrollment. For elementary school buildings, the ideal enrollment is defined

as the number of allotted homerooms multiplied by 30. The number of allotted homerooms is approximately 76 to 77% of the total classrooms available. …There are 31 total classrooms within the Mayo facility. Approximately 76 to 77% of 31 is 23, the number of allotted homerooms. Twenty-three multiplied by 30 yields the ideal enrollment of the facility, which is 690. As such, the enrollment efficiency range of the Mayo facility is between 552 and 828 students. As I stated, the enrollment of Mayo as of the 20th day of attendance for the 2012-2013 school year is 408. This number is below the enrollment efficiency range, and thus the school is underutilized.

In beginning by pointing out that the text of her statement is available in a binder, Meadows contributes to the air of legality or trial surrounding the hearing—established, as well, by the presence of a hearing officer who is a judge (and who is therefore referred to as "your Honor" by participants), and an opening statement by an attorney. As opposed to other forms of social discourse that the hearing might take, where participants debate one another, respond dynamically to the statements of others, or answer questions—a town hall meeting, for instance, or the kind of deliberation typical of participatory democratic structures—Meadows is invoking the interpretive repertoires of a legal proceeding, where prosecutors share evidence prepared in advance and gathered into exhibits for all to see.

These legal referents extend to other aspects of the district presentation, as well. At each hearing, the proceedings begin when the hearing officer introduces himself or herself as a retired or inactive judge, then invites an attorney from CPS's legal affairs office to present the first statement. Each attorney produces a binder, reading a prepared statement, which they refer to as an "exhibit" much as one would refer to evidence at a trial: "At this time I would like to tender to you the CEO's compiled exhibit one, a binder of documents being submitted for your consideration in support of these proposals…. The binder consists of documentary evidence in written statements demonstrating the

CEO's proposals comply with the requirements of the Illinois school code and the CEO's guidelines for school actions." The statements read by Meadows and another district representative, Justin Brent, are contained in the binder, which is physically available for attendees to review during the meeting. This advanced preparation means that there is no structured opportunity for community members to interact with or pose questions to the district representatives (as they might during, say, a town hall forum or other dialogic event) or have spontaneous interactions beyond what the representatives have already stated and rendered in print. Participants invoke the social language (Gee, 2014) of a trial in other small moments, such as this interaction between a district attorney and the hearing officer during the Williams hearing:

> *Attorney:* I believe both testimonies were intended to demonstrate how the proposal of the 27 classrooms would be within the range, but we're happy to provide additional information if that's what you would like to see.

> *Hearing Officer:* Whatever you want to do, it's your case. Anything else?

District Criteria for School Quality: Performance & Efficiency

As noted above, Meadows introduces a series of metrics and quantitative indicators meant to serve as such evidence: the "enrollment efficiency range," the ideal number of children in a classroom (30), the ideal proportion of rooms in a building that should serve as classrooms ("76 to 77 percent") and an appropriate margin of error for the enrollment efficiency range (plus or minus 20%). After presenting an overview of this quantitative analysis, Meadows closes with explicitly causal language: "This number is below the enrollment efficiency range, and *thus* the school is underutilized" (emphasis mine). Meadows presents this data using the "if… then" logic of rhetoric, explaining the *calculation* of the metrics without explaining the *validity* of the constructs involved. For

instance, one might wonder why enrollment efficiency is a useful or necessary quality for a school, whether 30 students in a classroom is ideal, where the "76 to 77 percent" proportion comes from (and, indeed, what this proportion is exactly) and why 20% is the margin of error. In this manner, Meadows construes the school closure proposal as objective and neutral—the natural, inevitable outcome based on a series of calculations using measures which are taken for granted as legitimate.

Following Meadows, a second district employee, Justin Brent, presents a similar prepared statement, offering a comparison between students' performance on standardized tests at the school slated for closure and that of the designated receiving school. Like Meadows, Brent presents an identical statement at each of the hearings, with the appropriate data filled in. Also like Meadows, Brent provides a thorough step-by-step explanation of the metrics used, though not a justification of their validity or relevance as constructs, and ends with a "thus" declaration:

> Wells's ISAT meets and exceeds composite score was 66.4, while Mayo's meets and exceeds composite score was 62.5. … As you can see, Wells's reading value added score was a p ositive .4 in 2012 and Mayo's reading value-added score was -.7. This means that on average students at Wells grew at a faster pace in reading when compared to students at Mayo. Wells's mathematics value-added score was -.6 in 2012 [noise from audience]—I'm sorry, Well's mathematics value-added score was .6 in 2012, and Mayo's value-added score was -1.7. This means that on average, students at Wells grew fast-- grew at a faster pace in mathematics when compared to students at Mayo. To summarize, Well's performed higher than Mayo in 2011-2012 on a majority of the metrics identified in the CEO's guidelines for school actions, and thus is a higher-performing school.

In their presentation of these measures, and in particular in their detailed explanation of how they were calculated, Meadows and Brent are inviting hearing participants to assent

to the logic of their decision—to view the school closing proposal as grounded in neutral, objective criteria.

Community Perspectives: Familial Disruption as Harm

In contrast to Byrd-Bennett's representation of the closures as neutral and expressly divorced from issues of race, parents, teachers, students, and community members participating in closing hearings and meetings present implicit and explicit allegations of racism. One middle school student, Jordan McKendrick, begins her testimony by making a broad statement regarding school closures before moving on to speak directly to the case of Mayo:

> Hi, everybody, my name is Jordan McKendrick. Okay, so. This is not just for everybody. I feel like this is so racist of y'all to close down all these CPS schools because most—you see, most black kids going to CPS schools. It's taking away education from them when you closing their schools down and you movin' them into new schools and you takin them out they comfort zone and you takin jobs from teachers. That's not right. That's not fair at all. Okay, back to Mayo.

Carla Watts, a former principal, extends an allegation of racism via a startling metaphor—the antebellum slave auction block, where families were routinely separated for the economic gain and expediency of white slaveholders.

> So now we put [teachers] out to pasture when they have built all these skills for these children and now they're going to be put out there with other teachers trying to grapple for a job. I feel like I'm at a slave auction. I'm very full right now. Because I'm, like, begging you [begins to cry] to keep my family together. Don't take them and separate them.

At another point in her statement, Watts refers to the school and its students as "the fruits of my womb, my labor." At Williams, teacher Marcia Collins says that news of the planned closing was already disrupting her students' relationships with one another, and that she felt at a loss for how to support them given the uncertainty of her own future. She cites a "special" relationship with them that makes her feel compelled to guide them

through the transition if she can:

> And I feel I have a very special relationship with my kids…. And I've learned a lot from them. I think they've learned a lot from me and we have a special and unique relationship, but I think they're entitled to be given a lot more information about their future….They're nervous about what's going to happen and other than what I've read there's not much I can say to them and I certainly can't say to them "Well I'm going to be here to support you, to help you with that transition."

At Overton, another teacher cites family ties as the very reason she chose to pursue a career at that school in particular, invoking a bond that spans multiple generations and that she sees as an asset to her colleagues:

> Good evening, your Honor. I have been a teacher at Overton Elementary school since 1997…. Overton is my home. As a child, I remember leaving out the house and joining other peers as they walked south on Indiana Avenue, headed to the Child-Parent Center. After graduating from preschool, I later went on to attend Overton Elementary School. Overton was home to my sisters, brothers, and cousins. In our family, it was mandatory for every child to attend Overton School. My parents were committed and had faith in Overton School. When I graduated from college, my mother made sure I stayed in the community to give back. So, Overton was the place for me to share my expertise with not only students, but my colleagues.

The Significance of Family Disruption. Watts's plaintive request to keep her family together is one that is echoed by many hearing participants. Many students, like Ke'Shaun Knowles, state that they considered their classmates to be like their brothers and sisters:

> My name is Ke'Shaun. And the reason I came up here today is for Mayo School to not close. Cause the school is like my home. And the teacher is like my, um, mother. And... the students like my brothers and sisters and my cousins. That's the reason I do not want Mayo School to close. Thank you.

While Ke'Shaun's evocation of family as an interpretive repertoire may seem like simply a poignant metaphor, the importance of fictive kinship in African American social life

suggests a potentially much more literal interpretation. As Chatters, Taylor, and Jayakody

(1994) point out, in African American social networks fictive kin often share the same

rights, status, and intensity of relational bonds as biological kin. Indeed, at the Williams

hearing, Chicago Teachers Union representative Michael Lucas draws a connection

between the historical challenges faced by African Americans, school closures, and his

contemporary sense of responsibility for children that are not his own:

> This is real fast without taking into consideration real people, real babies okay. So
> like I stated I have children. You know I don't have any grandchildren yet, but
> I'm sure hopefully I will. I want to be an advocate and continue to be an advocate
> for children or other folks' children just like my own. Because really I'm going to
> tell you something— I consider us a community, a family. Okay? We've come a
> long way. And again I'm not casting aspersions but we've come a long way from
> where we've began as African Americans. Coming over here from Africa and
> going through what we went through in terms of the slavery and our ancestors and
> so on and so forth. And then what we went through in the south and the north and
> then all of a sudden we do get Brown versus Board of Education, but the Supreme
> Court really doesn't really put any teeth in it and what happened back then
> historically was that the schools in the south many of them they shut them—they
> shut down the school districts.

In this narrative, Lucas establishes a through line of concern, pain, and resilience,

moving in conversational flow from his own children, his feelings of accountability for

the children of others, and history from slavery to desegregation to the closure of black

southern schools post-Brown—all as a rationale for why Williams should remain open.

In addition to such fictive kinship ties, community members make reference to

longstanding connections between biological family members and the school. One

student begins to cry in the midst of explaining that her granny, who also graduated from

Mayo, told her that she used to sing the Mayo school song every morning during

assembly—the same song, the student adds, that *she* sings every day. Another, an eighth-

grader named Rayven Patrick who says she has attended Mayo since preschool, discusses

both forms of kinship seamlessly, intertwining them as she describes the rituals of daily

school life and graduation:

> Most of my family have went to Mayo. My grandma attended. My mother, my aunt. I came from a big family. The Patricks are known in Mayo. Like, we have been going there for so long. Over the years I have watched lots of students graduate, and they were able to come back to their teachers and tell them how high school has been going. Most of them are in college now, and I see them come to the few teachers that are left at Mayo and tell them of their experience of college and high school. This year, I will graduate. And most of the students at Mayo, I think of them as my little sisters. They're family to me. Little sisters and little brothers. I walk through the hallway and every kid knows who I am. I'm able to speak to them, and I honestly, I wanna be able to watch them graduate. My little sister is in first grade and want to see her graduate from the same place I'm graduating from.

Students and parents at Williams cite similar family ties; one parent links the school

closing to a form of genocide:

> My mother, my cousins, my grandmother went to Daniel Hale Williams. We have a long tradition at this school and to rename it and to do all those others things is, it's a big…it's like you're killing our generation off.

> The recurrence of discourse around "family," both biological and fictive, is so

prevalent during the hearings that one speaker makes an explicit observation about it:

> Now, one of the things that I have looked at from after the first speech to the final speech is that this school is based on family. And I know because as I stated I have four decades of it. To tear down this family will be one of the biggest mistakes that Chicago Public Schools has done in years. And the reason why I say that is because we have the Johnson family, we have the Patrick family, we have the McKendricks, we have the Leonards, we have so many names that have been there for years. And I'm not up here to battle. But it seems like right now we're putting north and south against each other again.

> Given the history of African American familial disruption—the history which

Watts is explicitly calling upon when she evokes the shocking image of the slave auction

block—the refrain of "family" and the call to "keep the family together" can arguably be

viewed as a form of implicit discourse about racism. Historically, the intentional

disruption of the African American family has been configured as a primary tool of white supremacy[xii], one with deep roots spanning from the time of chattel slavery (evoked, as well, through Johnson's comment about "putting north and south against each other again," as in the Civil War) through the present era of mass incarceration. Further, such familial disruption has often been cited as an explanation for why African American students have historically faced academic failure. Perhaps most famously, in "The Negro Family: The Case For National Action" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965), sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote that "at the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family," and that "a prime index of the disadvantage of Negro youth in the United States is their consistently poor performance on the mental tests that are a standard means of measuring ability and performance in the present generation."

Retired teacher and community member Simone Clark makes this connection between family disruption and the dismantling of African American community and social life even more explicit, while also mentioning its implications for Bronzeville and its historical significance as a center of Black culture.

> You are destroying a family for many children who don't always have the easiest family situations in their homes…A school is a community and a family and that is what is being destroyed here. Not only is it a family at the moment, but as you have heard people talk, and I was a history teacher for many years—this is a historical family. This is a family from one of the original and important African American communities in the city of Chicago and Mayo School represents the historical continuity of the Bronzeville community in an extraordinarily important way.

Explicit Resistance to District Narrative

Students, school personnel, and community members outwardly reject the neutrality

narrative presented by the district, as in this statement by special education teacher Carol

Parker:

> I'm still tryna count 30 classrooms. But I can see now that the classroom that I
> built for my special ed students will be gone. We'll be the closet on the other side
> of another room. Because that's the only way you're gonna get that many students
> in that building. Two, three points difference on the ISAT test? Let's take it back
> even further. We just got on probation. This is our first time here. Our name has
> never been on a close list. Never been on a close list. And all of a sudden we're
> closed!

Here, Parker challenges several aspects of the district's narrative—not by disagreeing

with the facts as presented, but by questioning whether they should be the basis upon

which a decision is made. She shifts from the use of the term "classroom" as a physical

site ("I'm still tryna count 30 classrooms") to "classroom" as shared cultural space ("the

classroom that I built for my special ed students"), then challenges whether the

enrollment efficiency range is really the way to ensure an "ideal" classroom arrangement

(by suggesting that the numbers Meadows presented will not be feasible unless some

students are seated in closets). Parker then suggests that ISAT points, not value-added

measures, should determine whether a school stays open, and that the school's history or

consistency with high academic performance, rather than a snapshot view, should be

taken into consideration. At Williams, special education teacher Marcia Radmore raises

similar concerns.

> What was not taken into consideration was that of the eight rooms, three are used
> for special education instruction. Within the guidelines of the state and the union
> contract, special education teachers can have a maximum of fifteen students *with*
> an aid in their classrooms. This means that the three rooms combined have a
> maximum capacity for 45 students and not 90 as indicated in the plan…. The plan

also indicated that the Williams Prep has been on probation for five years…This is incorrect. Our first year of probation began in school year 2010-2011. We were listed as academic warning year one. Since then our school has not received any additional supports for our teachers and our students to use to improve our students' academic performance.

In addition to challenging the method used to calculate available space, and arguing that the record presented as to Williams's academic history includes an error, Radmore is also implicitly suggesting that it is not only the school that should face a quality assessment and culpability for low academic performance, but also the district; what is relevant is not only the fact the school faced academic warning, but also that CPS did not offer any resources or a pathway for improvement.

Teacher Nakia Mosby of Williams questions whether the very data analysis that has been presented is sound, citing other numbers available from the state's performance data website and from the newspaper's annual ranking of schools:

What information determines which school is higher performing or not? …I compared the two [school performance] report cards and even based on the *Sun-Times* you have Williams Middle as 67.3 and Drake as 69.9. Does that few points determine that they're a better school? It's just not enough information for the community, the parents, the teachers, everyone involved in this decision making. …You know we need to look at every single detail and not just one report card that's half done, missing data, missing information to make a critical decision like this. This is impacting people's lives, people's future, people's children. And I ask you all to look at this data. Do not look at one year's worth of data. Go back. It's right there.

In the case of Williams, much of the challenge to the official district narrative has to do with highlighting the tensions of co-locations with Urban Prep, an all-boys charter high school equally lauded for sending large numbers of its virtually all-black student body to college each year and criticized for pushing out students whose academic challenges are deemed too challenging (Ravitch, 2014).

Just as a point of clarification where it says that Drake will be relocating to the

Williams Elementary and Middle building which will offer— the third bullet point "a building that has received 6.8 million in recent facility investment." Williams Middle did not benefit from that investment. That investment was strictly for Urban Prep. Everything that was done as far as ADA accessibility and other upgrades that was for the high school. We have no access to that entry, we have no access to the third floor and the portion of the building that was— that those upgrades you know has been received. We do not have elevators. The high school has that. They utilize that. Those upgrades was strictly for Urban Prep and not for us. So that's misleading right there, that information.

Parent Evelyn Scott, unable to attend the Williams meeting, sent a friend who was a police officer from the community to read a letter in her stead. She challenges the narrative that Drake is a superior school to Williams, as well as the decision-making process, which she contends is a farce. She address her letter "to Barbara Byrd-Bennett, or whoever is seeking to undermine my intelligence":

It burns me up inside to hear that you have decided to close down my children's school due to under enrollment or lack of performance only to replace their school with a school which is pretty much identical. It's an outrage and not a good choice. Though I am not a rocket scientist, I am wise enough to see that no serious thought was put into place by your staff when the decision was made for the improvement of my children's education. …If you were aware of the fact that we were not utilizing the space to its full potential why didn't anyone from downtown come into Williams to offer their services to assist us? Chicago Public School's slogan has always been "children first," but in this past year you have made it quite clear that this is not the case.

Others pursue a similar line of argument, suggesting ways to think about a school's "performance" and fundamental worth that are not reflected in the measures presented. Linda Jones, a teacher who also has a child in third grade, makes an impassioned speech in which she challenges the neutrality of the district presentation from several angles.

Wells Prep student growth on the 2012 school progress report, disseminated by CPS, indicates that Wells Prep student growth was below average. While Mayo Elementary School student growth was average. That was not seen on the screen.

> We're both level three schools. We both earned a 26.2% performance rating. Both schools had a decline in enrollment. But Mayo has taken everyone that has come. Everyone. We have turned no one away. We have never had the luxury that Wells Prep has had to decline any student. We took you as you came and we flourish with what we had. [Begins to cry] I promise you…I will not rest with Mayo being closed on our fiftieth year. We've had fifty years of a cultural celebration that we call Extravaganza. We have fifty years of tradition, including but not limited to our history fairs, our plays, our programming, our open book programs, our band program, our African dance, our computer technology, our tap dance….

Jones begins by legitimizing performance data as a meaningful set of measures, but suggests that district officials have been selective and not objective about what material to include and what to omit. She then implies that the differences in admissions practices and the resulting makeup of the student body make a Mayo-Wells quantitative comparison invalid—a direct challenge to the interpretive repertoire presented by Brent, where both schools are functionally identical such that it would be reasonable to compare them. However, Jones then pivots, arguing that the real value in the school lies not in its standardized test outcomes but in the traditions and opportunities shared with students.

At the Overton meeting, community resident Trey Barksdale speaks with a tone of resignation as he describes the hearing process itself as a futile endeavor.

> I'm not gonna waste too much time rehashing the same things. But there's one thing I need to state. That it sounds like a broken record, like we keep hitting our head against the wall. These consolidations and closings are racist. Plain and simple, clear and cut. '63 my mother and my grandmother fought against the first Daley to get a better life and a better education. And yet, 50 years later, we're still doing the same thing. So, we give you data. Teachers, professionals, they're giving data over and over again how to improve schooling for our children. Especially children of color. Arts, music programs, physical education, rehabbing of buildings. And yet we've given you this information and you've not done anything about it. So it kind of seems like to me you really don't care. Cause you don't.

Chicago Teachers Union representative Wallace Newkirk also directly counters Byrd-Bennett's narrative that the closings are neutral and not racist. On the contrary, he

argues, the decision to close the schools was made based on a desire to systemically disempower Black and Latino communities, and the performance criteria were only intended to justify the decision *ex post facto.*

> For too, long CPS—and I want this on the record—for too long CPS and the Board of Education have claimed that they could improve our schools by closing them. School closings, turnarounds, and privatizations have targeted African American and Latino neighborhoods for years. I mean where are—and I'm not casting dispersions, but where are the white community schools in this room or at any of these hearings? They're all African-American. And you gotta think about that…. [CPS and the Board] have targeted African-American and Latino neighborhoods for years. Latino schools as well. The voices of our communities have been ignored as we have demanded an end to school actions that destabilize our neighborhoods, take resources from our students, and increase racial inequities in Chicago.

The quick aside with which Newkirk begins his statement—"I want this on the record"—is ostensibly superfluous, since district officials opened the convening by stating that there was a court reporter present and all comments would be recorded and conveyed to the CEO. By stating that he wants his comment on the record, Newkirk reinforces the significance of what he is about to say, while also implying that the officials may not actually be taking notes as they said they would, necessitating a special statement if he wants to ensure that his opinion is noted. Loretta Jeffries, a grandparent at the Overton hearing, makes a similar comment: "You know, y'all already planned to close Overton. I just want to know, because it's worrying me—is y'all tapes and stuff on? Is y'all really documenting this?"

Additionally, by stating, "they're all African-American" and "you gotta think about that," Newkirk suggests that school closing proceedings should be judged not only by whether they demonstrate disparity in intentions, but disparity in outcome; if the schools on the proposed list are all African-American, that unto itself merits closer

examination regardless of how they got on the list.

At the Overton meeting, parent Josita Curtis quotes Byrd-Bennett directly in order to refute her claim that Overton itself, and other schools that are not filled to capacity, are the locus of the problem.

> As I was reading this paper, and it stated something about "the reality is that too many of our children are being cheated out of a quality education they deserve because they are trapped in underresourced and underutilized schools." If I could learn in the dark and grow up with no heat, no light, a mother with no job, and get taught and have to skip two grades…because they school is not up to date or the windows are foggy and they ain't got air conditioning does not mean that they can't learn being sweaty or being hot…. Y'all talkin about some repairs or "trapped." The only way they're trapped is because of the system, because they don't have a voice, and because everyone is looking upon a certain area, oh, because they [the schools] not full. I'm trying to keep my tears back cause we got kids back there looking at people that they not gon' see no more. …. Y'all gonna tell them where they can and can't go? Y'all are a gang too!

In the context of a meeting where there is much discussion about gangs and violence (as I will discuss further below), Curtis's accusation rings sharply. Other participants suggest that the Board and district officials are complicit in something profoundly immoral, saying things like "I don't know how y'all can sleep at night" and calling the plan for closure "evil and devilish." But by calling them a *gang*, Curtis evokes something much harsher: a coordinated collective attack, the infliction of terror upon the community, and a cavalier act of violence with no regard for who is caught in the crossfire.

What Constitutes Goodness? History & Legacy

Whereas Brent and Meadows use causal language (e.g. "and thus") to argue that the schools slated for closure are not good schools based on the constructs of "performance" and efficiency, community members at Williams and Mayo suggested other criteria by which the schools should be judged: their history and their legacy as

community anchors within Bronzeville. While these attributes could fairly be important to stakeholders of any school, they hold a particular symbolic weight given the historical significance of Bronzeville in the twentieth century. Mayo parent Janet Rice speaks of the school's history as intertwined with the intergenerational familial relationships it houses:

> So I'm asking you just to reconsider, let Mayo be Mayo. We been there 50 years and it's for a reason. It's a legacy. You got families that have families that have families. Your kids graduate, they wanna come back to Mayo and bring their children. So I'm asking you, leave us open.

A third grade student at the Mayo hearing also references the school's anniversary and describes how painful and how much "shame" it caused to find out about the proposed closure:

> My whole class started breaking out crying, so did my teacher. We walked through the halls in shame because we didn't want Mayo to close. When I'm in fourth grade, I was really thinking about going to the fiftieth year anniversary, but how can I when Mayo is closing?

Other students make reference to the Mayo school song, which they view as an important tradition:

> Every day I go to school, we sing the Mayo song, and we are proud to hear the song. We are proud to sing the song every... every day. All I want to know is why close Mayo? This one of the best schools we ever had.

> Just like everybody else was saying when they came up, what's the point of closing Mayo when it been on 37th Street for fifty whole years. And I have, like, I have a granny and she's like 62 right now… and she had went to Mayo…. And she like always tell me stories about, um, that the song that they'd be singing [begins to cry] that we sing still, that we still sing today….

For these students, the act of singing the school song—a recognition of history and legacy—is, itself, a marker of goodness ("we are proud to hear the song… this is one of the best schools we ever had") as well as a representation of close family ties, something that can be spanned between generations. At the end of the hearing, attendees begin to

sing the Mayo school song**.**

At Williams, the proposed plan for closure dictated that Drake would move into the building occupied by Williams, and the name would change to Drake. Some community members were particularly offended by this proposition. The school had been named for Daniel Hale Williams, an African-American doctor who performed the first open heart surgery in the nation and founded Bronzeville's Provident Hospital, which served black patients in a time when many hospitals did not (Buelow, 2004). Thus, the suggestion of changing the school's name was perceived as an affront not only to the school's legacy, but to the history of Bronzeville and of African-American heroes in general:

> I just want to say this in respect to the name changing. I feel this is just a disrespect because we have an alumni association. The alumni are people that they say we went to *Daniel Hale Williams* the first black open heart surgeon and that meant a lot. And it still means a lot. And it means a lot to these kids now.

In light of this concern, Brent's standard script regarding school performance was amended at the April 26 hearing for Williams, where he stated: "Finally, if the CEO's proposal is approved and the community later wishes to consider changing the school's name the requirements of the board's school renaming policy will be followed to ensure both school and community engagement in evaluating potential new names." No justification is offered as to why the school cannot remain Williams. As of this writing, the school building occupies an odd middle ground: the metal sign erected outside proclaims bold letters that the school is called Drake, while the original engraved stone above the door pronounces that the school is called Williams, and a metal plaque nearby honors Daniel Hale Williams as the school's namesake.

The Pre-Eminence of Safety

Many community members expressed concern for their children's safety and

security, citing tensions between closing schools and receiving schools and the challenges

of traveling an unknown route to get to school. Parent and teacher concerns about student

safety are far from hypothetical. While gun violence in Chicago in general has received a

great deal of local and national media attention in recent years, there is a particular

linkage between the fear of school closure and the fear of children facing death—the

heartbreaking story of Derrion Albert, who was beaten to death in 2009 during a fight

that many attributed to student conflict after school closure and consolidation (NBC

Chicago, 2009). During the scripted portion of the hearing, district representatives

promised that safety and security measures would be taken, and the Safe Passage

program—where representatives from community organizations usher children to and

from school—would be expanded. However, many parents and teachers expressed

doubts, suggesting that Brent's assurances about the program were naïve, ill-informed, or

misguided.

> You guys just don't know what you do to these kids when you displace them. And
> you just put them out in the streets for them to be turned over to the wolves. How
> would you feel if your kids were in that position?

At the Williams meeting, Jessica Roberts invoked the students themselves as experts on

safety—experts whom no one had consulted or spoken to:

> How can we get these students across these gang lines? Now let's just be realistic
> here. You know there are boundaries and some of my students had to tell me
> about them. If you ask them, they'll let you know which boundaries they cannot
> cross because they're going into this gang's territory and that gang's territory.
> What are we doing to make sure that they can actually walk to and from school?
> A situation happened at another school over by our area where that child got beat
> to death. How is CPS addressing that and can confirm that that would never
> happen again? You know that during the winter time it's getting later, a lot of

> these schools have afterschool programs. We already have an additional time to the learning environment. I know me personally I don't get out of school until 6:00. What can we do for those students, how is that going to be addressed in writing to our parents and our community for their safe travels?

In noting that some of her students had to inform her about relevant gang boundaries, Roberts admits that she, herself, does not share their expertise—meaning that representatives from the Office of Safety and Security, cited by Justin Brent, are also likely to lack the relevant information needed to keep their promises about student safety. By noting that she wants to see the issue "addressed in writing," she suggests that promises from the Board are not to be accepted or believed unless they are recorded like a formal contract, reflecting a fundamental mistrust which I will discuss further in the next section. She also invokes a shared understanding of history by reminding those present of Derrion Albert. Parent Karen Pitts also invokes a shared history to draw a connection between school closings and violence, asking participants to recall nearby Florence B. Price Elementary, closed in 2012.

> I wonder, do you remember Florence B. Price? The school that was on 43rd and Dresden? You sent their kids to the school right over there right off of State; that new school right over there on State, or right off of State? Did you notice that the kids over there, they didn't fit in real well? Fights broke out almost every day. One kid got beat up outside the school going home. That's the future you would try to entail for Mayo. You gonna take the kids from Wells Prep, put 'em over there in Mayo, then all chaos is gonna happen. We don't want that to happen.

The invocation of *you* and *we* here are especially salient: *you* (representatives of the Board) sent the kids to a new school, *you* need to be reminded (do you remember?), *you* want the same fate for Mayo that you created for Price, and *we* don't want that to happen.

Parent Lena Hobson, speaking at the Overton meeting, speaks of further intergenerational ties as she establishes a similar knowledgeable *we* in her statement— implying that there is a complementary *you* that lacks community knowledge. Like

Jessica Roberts at Mayo, she suggests that the children themselves are the true experts on

the threat of violence, and only those close to them have access to that expertise.

> My grandmother took us to school from 46th and Michigan to Overton. Now I
> take my cousins to school, from 49th and Wabash over to Overton Elementary. As
> a person who stays in the community, is involved in the community with the
> children, I talk to the children. I talk to the parents, I know most of the parents. I
> actually went t school with the parents that spoke earlier; we attended Overton.
> We know what's best for our children. We know what they go through going to
> school. We know where they pass. We know who's out there to make sure they
> get there safe.

Phylicia Columbus, speaking at the Mayo meeting, frames her concerns about violence in

a manner intended to invoke both empathy and a sense of fairness or justice.

> When you shut down the schools, now you're gonna send my special ed kid
> walking through a bad neighborhood by himself. Is that fair to him? When you
> close these schools, you're putting our childrens' lives on the line. Have some
> sympathy for us parents that have to work. I work at 147th and Halsted. My child
> goes to school at Mayo. If something happens with them walking to another
> school, is that fair for me to have to try to get from 147th and Halsted to see what's
> going on while he walking to school? Mayo did a lot for these children, and CPS
> is making very bad decisions right now, and somebody needs to stop it before we
> have more kids killed on the street. Look at the crime right now. Now we putting
> more kids in danger and now you're putting my kid in danger, and I have a
> problem with that. It's not fair.

In their presentations, district representatives referred to the closing actions in a way that

omitted mention of individuals, or even of children more generally. By illustrating the

specifics of her situation, Columbus reframes the dialogue from a large-scale level (the

building, the classrooms, the test scores) to a focus on a single individual—her son—and

his familial circumstances. She prompts listeners to consider whether the proposal is just

not for the school on a general level, but for *her* son and *her* work situation.

Mistrust and Broken Promises

More generally, community members expressed doubts that promises from the district

could be counted on or that district representatives were trustworthy, citing past instances where trust had been violated or the community had been misled. Williams teacher Melissa Washington argues that the proposal presented by district representatives is not a proposal at all, given CPS's history of, as she observes it, presenting actions as possibilities when they have already been decided:

> On this sheet of paper that you gave us it says it is proposal. However, within the school building I wonder why there are individuals who are now coming in and taking inventory of everything that are in our classroom if this is still in the proposal stage? Secondly, why are people coming from HR to talk to us about how to transition out of losing our jobs if this is still in the proposal stage? …When Urban Prep moved into Williams Multiplex two years ago, when they had our—the meeting for the community, they came in saying that it was a proposal. However, two days prior to the time that they came in to our school the Board had already voted on moving Urban Prep into our school building. So it wasn't a proposal. The word proposal is thrown around too loosely for me and as an educator, "proposal" means that it is not cut in stone, but however what is going on around in our school shows that it is cut in stone.

She goes on to describe being in the school building for an extracurricular program over spring break, and witnessing representatives from central office taking measurements for new air conditioning that was to be installed in the school. Washington also employs positioning[xiii] (Davies & Harré, 1990) as a discursive device to lend credibility and social weight to her critique: saying that *as an educator* the word "proposal" bears a precise meaning for her, she reminds listeners that defining the meanings of words is part of her realm of professional expertise.

In a testimony during the Mayo hearing, Lashae Parker, an eighth grade student, demonstrates very little faith in the district staff or the legitimacy of the test scores that provide the basis for the closure proposal.

I know you heard a lot of stuff. "Oh, Mayo is bad. Mayo is terrible." All of this,

> da-da-da-da. It's not right. Um, from what I hear from Wells Prep, you say that Wells Prep is just the best school in the world. It's not…. Are you able to prove that those scores—I saw the little thing up there about where Mayo hasn't met in reading and math—do you have any proof or did you just make up those lines and just put whatever you wanted? …I don't think that those scores are right. Mayo has been has been in that spot for over 50—for 50 years. And all these children—look at all these kids out here crying! That's what you wanna see. I know you don't care."

In an open and pointed refusal of Meadows's and Brent's terms, Lashae suggests that the case against Mayo is simply hearsay that should be dismissed—"Mayo is terrible, da-da-da-da"— that Brent may have fabricated the data he presented at the meeting, and that the decision to close Mayo is one rooted in personal malice rather than objective criteria. At the community meeting for Mollison, parent Charles Morris went a step further, describing his own information-gathering and research efforts as a more reliable and accurate counterpoint to the closure as proposed:

> I actually walked to see how long it would take me to get from Overton to Mollison School. And I actually looked at Mollison School to see what was so great about Mollison School that you would keep it open. And my findings: Mollison School is *very* small. It's nowhere near as large as Overton School. So to uproot all our children and put them in that school—it's not even possible. Then I looked at Burke Elementary. I decided to do some fact-finding. And it is a long way for the students that go to Overton. Not only that, Burke School is also smaller than Overton Elementary School. Then I decided to ask a couple of people who attended Mollison. I asked them about, you know, their school. There was nothing good to be said about Mollison, just like the parent that spoke here Monday. So I'm trying to get an understanding of what's the purpose. Is it because you all *want* Overton school? Because it is larger? You want it for some other purpose that's not, you know, to teach students? Because if that's the case, then it's not worth it, and you definitely shouldn't close Overton for selfish gain.

In his use of the word "actually," Morris presents an implicit contrast to the information presented in the proposal, suggesting that those who prepared the Overton closure plan had not "actually looked" or "actually walked" as he had, and therefore were presenting a plan based on incomplete knowledge. He also invokes the social language of research and

data, both through his use of the terms "findings" and "fact-finding" and by describing a

methodological procedure of inquiry (*I walked, then I looked, I decided, then I decided*)

rooted in a research question (*what's the purpose*) and ending in a hypothesis ("is it

because you all *want* Overton school?") and a conclusion ("then it's not worth it, and you

definitely shouldn't close Overton"). In this way, Morris's statement presents a dialogic

counterpoint to the testimonies of Brent and Meadows, in which they, too, describe a

methodological path and findings that lead to a causal conclusion.

Loretta Jeffries, the speaker at the Overton hearing who asked whether the event

was actually being recorded, reminded attendees of the city's failed bid for the 2016

Olympics (the proposal for which included an athletes' village in the Bronzeville area,

along the lakefront) as evidence that the closure proposal represented an ulterior motive.

> Y'all want our building though. Yup. Cause the University [of Chicago] want that
> land. Y'all don't know…. I'm the community person. I see what goes on in that
> neighborhood. Why we can't keep our school? There was a time when the
> Olympics was coming. Y'all remember they was finna have the Olympics? They
> was gonna tear up all of King Drive. Well, since they lost the deal, they said, oh,
> we'll skip over to Overton. No! Leave our babies alone!

As with other speakers, Jeffries's mistrust is manifest through the invocation of a *you/us*

dichotomy, this time bolstered with the suggestion that the district officials have tried to

deceive her and others, but have failed because they underestimated her. The use of

"though" and "yup" alongside the statement that "y'all want our building" reinforces the

claim against an imagined protest or disagreement (i.e. the "yup" is a response to an

imagined "no, we don't want your building"), while "y'all don't know… I'm the

community person. I see what goes on" suggests that district officials did not expect her

to be observant of their misdeeds and the historical context of the efforts to close

Overton," while also positioning her as a knowledgeable figure whose observations should be heeded.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett's Statement: Closings as Natural

In Byrd-Bennett's statement to the Board, she makes several references to the structured differences and inequality between subgroups (racial and geographic) of CPS students, but does so without suggesting potential causes for these differences, events that catalyzed them, or actors who might be considered responsible for them. With this omission, Byrd-Bennett implicitly constructs these differences as incidental or neutral—a normal inherent quality of the city landscape itself. Consider the following excerpt from Byrd-Bennett's statement:

> I believe that every child in every community in Chicago deserves access to a high-quality education that will prepare them for success in college, career, and in life. I believe that that's the purpose of public schools. But for too long, children in certain parts of our city have been cheated out of the resources they need to succeed in the classroom because they are trapped in underutilized schools. These underutilized schools are also under-resourced. Today, Chicago has 145,000 fewer school-aged children than it did in the year 2000. This has affected student enrollment, especially in the city's South and West sides, which saw significant population declines and now have the most underutilized schools.

In this excerpt, Byrd-Bennett explicitly acknowledges two structural phenomena: geographic inequality ("children in certain parts of our city have been cheated") and the drastic decline in the number of CPS students enrolled in South Side and West Side schools. However, there is much that is omitted in this statement. For instance, children in "certain parts of our city"—later identified more specifically as the South Side and the West Side—are not racially identified, despite being, by a wide margin, African American students. Instead, "certain parts of our city" becomes an indexical, roundabout

way of speaking about Black children. Byrd-Bennett also notes that the children have been cheated, an action that requires a specific actor, without suggesting who that actor might be. Further, their schools are described as "under-resourced," a terminological choice that similarly provokes questions about who, precisely, was supposed to provide the resources and failed in that duty.

At the end of this excerpt, Byrd-Bennett notes that the city's South and West sides have seen significant population declines. Later, she builds on this idea, stating that "the greatest population losses in our city over the past decade have taken place in the South and the West sides. Underutilized schools in these areas are the result of demographic changes and not race." Once again, although she notes a pattern, Byrd-Bennett does not suggest any catalyst for the pattern, when in fact sudden demographic change in these areas has been both tied to the decline of industrial employment opportunities and, more recently, the demolition of public housing. This omission culminates in the statement that closes this passage: "underutilized schools… are the result of demographic changes and not race," a statement that is somewhat paradoxical given that "demographic changes" would generally be construed to mean, specifically, changes in the population of a particular racial group or groups.

Thus, in both instances, Byrd-Bennett discusses phenomena that are explicitly racialized in terms that downplay the potential role of race. In so doing, she engages in all three forms of Davis's notion of "muted racism" (2007). Arguing that underutilization is the primary crisis leaving students "cheated," without acknowledging racism as a potential factor is a form of deflection; referring to students in "certain parts" of the city without explicitly calling them African American is a form of indexicality. It is a form of

omission to discuss the demographic changes on the South Side and West Side without discussing the history of segregation, low-skill industrial employment, the construction of public housing, and the later destruction of public housing. Together, these discursive repertoires present structural inequality as an *a priori*, neutral fact.

Analysis

In her statement to the Board of Education, Byrd-Bennett responded to allegations of racism with the following: "First, the overwhelming majority of students in CPS are children of color. Any significant change in the status quo, therefore, is going to affect those children. This is not racist, it's simply a fact." Mayo student Jordan McKendrick, however, says the following during the school closing hearing: "I feel like this is so racist of y'all to close down all these CPS schools because most—you see, most black kids going to CPS schools." The two are describing the very same phenomenon, but arrive at the opposite conclusion. If schools are closed according a variety of well-reported public criteria, and the students in those schools are mostly African American, is this racist?

In Byrd-Bennett's statement, there is a noted absence of any particular actors or agentive forces. And because her narrative does not involve individuals, there is no one to harbor negative personal feelings or bias. In contrast, Jordan's statement is not about the good intentions or personal affect of anyone involved in the school closings, but contends that the closings are racist because of their structure and outcomes. Byrd-Bennett's statement that the closings are not racist seems to reflect the idea that racism is "prejudice, ignorance, or a disease that afflicts some individuals and causes them to discriminate against others just because of the way they look" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p.

21). Jordan's comment, on the other hand, reflects a focus on disparities in outcomes, without the need for an agentive character. Other Bronzeville community members present several examples of what this looks like in the context of their school potentially being closed. When you are African-American and your family ties are disrupted, using criteria which you find untrustworthy, *and* when this occurs via the edifice of a highly systematized hearing process over which you have little control, a materialist view of racism would construe the process as racist.

What accounts for this discrepancy? While the community members and district representatives are inhabiting the same physical world, they live in different *figured worlds* that lead them to interpret the same objective reality through radically different lenses. As defined by Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), figured worlds are "sociohistoric, contrived interpretations or imaginations that mediate behavior," within which "particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (p. 52). Figured worlds have a particular relevance for the work of discourse analysis, as the way language is constructed and interpreted is moderated through the figured worlds of discourse participants. "When talking and acting, people assume that their words and behavior will be interpreted according to a context of meaning—as indexing or pointing to a culturally figured word. Violations of this assumption cause confusion and prevarication" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998, p. 52).

Thus, in a sense, while the excerpts presented here show district officials and community members evidently taking opposing actions—arguing that each school should close, versus arguing that it should remain open—they are discursively taking the same

action: presenting an evidence-based analysis of each school's quality, and an assessment of whether closing it is fair and just. The divergence lies in the figured worlds that shape their respective discourses. Byrd-Bennett's discourse reflects an idealist view of racism (through which the closings are not racist). Community discourse reflects a materialist view: the school closings are racist because they have disparate impact ("I feel like this is so racist of y'all to close down all these CPS schools because most—you see, most black kids going to CPS schools") and because they are rooted in a racist history, in which institutional actors have demonstrated malignant intent (as one Overton meeting participant put it, "turning Bronzeville into Rahmsville"), unreliability, or—at best— ignorance about how best to ensure the safety and sustainability of the community.

Discourse analysis is about what people are *doing* with language, and the community members who made statements with regard to each school closing do more than rebut arguments from the district. Through their testimony, community members propose alternate criteria by which school closing decisions should be made—an alternate analysis of the negative consequences of closure as well as of the virtues by which a school ought to be assessed. After hearing a lengthy statement intended to establish the school's inferiority as objective fact, each time a student, teacher, staff member, parent, or community member puts forth a countervailing claim about why the school is, in fact, good—and, moreover, why the district itself is the source of malfeasance—they are, in effect, creating counterhegemonic paradigm for how we ought to evaluate schools. A good school, in the eyes of these community members, as a school of relationships, a school of safety, a school of family, a school of history—not necessarily a school of performance or efficiency.

However, the conflict between these two figured worlds does not exist in a vacuum; each figured world is constructed and enacted by a social group and each of those social groups has a hierarchically-determined relation of dominance or subordination to the other. As such, the discrepancy between them is not one that is settled through, necessarily, logic, or internal validity, or the will of the majority. Rather, the claims emerging from the figured world rooted in a dominant structure—the school district—necessarily win the day, even when an arbiter introduced with the role of independent, third-party expert (the hearing officer for each proceeding) weighs in. Therefore, Overton, Williams, and Mayo are all now closed.

Conclusion: Discourse toward Strategy

"*Language has meaning only in and through social practices*, practices which often leave us morally complicit with harm and injustice unless we attempt to transform them.
(Gee, 2014, p. 12)

An obvious limitation of the analysis above is a variation on the limitation of all empirical inquiry: it emerges from my own individual scholarly lens. In the case of discourse analysis, this broad limitation manifests as what Gee (2014) refers to as "the frame problem," which is that "no matter how much of the context we have considered in offering an interpretation of an utterance, there is always the possibility of considering other and additional aspects of the context, and these new considerations may change how we interpret the utterance" (p. 85). This challenge is mirrored by thematic analysis; as Boyatzis (1998) describes, "thematic analysis is a way of seeing," and as such, "often, what one sees through thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same information, events, or situations" (p. 1). Ultimately, as an analyst I

have to make decisions about which details of a given discursive event are most relevant to both the context of the event and the context of my research questions, with the understanding that other frames may be more useful for another line of inquiry. As it stands, the analysis as presented reflects my own preoccupations, one of which is the desire to use critical discourse analysis as a means to address social inequalities.

One pathway toward this goal is to take up Fairclough's (2010) call for critical discourse analysts to move from only *describing structures* toward *developing strategies* through careful examination of the social use of language. As he describes, "strategies have a strongly discursive character: they include imaginaries for change and for new practices and systems, and they include discourses, narratives, and arguments which interpret, explain, and justify the area of social life they are focused upon—its past, its present, and its possible future" (p. 18). If community members' discourse introduces an alternative means of evaluating the very nature of what constitutes a quality school—one that emerges from the grassroots, not from the top down; one that centers black children and black communities as constituents, with the concomitant acknowledgement of the racialized social system in which we live—then that very discourse may offer a first step toward schools that are truly just and oriented towards those whom they serve.

While this suggestion may seem radical, it is worth remembering that there is nothing fundamentally more valid about performance or efficiency as measures of goodness than history, familial relationships, or any other metrics that are equally socially constructed. The "enrollment efficiency range," for instance, is not clearly motivated by any facet of child development research, professional expertise, or any other transparent factors. It includes figures which seem peculiarly arbitrary (e.g. the notion that "76 to 77

percent" of a building's classrooms should be occupied) to carry so much social weight. Indeed, one CPS teacher told me privately that she and her colleagues suspected the list of proposed school closures was prepared in advance based on other factors, and the enrollment efficiency range then determined algebraically to fit with the enrollment data of the schools on the list. This accusation is mirrored by the many hearing and meeting participants who seemed confident that, as we say colloquially, the fix was in—that their school was already doomed, and that the hearings and meetings were a charade designed to make the process seem fair and to placate them.

These questions—of fairness, of goodness, of justice—are far from being matters of theoretical or pedantic distinction. In a contemporary landscape of public school discourse where racial equity is the primary goal trumpeted by policymakers, educators, and civic leaders across the political spectrum, the questions of what racism, and of what is best for students and communities who have faced social marginalization, logically precedes any solutions to educational challenges. If one believes that objective facts such as the distribution of Black and Latino students across schools, the relative minority of white students in the district, the demographic changes that have occurred on the South and West Sides in recent decades, are all value-neutral—that is, unrelated to racism— then offering school closings makes a kind of quantitative sense, in that these actions comprise a redistribution of physical resources (i.e. buildings) across an otherwise level playing field. Conversely, if one believes that the condition of underutilization is not, itself, the "crisis," as Byrd-Bennett terms it, but rather a symptom of a racialized social system that has deep historical roots and continues to persist, the logical solution is to examine that social system and its historical manifestations and seek to address them

directly, while assigning social value to the goodness that community members identify in their own schools.

Although these three Bronzeville schools are now closed, they leave in their wake a host of other decisions, such as how to support consolidated schools, what to do with vacant buildings, and when and whether to close more schools in the future. In each decision, the question of how best to avoid perpetuating racism in a community marked by the history described in Chapter 1 should be ethically paramount—but as long as community members and district leaders have profoundly dissonant views about how to serve Bronzeville, there is no clear road to equity and justice for the children who live there.

Chapter 3: "Whose School? Our School!"
The Fight for Dyett and an Embargoed Democracy

"Cause everybody dies in the summer / Wanna say your goodbyes, tell 'em while it's spring. / I heard everybody's dying in the summer So pray to God for a little more spring."
-Chance the Rapper, "Pusha Man (Paranoia)" (2013)

I was back in Cambridge for the week when I got the news that Dyett was going to open again. I scurried to my office, closed and locked the door, and pulled out my phone, watching with wide eyes as the live photos and journalistic reports from the City Hall press conference scrolled down my Twitter feed. There was school CEO Forrest Claypool[xiv] standing at a podium, surrounded by a cadre of black folks—some elected officials, and others whom I didn't recognize. The news was that students could enroll in Dyett once again starting in the fall, and that the building would become an arts school. And then, another picture appeared on the screen—this one taken from outside CPS headquarters. I saw a figure I recognized, one I knew well—one of the women who had been on hunger strike for over four weeks, demanding that the school be reopened. As others bustled around her, her face was turned downward, her hands were open, and her fingertips were pressed over the lids of her eyes. It was Irene Robinson, a woman who in our every interaction had treated me like her own child. "Ms. Irene," I said aloud as I looked at the picture. Ms. Irene, loving and kind, determined to find the best life for the children in her care and any others who might cross her path, who ended our every interaction with a heartfelt "I love you!" and who dreamed of founding a freedom school and who texted me heart emoji and pictures of her grandbabies. She seemed to be crying.

I lingered on the photo for several moments, feeling at once very close and very far away from home. When I finally left my office, a colleague who had been reading my

social media updates and staying abreast of Chicago school news caught me near the elevator. "Dyett is re-opening!" he exclaimed. Perhaps he saw the pained expression on my face, because he followed quickly with an uncertain question. "That's good… right?" I wasn't sure what to tell him.

In this chapter, I will tell a story of Walter H. Dyett High School—how it opened, and how it closed, of the fight to see it opened again, of both incredible success and searing disappointment. But it is also a story about democracy, about participation, and about citizenship, and about how the political processes that are supposed to serve the stakeholders of a city can fail tremendously in the course of school closure.

Voice as Witness

It is intentional that I introduce this chapter by saying I will tell *a* story, rather than *the* story. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) describe, in creating a portrait the researcher makes use of six aspects of voice, as she works to balance her own voice with the voices of those whose stories emerge in the portrait: voice as witness, voice as interpretation, voice as preoccupation, voice as autobiography, listening for voice, and voice in conversation. While each of these elements of voice is salient for this story, I attend particularly to my voice as witness. In so doing, the many interwoven cultural resonances of this term echo in my thinking; bearing witness to one's own experience, offering testimony as a witness to a crime (referring back to the social language of the law present during the 2013 school closing hearings, as discussed in the previous chapter), and the act of standing as a witness in church to speak on the presence of grace or miracles all come to mind. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis describe "voice as witness"

as a concept highlighting "the researcher's stance as discerning observer…. We see the portraitist standing on the edge of the scene—a boundary sitter" (1997, p. 87). I tell this story as someone neither at the center of its events, nor invisible to its participants, from my vantage point as someone literally and figuratively observing not from outside the action, but from its borders.

While this position of "boundary sitter" may be familiar to social scientists whose work is contingent on the art of keen observation, it has additional layers of meaning for a black woman scholar working in a black community; it speaks to the trope of Witness/Testify in the rhetoric of the African-American oral storytelling tradition (Atkinson, 2000), the ways in which civil rights work for black women has historically centered around the acts of witnessing and testifying (Ross, 2003), to the act of "storytelling resistance" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) that is central to critical race methodology, and the role of stories and parables as teaching tools (e.g. Bell, 2008[xv]). While other witnesses would testify differently, this is a story in my voice as a witness.

Data Sources

This account is drawn from primarily from my notes at public events in support of Dyett, such as rallies, press conferences, and vigils, and public events at which Dyett was discussed, such as a hearing held by CPS and a Chicago Board of Education meeting. The biographical details that I include regarding the life of Walter H. Dyett come from his personal archival papers. I have noted instances in this story where details come from media accounts rather than from my own observation. I also was present at inward-facing events, such as quiet recovery periods on the days of the hunger strike, and while I had

countless one-on-one conversations with individuals involved directly or tangentially in the struggle for the school. To safeguard the privacy of those present and in recognition of the vulnerable emotional tenor of these conversations, I do not include notes from these more private interactions, though they undoubtedly inform my interpretation and recounting of events.

"The Dyett Tradition"

So much of black life in Chicago happens in Washington Park that even if you are from the West Side or (like me) the North Side, it is hard not to find yourself there at least once a summer. The African Festival of the Arts, the Bud Billiken Day Parade, and family barbecues all find a home in the park, which is massive. Sitting at the southern edge of Bronzeville, it spans 367 acres designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the architect most famous for his design of Central Park in New York City. At the northern end of the park, facing 51st Street, a low building erected in black glass looks out over a broad expanse of grass. The flag still flies above it. The sign still says "Welcome to Walter H. Dyett High School" over a yellow background, bright against the backdrop of the dark building and the more-often-than-not gray Chicago weather. But no doors are open. No teenagers gather to speak or to run, to flirt or to gossip or tease, to play football or scramble for forgotten homework or to do the things that teenagers do. Walter H. Dyett High School is closed.

Not many schools are named after teachers, so it is notable that this building, in the time when it served students from across Bronzeville and beyond, was as much a living monument to Walter H. Dyett as it was an educational institution. It is also notable

that this man, arguably the most renowned and respected educator ever to emerge from Bronzeville—a community famous for its musical venues and figureheads—was a bandleader and a music teacher.

Walter Henri Dyett was born in 1901 in Saint Joseph, Missouri to a mother who was a pianist and soprano vocalist, and a father who was an pastor in the A.M.E. church. Dyett began his musical life as a violinist after his family moved to California; as a student at Pasadena High School, he became concert master of the orchestra and also played clarinet, bassoon, and drums. After graduating in 1917, he attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he was the top violinist in the school's symphony orchestra while he completed his pre-med studies. In 1921, Dyett received a scholarship to the Illinois School of Medicine, and relocated to Chicago to pursue his studies. However, his mother and sister, who were already living there, were in need of financial support and he found himself taking on work as a musician to support his family. In a curriculum vitae dated from 1960, Dyett described the early days of this work: "One year violinist in Erskine Tate's Vendome Theatre Orchestra playing the silent pictures and stage presentations along with Louis Armstrong and other now internationally known musicians. Transferred to orchestra leader in the Pickford Theatre—one of the Vendome chain—and remained until talking pictures came in and orchestras went out." He then became a youth music director at a church, then a private teacher of violin and theory. Finally, in 1931, Dyett began the work for which he would become beloved: he became a music teacher in Bronzeville, first at Phillips High School, then at DuSable High School.

Tribute concerts, memorials, and articles about Dyett often cite his influence on the Bronzeville musical legends who were his students, such as Von Freeman and Nat

King Cole. But, while these well-known figures may loom large in history, they were far

outnumbered by the thousands of average Bronzeville teenagers who discovered a love of

music during the 38 years when he was a teacher through his school-wide concerts and

community initiatives (see Figure 1). In a 1940 letter, William H. Johnson, then the

superintendent of schools, wrote Dyett a letter of appreciation after a visit to the school:

> "Dear Mr. Dyett:
> The students who play in the Du Sable High School Band are a particularly
> cooperative group to work with, but their spirit is largely a product of your
> influence. A gifted musician and a strong leader, you secure the attention of your
> youngsters with apparent ease and you succeed in teaching them to play
> compositions which are worthy of more advanced students. You have
> undoubtedly secured from them the best of which they were capable, for Mr.
> McKinsie was very impressed with their performance. May I congratulate you on
> your success. It is indeed a credit to Du Sable High School.

When the Walter H. Dyett Middle School was dedicated in 1975, the program described

the scope of Dyett's influence on his students:

> "Few musicians, living or dead, have brought music into the lives of so many
> young people and made them a part of the world's music…. He was the complete
> musician: an artist who could teach, a musician's musician, a student's
> inspiration, able tutor, and friend…. [H]e personally taught or supervised the
> music education of some 20,000 young people. He brought music appreciation
> and serious awareness of good music to another half million youth through his
> activities as a conductor bands and orchestras in school assemblies and public
> programs and concerts…. Dyett was well known for his practice of sharing his
> baton and podium with promising young musicians and many of them are
> continuing the 'Dyett tradition,' as they enrich school systems in Chicago and
> elsewhere as music educators, or in the music profession as performers or
> entertainers."

Figure 1: Dyett (at right) addressing the Du Sable High School band, December 22, 1954.

Dyett was intentional about the pedagogical principles he brought to his work. He

explained them in detail in his 1942 master's thesis from the Chicago Musical College,

which explored methods for teaching the fundamentals of rhythm to high school students

and made arguments for how music education could help students develop a sense of joy

and discipline. "The student learns from experience," Dyett argued, "and these

experiences must be enjoyable ones if the proper interest necessary for this learning is to

be motivated and sustained." In another chapter, he wrote: "If, in our music classes, we

can kindle a spark which will inspire the students to be satisfied with only the best work

that they are capable of performing, this development will surely be carried over into whatever field of endeavor they may choose for a vocation." In a 1969 letter to the musician's union celebrating Music Appreciation Week, Dyett echoed the importance of such disciplined determination to do one's best work: "The world today calls for dreaming possibilities and developing these possibilities into live realities and actualities. Creativity development comes by: becoming receptive to ideas – welcoming new ideas; by being experimental… by accepting the opportunity to do more; by asking how can I do more—how can I improve the quality of my performance—how can I do better?" (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2: Dyett leading Du Sable High School spring baton-twirling camp (likely in Washington Park), June 1940.

It was these principles that were to serve as the core of the school that would bear Dyett's name—a middle school with the motto "develops individuality, encourages responsibility

and provides opportunity."

"Choice" and Change

In 2000, Dyett Middle School faced a major upheaval that was spurred by changes in other schools beyond the green confines of Washington Park. CPS introduced plans to convert King High School, a little more than a mile away, into a college preparatory school, with a selective admissions system based on test scores and grades rather than open enrollment. King would receive a multi-million dollar renovation, and students from all over the city would be able to attend—if they could meet the admissions requirements. The move was part of CPS's creation of a suite of "selective enrollment" schools, designed to attract the top academic tier of the city's high school students through rigorous curricula and high-end facilities. The transition also meant that if their test scores did not make them eligible to attend the new, selective King, students in the area would need a new place to go—which meant that Dyett would have to become a high school. This plan was met with criticism by residents, as documented by Pattillo (2008). One parent of a King student (pre-selective enrollment) expressed frustration that the $20 million dollars invested in the school's renovation was nowhere to be found when the school's enrollment was based on neighborhood attendance boundaries. Another community member lamented that young people in the area would be "shipped out of their neighborhood in order to turn King into a magnet school," suggesting that this ostensibly public school would thereafter no longer be public at all:

> If something is public, then ain't I the public? Aren't these kids who are being put out of King High School and going over there to Dyett [High School], [which is like] a factory, aren't they part of the public? How can you have a public school and then school and then say everybody in the public can't go to it? That's what I think. It's a bunch of hogwash…. You don't make no magnet school with my money. I did not tell you to do that,

> and I don't want King to be a private school in my neighborhood. If it's public, I want you to do the best that the public can get right over there for the people in this community. (Pattillo, 2008, p. 171).

The development of selective enrollment schools was just one piece of what would, over the course of the following decade, become an expansion of "choice" within CPS. No longer would students necessarily attend the school in their immediate area, as they had for generations. Instead, new schools appeared or were converted across the South Side, each with varying purposes and admissions policies: several charter schools, a military academy, a technology school, an international school, and others now dotted the landscape. Meanwhile, the school "right over there" languished. While enrollment at Dyett varied over the course of the decade, (see Figure 3), its number of students eventually began to decline. By 2011, 19 percent of the students within Dyett's attendance area boundaries were enrolled in the school (Karp, 2011).

Figure 3: Dyett Enrollment, 1999 - 2011
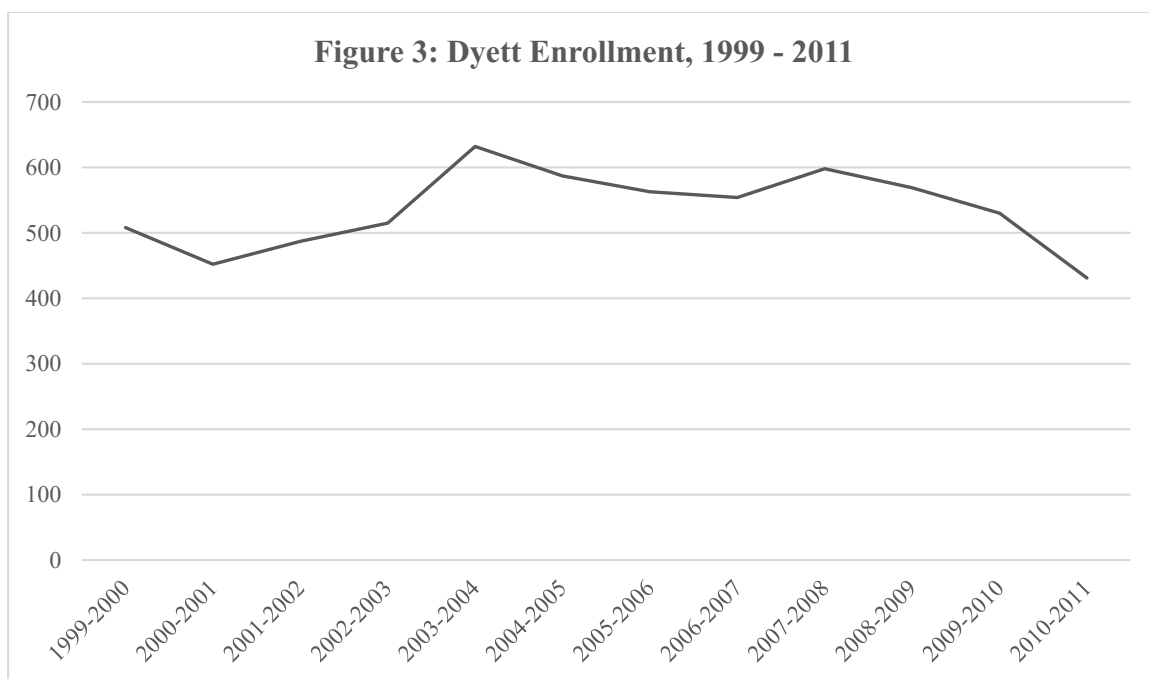
Source: Chicago Public Schools, 2015c.

On November 30, 2011, parents of Dyett students received a letter from CEO Jean-

Claude Brizard. It began:

> Dear Parent or Guardian:
>
> As Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), nothing is more important to me than making sure your child is getting access to a high quality education. My team is dedicated to ensuring that every child in every community can be successful in the classroom and graduate ready for college and career – which is why I am writing to you today.
>
> There are too many schools in Chicago failing our children. Across the District, only 7.9% of 11th graders last year tested ready for college, while achievement gaps for African American and Latino students remain in the high double-digits. As adults, we all have a responsibility to make sure that we are putting the academic needs of our children before all else. To do so requires some very difficult but necessary choices to boost the academic achievement of our kids.
>
> For too long, Dyett High School (Dyett) has been one of the schools not meeting the needs of its students. Over the last few years, Dyett has been a chronically underperforming school with a graduation rate that is far below that of other schools in its area and is among the lowest academic scoring schools in the district. This is why we are proposing today, after a very lengthy and thoughtful process, to phase-out Dyett. This means that current ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade students would continue to attend Dyett, but the school would not enroll new students next school year.

The letter went on to say that Dyett would continue phasing out one grade each year, with

the closure completed by the 2014-2015 school year (when only seniors would remain).

Rising freshmen within the school's attendance boundary would be redirected to nearby

Phillips Academy, and parents were invited to discuss the proposal at two community

meetings before a formal hearing would be held, similar to the process described in

Chapter 2. While Brizard cited academic failure—not lowered enrollment—in his letter

to parents as the reason why Dyett would close, Phillips (which remains open as of this

writing, and is managed contractually by the non-profit Academy for Urban School

Leadership with some degree of autonomy from the rest of the district) did not differ

significantly in academic performance—both schools were considered "Level 3" schools

(the lowest performance ranking, characterized as needing "intensive intervention"); in

2010 the graduation rate at Phillips was 42.9% and 37.2% at Dyett,[xvi] and both schools

had average ACT scores of about 14 from 2007-2010.

Brizard told the local news that he would prefer to send new teachers and

resources to Dyett and other schools proposed for phase-out. "But there are some schools

that are so far gone that you cannot save them. There's got to be some hope left in the

building for you to be able to turn a school around" (CBS Chicago, 2011).

CPS Changes Course: The Possibility of the "New Dyett"

It was a Tuesday in August 2014—a year before Dyett was scheduled to be closed

for good—and I had spent the day taking refuge from the heat for as long as I could

before admitting to myself that I needed to get to the (air-conditioned) library and get

some work done. As I shoved books and water and snacks into my bag with one hand, I

absentmindedly checked my Twitter feed with the other. When I saw a tweet from the

Chicago Teacher's Union, I paused, put the bag down, and scrolled back up. There was a

group of parents and community members, CTU was notifying its followers, holding a

sit-in in front of the office of Alderman Will Burns. They were demanding that Burns

meet with them to discuss their proposal to keep Dyett open. I knew where the

Alderman's office was—35th and King Drive, across from the King Branch of the

Chicago Public Library where I used to lead occasional study sessions for my students,

and from the Lake Meadows shopping center where I often bought school supplies. I

jumped in the car and went to the grocery store in Lake Meadows to pick up some fruit and bottles of water, which I brought to the sit-in with me. I spent the afternoon in a foldout chair, periodically shifting to avoid the sun as it moved across the sky, drinking water and chatting with an older woman who told me stories of her grandfather's store in Mississippi, her move to Chicago when she was twelve and her childhood spent traveling back to the south every summer. She asked me good questions about graduate school: "What's your passion? What class do you love the most?" Every once in a while, a car or a truck honked in solidarity as it passed. The alderman never emerged.

On that day, I did not expect to be thinking or writing much about Dyett. I knew some basic facts about the school—that it was a high school in Bronzeville, and that CPS planned to shut it down—but mainly I joined the sit-in as an act of solidarity with a school that was closing, to learn more about the issue and the opinions of the folks involved, and because I was impressed by this group of people—including small children and elderly people—who cared enough about their school to sit outside in the incredibly hot Chicago summer. When the sun began to sink in the sky, I joined the organizers' mailing list, said some hugs and thank yous, and bid them farewell.

Summer ended, I flew reluctantly back to Boston, and the fall semester began. I had a dissertation proposal to attend to and fellowships to apply for, and I didn't think much about Dyett until I saw a headline that made my eyes widen. "CPS reverses course, says Dyett to reopen in 2016 as neighborhood high school." The first three words alone were stunning enough. "CPS reverses course"? About a school closure? I had never heard of such a thing. I kept reading:

> CPS officials made the surprise announcement Friday that they want proposals
> for a new, open enrollment neighborhood high school to be located at Dyett High,

the Washington Park school that is in the last year of being phased out.

…CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett said in a press release that she looks forward to working with the community. CPS spokesman Bill McCaffrey said the Dyett request-for-proposals to run the school will be separate from a request for new charter schools, which also will be issued in December. He said the Dyett site will not be open to charter operators, but contract schools will be considered. (Contract schools operate under much the same rules as charters.)

The new Dyett won't be opened until the 2016-2017 school year, which means the site will sit vacant for a year. (Karp, 2014)

Everything about this news awed me. I had seen Byrd-Bennett and other CPS officials remain steadfast in their decisions even in the face of tremendous protest from thousands of teachers and students, without an apparent second thought regardless of the scale of the criticism they received. Bronzeville had lost school after school in the last decade, even before the citywide mass closures of 2013. Charters had expanded, and schools had been subjected to the "turnaround" process, but never had I heard of a school having its fate sealed, only to be undone. Furthermore, the district was seeking community input and hosting an open proposal process—not for a charter or contract school, but for a neighborhood school? I was astounded, and tremendously impressed at the impact of the community members I had met that day in August. Through their resolve, they had opened the window for this seemingly impossible opportunity; the article described the rallies, sit-ins, and civil disobedience leading to arrests that had taken place since the phase-out of Dyett was first announced. Could Dyett, I wondered, become a case study for the future of Chicago's closed schools? Could it be a demonstration proof illustrating how it was possible for a community to undo a top-down decision and remake a school in an image reflecting the desires of its residents? Could this proposal process serve as a model for a new form of engagement between the district

and members of the community? I was excited, hopeful, and curious. When I learned the date of the public meeting where community-created proposals for a new Dyett would be presented and discussed, I eagerly marked down the date and cleared my schedule in anticipation.

"We Are Speaking. We Have Spoken."

There is a weighty irony to the fact that the meeting to consider the proposals for a new Dyett is held at King College Prep. Next to it, the windows of Florence B. Price Elementary School are darkened. The school's closure was announced in the same year as Dyett's, but was completed at the end of that school year. Piles of chairs and books are visible on the other side of the window panes, and one can just make out the outline of an American flag through the cloudy glass of one classroom. Price, like Dyett, was a groundbreaking musician; she was a classical composer and became the first African-American woman to have a composition played by a major symphony orchestra when the Chicago Symphony Orchestra debuted her *Symphony in E Minor* in 1933. Indeed, this is a very musical block: Price Elementary sits at the corner of Drexel Boulevard and Muddy Waters Drive. The grass along Drexel Boulevard looks extra green after the recent rain. I cross a wide concrete expanse to get to the doors of King, above which a mosaic reads "THROUGH THESE PORTALS AWAITS YOUR FUTURE." My future has to wait a few minutes, as the doors are locked.

Once I finally make it into the foyer, someone calls out my name. "Eve! It's Liz from CTU." Liz, a petite woman with serious eyes and a floral shirt, flags me down after recognizing me from a conference. She explains that the Chicago Teachers Union is a

partner in a group that has named itself the Coalition to Revitalize Walter H. Dyett High School. Other members of the Coalition include faculty from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) College of Education, the educational activism group Teachers for Social Justice, and the community organizing group the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), along with individual parents, teachers, youth, and community members. The Coalition is a reconfiguration of a group that has been meeting with Bronzeville residents and CPS officials since 2009; their efforts were initially spurred by the need to create a united school vision after a change in Dyett's attendance boundaries resulted in student enrollment from 39 different elementary schools. It was this group's initial, unsolicited plan for a school concept called the Bronzeville Global Achievement Village that led to Byrd-Bennett announcing the RFP process.

I marvel out loud to Liz about how surprised I was to see that this RFP process was occurring, and she agrees that it was a totally unprecedented process for CPS. In fact, Liz, charged with preparing some aspects of the proposal with the group, discovered that the budget application was repurposed directly from the charter school application process. "Some of the questions I couldn't answer. CEO salary in the budget?" She laughs. "There is no CEO."

She stepped away for a quick meeting with other representatives from the Coalition, and I found a seat in the auditorium, near the front. The meeting format was straightforward. There were three proposals for consideration, and representatives for each proposing group would have 20 minutes to give a presentation introducing their ideas for how the new Dyett should operate. Those presentations would be followed by an open comment period; participants were only permitted to speak if they had signed up

as they entered the meeting, and would be allotted two minutes to make a comment after being called to the microphone. A court reporter and a note-taker were present to record comments. "There will not be a question and answer period, because that's not the goal for this meeting," said the district representative overseeing the proceedings. Contact information for CPS and for each of the presenters was provided on the back of a handout, and attendees were directed to ask any questions later, using that information to "engage with them directly." The proposals were also available to view or download on a CPS website, along with a rubric for evaluation.

What was less clear was what was supposed to happen after the meeting, and how the decision would be made. How would the community feedback from this meeting be integrated? Similarly to the school closing process, this community meeting was to be followed by an official hearing, after which point the Board would make a decision. Would their decision incorporate input from other sources, such as the alderman or the Mayor? No location was yet set for the hearing. Complicating matters further, CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett, who issued the request for proposals in the first place, was no longer in her position. Byrd-Bennett went on leave in April amidst a federal investigation into a no-bid contract in which she was involved, and had finally resigned just two weeks before this proposal meeting (Byrd-Bennett has since been indicted on federal charges related to bribery). What role would the interim CEO, or Byrd-Bennett's replacement, have to play in the future of Dyett?

These questions of process swirled in my head as the meeting began. The first group to speak was the Washington Park Athletic Community Academy (WPACA), the

second was the Coalition to Revitalize Walter H. Dyett High School (Coalition to

Revitalize Dyett), and the third was Little Black Pearl.

WPACA presented the first presentation, led by Charles Campbell, who served as

principal for Dyett's last year. WPACA would be "designed to prepare students for

careers in sports and beyond, using sports themes and concepts." Campbell emphasized

that although the school would focus on athletics, the school would also prepare students

for "the industries surrounding athletics," such as entrepreneurship and general

management. He played several videos from sports and athletic professionals (all men of

color) describing the "creative mindset" and skills they used to succeed in their fields.

"According to *Money* magazine and the U.S. Department of Labor, all of these

professions are expected to see major growth over the next decade," Campbell said. The

WPACA proposal expounds further on these career development aspirations:

> Our **vision** is to motivate, engage and cultivate students through athletics
> while producing capable, confident graduates who are empowered to
> create the trajectory of their own future. The **vision strategy** is to make
> learning real for all students through engaging and innovative practices
> based in sports methodologies and concepts. The culture of WPACA
> develops students into exceptionally qualified candidates for a rewarding
> career in sports and athletics as an executive, professional, athlete or
> entrepreneur. To achieve this, we backwards map our curriculum focus
> starting with career paths, college options, high school course alignment,
> as well as middle school critical and conceptual development.
> (Washington Park Athletic Career Academy, 2015).

"[Sports] offers us real-world framework, a high-interest hook on which to hang

our curriculum on…. African-American boys have the highest at-risk numbers and the

highest dropout rates" in Dyett's attendance boundary, Campbell continued. "40% of

African-American [girls] have either a D or F in math….. By a show of hands, how many

of you are shocked by these numbers? I mean, let's be real…." Campbell also described

an in-house sports nutrition café, sports medical facility, and a maker lab, where students would apply knowledge from their science classes to run small businesses supervised by professionals.

The Coalition to Revitalize Dyett offered their presentation next, led by Jitu Brown of KOCO, Rico Gutstein of the UIC College of Education, and Prudence Browne of Teachers for Social Justice. The proposal began with short videos from community members and students, providing testimonials in support of the Coalition's plan. Speakers went on to describe the two prongs of the curriculum in the proposed school's name: global leadership and green technology, two "separate but related" principles. In this proposed school, students would learn urban agriculture techniques that would allow them (in partnership with the Chicago Botanic Gardens) to sell fresh produce in the community, and could take the training courses needed to become LEED-certified building planners. Solutions for issues like global climate change and environmental racism, the team argued, "depend in part on students learning to connect their academic studies in school to the realities outside. That's why the new Dyett has roots in the community and branches out to the world beyond." This community-responsiveness was explained further in the proposal:

> The Design Team believes that this proposal speaks directly to the needs as expressed by the Bronzeville community that we describe above in Section 3.1c. Every component of this proposal is an extension of the four-year effort to have a village of sustainable community schools. …The collaborative nature of both the development of this proposal and the vision of our school culture, as well as how we frame Dyett's relationship to the community, also respond to these concerns. That Bronzeville parents want their children to assume their place as actors on local, national, and international stages and contribute to bettering their society and planet is specifically addressed in the Dyett mission. And the voiced need by parents and community members that young people know who they are, love their community and themselves, and are deeply rooted in

their histories and cultures is also reflected in the mission and vision…. (Coalition to Revitalize Walter H. Dyett High School, 2015).

Representatives also described how Dyett would have a restorative justice program, a full-time nurse, and a small student-to-counselor ratio to provide student support, beginning with a social-emotional assessment in the students' first year.

The final presentation came from Little Black Pearl, a youth arts non-profit based in Bronzeville. The proposal was introduced by Terri Evans, a member of the organization's Board of Directors, and Matthew Kupritz, the architect who would design their proposed new facility; the proposal was for the Little Black Pearl School of the Arts, which would offer an integrated arts curriculum. The board member presented achievement and growth statistics for the two schools that Little Black Pearl was already operating. She described the college preparatory curriculum that the school would provide and the community and corporate partnerships that would "serve as ambassadors and allies to create opportunities in the arts for students." Next, Kupritz, an architect from the firm that designed Little Black Pearl's existing arts facility spoke, presenting images of floor plans and renderings. The proposal outlined the resources that the new school facility would include:

> LBP is proposing the acquisition and renovation of Dyett High School, transforming the school facility into one of the greatest Arts and Culture assets of Chicago. The facilities unique contemporary design will highlight the essence of LBP's new model for education that engages the entire community. The facility will feature an indoor/outdoor state-of-the-arts theatre, gallery/exhibition space, glassblowing facility, creative arts incubator spaces, and a skateboard park designed to strategically position the school as an anchor for Arts, Education, Youth Employment and Community Development. (Little Black Pearl, 2015).

In this plan, aspects of the school facility (such as the performance theater) would be available for public use. "Our objective is to enable [the school] to connect back to the park, to connect back to the community" to "reinvigorate" the facility, he explained.

Following the presentations, the CPS representative thanked the three presenting groups for the "time, and the thoughtfulness, and the creativity and the ideas" behind each option to reopen Dyett, before transitioning into the public comment period. "We're really excited to hear feedback from the community… that I will then share with the Board members." She went on to make a note about the expected decorum during the comment period: "I'm gonna ask the audience to remember that this is a fun and engaging event. Let's engage each other with dignity and respect." Lastly, she made another reference to opportunities to participate in the process and share opinions beyond the meeting itself. "If you don't get to speak tonight, you have a phone number and email," and exit slips that would be collected by meeting organizers. "There are many different ways in which your feedback can be shared with the Board of Education." As she finished speaking, audience members were already beginning to line up behind the microphones on either side of the auditorium.

The remainder of the event, in which members of the audience stood up and made spirited comments regarding each of the school proposals, could be fodder for an entire discourse analysis of its own, much as I presented in Chapter 2. For the sake of this story, I will provide a more concise summary of what followed.

Attendees representing and supporting WPACA and the Coalition each took the microphone for the next 90 minutes. Many, particularly in support of the Coalition plan, read prepared statements. Those in support of the Coalition plan also tended to receive

loud, exuberant applause from the audience, which seemed more or less divided—

WPACA supporters on the right side of the auditorium, and Coalition supporters on the

left. Supporters of the Coalition focused their comments on the fact that the community

had been involved with the development of their plan over many years, such that the

current proposal represented feedback and input from all stakeholders involved. One

woman quoted former Mayor Harold Washington to make this point, saying that the

Coalition had brought together "parents, students, teachers, community groups and

partners, and university experts. The perfect formula for how to reimagine a school."

Another commended the "thoughtful, diligent process" through which the plan was

created. "This process was driven by parents and young people in partnership with

scholars and academic experts to deliver a plan that has a solid academic focus." Many

also argued vehemently that the community was in need of a school that focused

primarily on academics first, rather than sports or the arts. "These two proposals are

setting our people back. Back to the days of Stepin Fetchit," said one speaker. "And I

don't want that. I want to go forward with green technology!" Another speaker, a parent

at a nearby elementary school, agreed. "It is an insult to propose sports and entertainment

schools for black children. We should have well-rounded sports and arts in a world class

neighborhood school."

Those in support of WPACA pushed back against that interpretation, arguing that

the sports framework was just an entry point for a diverse curriculum. "This proposal and

this comprehensive effort would equip our young men and women with 21st century skills

within the context of preparing them for careers in the diverse industry of athletics and

sports," said one speaker. "It is amazing how this industry has grown and continues to

grow rapidly." Others reiterated this point while emphasizing the opportunity for socioeconomic mobility that could come from the WPACA plan, such as one CPS athletics coach: "It's time to be more than an athlete down on the field. It's time to be an owner in a box seat." Another argued that CPS should promote the benefits of health and wellness to young people, arguing that "if you have a good solid understanding about how to take care of your body earlier in your life, you will appreciate fitness and sports."

Several speakers in support of the plan from the Coalition spoke about the role that history and the legacy of Bronzeville should play in the decision, and argued that racism was the reason there was an RFP process rather than an immediate response to a community-developed plan. "Walter H. Dyett is a historic institution that was founded as an open-enrollment Chicago Public School," said one speaker. "We want Captain Walter Henri Dyett honored by keeping it a Chicago Public School. We want you to respect our history and Bronzeville, and the legacy of Walter H. Dyett." Another said forcefully, "It's amazing to me how always with black children, we sell them off. If I wanted my daughter to go to a double-dutch school, then maybe I would pick one of these schools up here. At the end of the day, what we've got to stop doing is playing black and brown children. Cause that's what this is, a game. Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology has to happen for our kids. Cause first of all, what we're *not* talking about is, CPS never would have reversed the decision if it wasn't for the community."

Three speakers spoke in support of the Little Black Pearl proposal. "I understand you love your community. But if you do, give Little Black Pearl a chance," said one young woman, sharing her personal experience as a graduate of one of Little Black Pearl's existing schools. Another, making reference to the criticisms from other speakers,

said that "good leadership does not rely on tearing others down," and that the arts would be an effective pathway for re-engaging learners who have lost interest in schools. A third, a teacher, said that the professional community at the school was like a family, and that the presentation of the proposal didn't include many of the important cultural learning experiences offered to students at Little Black Pearl.

As the evening wore on, the groups became more directly contentious. Some critiqued the WPACA team for submitting their proposal after the deadline, which had been reported in the newspaper the week prior (Fitzpatrick, 2015). "This is really about transparency and accountability, because CPS broke its own rules by allowing that proposal to be turned in an hour and fifteen minutes late. Others expressed frustration that speakers were not being called to the microphone in the order that they had registered upon entry. "This is a sham," said one women. "And this is disrespectful. This whole process has been disrespectful." When the meeting was nearly concluded, facilitators called Jitu Brown of KOCO up to speak, then upon realizing he was one of the presenters told him he was not eligible. This caused a massive uproar from the audience, leading, the district organizer to seize the microphone and try to explain. "So, we did not allow any of the presenters to sign up…" When people began to yell that Jitu had, indeed, signed in to speak, she apologized hurriedly and concluded the meeting (without, as indicated on the agenda, providing dates for the hearing or next steps) as people continued to shout in protest.

"I'm sorry. Then that was my fault. I'm so sorry. Out of respect for the evening, we're concluding today's community meeting. You have a phone number, you have an email address. Please complete your exit slips on the way out. Thank you." Voices

continued to echo in frustration across the auditorium as she rushed away. I manage to snag the woman on her way to the exit, and ask her when the meeting will be. "August," she tells me.

Inside Out and Upside Down

For the next several weeks, I find myself frequently checking the CPS website or the news for some hint of what is next for Dyett. The most glaring question is where the public hearing will be, and at what time. Whether it was on the South Side or downtown at CPS central office makes a big difference for my own logistical planning, as well as the planning of any community residents or members of the proposal teams who wanted to attend. I am afraid that I will inadvertently promise to babysit my niece, or attend another event, or interview someone that day, so I tried to stay vigilant. But no news came.

Meanwhile, other big things are happening at CPS. One day, I am meeting with the Chicago Teachers Union research working group to review ideas for how CPS might close its financial gap. The city is facing a massive budget problem, and the schools are being hit especially hard. At 2 o'clock, we pause the meeting to gather around a news stream and watch as Mayor Rahm Emanuel holds a press conference offering a plan to solve the $1.1 billion shortfall forecasted for CPS in the coming fiscal year. Emanuel blames the state for not adequately supporting the teacher pension fund. "This system is inside out and upside down," says the Mayor. "And I am here to tell you that these cuts are intolerable, unacceptable, and unconscionable…. Because of the way the system is set up Chicago is the only city forced to make the perverse choice between making pension

payments and making cuts to our schools…. The real issue is that Illinois does not adequately fund education and our children are paying the price" (City of Chicago, 2015).

This was also the day that citizens in Greece hold a vote to determine whether they want to pay their debt to the European Union or not, and one of the teacher-researchers cracks a joke. "Maybe Chicago should vote—should we pay this debt or not?" I laugh, but that evening as they discuss the Greek vote on the radio I find myself feeling a strange sense of envy. Why do they get to decide?

A few weeks later, representatives from the Coalition call for a rally at Alderman Burns's office, in search of more details regarding the Dyett hearing. A date has been announced, but no location. Everyone crowds into the foyer of the Alderman's office. He does not seem to be present, but the director of constituent services comes out to speak to the group. One organizer speaks up first. "The alderman needs to make sure the community knows where that's gonna be taking place, and what time that's going to be taking place. For such a critical decision, this should not be a mystery. Nobody at CPS seems to know anything about this, and it's unacceptable. This is a phantom process," she tells the director. "That's right," murmurs a woman behind me. "Well, I'll make sure I give him that message about the transparency that you're requesting," he replies politely. He says he will check to see what the chief of staff knows about the hearing, and directs the group to call back at the end of the day. "But this has been weeks now," another community member pipes up. "This has been weeks now. And they're still saying the scheduler, the chief of staff—you guys have been here [in the office] every day."

"Understood," says the director.

"We also need to know who makes the decision about Dyett. Is it the alderman? Because CPS says it's the alderman, and the alderman says it's CPS. We need clarity on who makes the decision about what takes place at Dyett High School. Everyone is pointing the finger. This is not a clear and transparent process." The director nods solemnly and repeats the promise to let everyone know by the end of the day. While aldermen do not have direct decision-making powers over CPS, they have a great deal of political power and may influence school happenings in indirect ways. However, Burns is exceptional in this regard: the preceding May, the mayor appointed him chair of the City Council's Education Committee, which the local newspaper called a "big political plum" and a "reward" for supporting the mayor's education agenda and helping him win black voters (Spielman, 2015).

Another Coalition member asks why WPACA's proposal is still under consideration, despite having come in after the deadline. The director nods again. "I will ask him that question."

On the steps of the alderman's office afterwards, I chat with someone who attended Mayo School (see Chapter 2). Eager to corroborate the discourse analysis I've been writing, I ask him if he attended that closure hearing. "No," he says sadly. "I didn't even know about it. I didn't even know about it. I just woke up one day and all my schools were closed. I ain't got no schools. They closed all my schools."

***

Three days later, I stop at the grocery store in Lake Meadows, across from the Alderman's office, to pick up some fruit before I head to a barbecue at Dyett. The Coalition is gathering everyone to maintain momentum, morale, and support for their

proposal. The event is also to celebrate the graduation of the school's last senior class.

Since the closure of Dyett was first announced and classes were phased out year by year,

many of the school's resources and budgetary allocations dissolved as well. The students

who remained in the shrinking school had faced so many cuts that they were left to take

online courses in art, Spanish, social studies, and even physical education (Lutton, 2013).

Community members had rallied to restore some rites of passage for the final 13 seniors,

such as luncheon and prom, and at this barbecue they would be honored in front of

everyone for the achievement of completing high school.

In the parking lot of the grocery store, I see a man in his fifties wearing a black t-

shirt. On the back of the shirt, it says "Rolls Royce" and "39th St. the Low End." This is

a reference to the Ida B. Wells Homes (see Chapter 1) and the shirt is a picnic shirt—

much like the shirts common at African-American family reunions—to commemorate the

annual gathering of these former residents. On the front of the shirt, it says, "The 39ers

Will Never Die! I Am A 39er."

When I get to the Dyett barbecue in Washington Park, there is a huge black and

neon pink sign that says "SAVE DYETT" stuck into the ground (see Figure 4). Someone

who recognizes me from the Alderman's office greets me with a hug, and I line up for

food. It's cloudy out, but the few intermittent rain drops seem to go unnoticed by the

folks lounging in chairs and bobbing their heads to the music as Dyett looms in the

background, windows dark. I have changed into a dress and out of the Jackie Robinson

West t-shirt and shorts I was wearing earlier, and I feel self-consciously overdressed.

Kids chase each other, toss a football back and forth, and play with hula hoops. The DJ is

attending to the multiple generations of Chicago music fans present, playing mostly

house music and some occasional hip-hop. I have a hot dog, chicken wings, potato salad,

cole slaw, and reluctantly pass up a bag of the Vitners Salt'n Sour chips in an attempt to

make a concession to my health.

Figure 4: Attendees line up for food at a community picnic hosted by the Coalition to Revitalize Walter H. Dyett High School. The closed school is visible in the background. Washington Park, Chicago, July 26, 2015.

After everyone has been eating and chatting for a while, the DJ turns the music

down so that the graduating Dyett seniors can be presented with gift baskets to take with

them to college—literal laundry baskets, filled with supplies and dormitory

accoutrements. One of them takes the microphone to say thank you on behalf of the

group. "I just wanna thank the community for being in this fight with us, so we can get our school," he says. Notably, even though he has already graduated from the old Dyett, when he says "our school" he is referring to the potential school of the future, the Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School. Jitu Brown then takes the microphone. "We're in the fourth quarter of this fight," he says, praising and thanking everyone present who contributed to the Coalition's proposal. "We're giving the mayor a gift by showing a model for community engagement with schools." Brown then turns to address the seniors in a call-and-response.

"In your last year at Dyett, how did you take art class?"

"Online!"

He turns to the crowd. "Is that bad teachers?"

"No!" the group roars back.

"Is that bad parents?"

"No!"

"Is that bad students?"

"No!"

Another community member stands up to speak. "They don't think low-income African-American families will be here in five years," she proclaims. "That's what this is about…. If Burns wants to get to Congress, he'll treat us with justice and respect," she adds, suggesting that Burns has political aspirations beyond his aldermanic office that will require community support in the long-run. Someone else suggests that Burns has eyes on the Mayor's office.

"No, he wants to be congressman!"

"Well, he shouldn't be dog-catcher," comes the response, spurring laughter. Conversation turns to next steps, and the continued wait for information about the hearing. There is still no location or time, even though the date is two weeks away. The *Hyde Park Herald*, a local neighborhood paper, has reported that the meeting will be downtown at CPS, but they did not publicize a time, and it is unclear whether even the location is confirmed. While these details may seem minor given that the hearing date was final, the time and location would make a big difference on who was able to attend and share their opinions. The meeting was scheduled for a Monday, making it difficult for people who work on weekdays to attend unless it was in the evening. Chicago is also very spatially spread out compared to many other cities, public transit is costly, and traveling from some parts of Bronzeville could be time-consuming. The organizations behind each of the proposals could rally resources for a bus to take people to CPS if necessary, but this would require advanced coordination that would become harder as each day elapsed without a clear time or location.

In the middle of the conversation about Burns's political aspirations, a squad car suddenly arrives. Some people have parked their cars on the grass alongside the path from 51st Street to Dyett, and the police want them moved.[xvii] A woman next to me shakes her head in disbelief. "This is a family picnic," she says quietly. Someone goes to negotiate with the police, which takes a long time and the conversation about Coalition next steps is halted. After the ordeal has gone on for some time the DJ, in a move of subtle defiance or in an attempt to restore the festive mood, starts playing the wobble and a couple of older folks get up to line dance.

As days continue to pass, versions of this event recur: the Coalition engages the

public in efforts to rally support for the school. I attend and continue to wait for a time

and location to be announced. Everyone continues to wait. Over lunch at Peach's

Restaurant, one of the former Dyett seniors tells me he doesn't think the hearing will

happen. "Why haven't they told us where it is yet?" he asks pointedly, stirring a bowl of

cheese grits. I am beginning to wonder the same thing. Three days after the barbecue,

several members of KOCO hold a sit-in at City Hall. A teenage boy next to me watches

incredulously as the police approach protesters blocking the elevators. "They gonna go to

jail for this?" he asks aloud to no one in particular (see Figure 5).

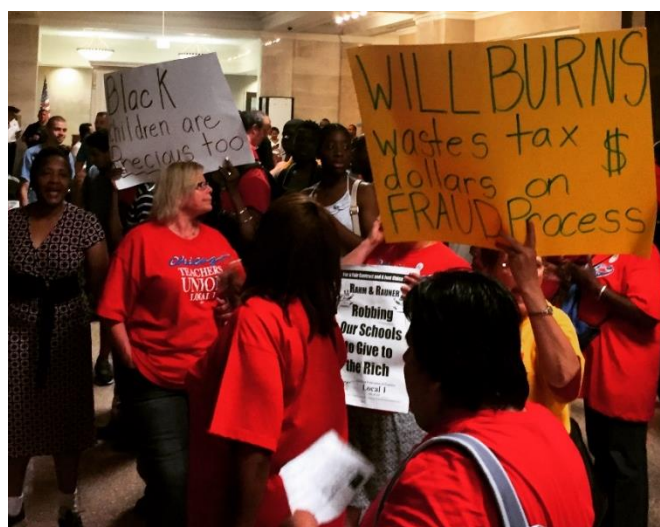*Figure 5: Members of the Coalition hold a protest and sit-in on the at City Hall. July 29, 2015.*

A week later, I stand with Coalition members hoisting the SAVE DYETT banner

on the corner of 53rd and Lake Park. There is no signage asking people to honk in

support, but several people do anyway—the driver of a Vienna Beef truck, the driver of a

white moving truck, a man driving a limousine, who waves out the window asking for an

informational flyer. After a while I walk a couple blocks down 53rd and get some cold

bottled water from the dollar store for everybody. Everyone is melting in the sun,

especially the older folks. *Too damn hot outside*, I write in my field notes as I walk down

the street. It is August 5. The hearing is supposed to happen on August 10, a Monday.

Sometime on Friday, August 7, this press release appears on the CPS website (Chicago

Public Schools, 2015a):

> Chicago Public Schools today announced the request for proposal process
> to identify a new open enrollment, neighborhood high school at the current
> site of Dyett High School is being extended to provide adequate time to
> review community feedback and proposals.
>
> CPS is also moving the public hearing on the proposals to 6 p.m. on
> September 15, 2015 inside the Board of Education Chambers at 42 West
> Madison.
>
> "Chicago Public Schools is committed to a community driven process that
> will identify a high-quality education option for the former Dyett site,"
> said Forrest Claypool, CEO of CPS. "We continue to review the
> applications by the 2014 RFP, but with the budget and financial crisis
> dominating the focus of the new CPS administration, more time is
> necessary to make an informed recommendation to the Board of
> Education. We look forward to receiving further feedback at the upcoming
> community hearing."

The next day, I receive an email invitation to a "Dyett Rally for Justice." I open my

calendar, delete the appointment reading DYETT HEARING that has been occupying

August 10 for weeks, and create a new event: DYETT RALLY.

The Hunger Strike

"You have to more than want to do it – you have to will yourself to do it." – Walter H.

Dyett

On August 17, everyone is once again gathered in the broad green space in front

of Dyett. News cameras and reporters gather around as Jitu Brown begins to speak.

Today several members of the Coalition, along with activist and community allies, are

beginning a monumental act: a hunger strike. They have vowed not to eat until the Mayor

agrees to move forward with the Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High

School.

> "We're gonna need your spirit and your energy, because we don't know how long
> we're gonna need to be out here…. This is a referendum on where we live. It's a
> referendum on the people in power. But one thing we've learned as organizers is,
> it's not about how eloquent we are. It's not who the people are that you know on
> the inside. What it's about is, do you have the will to win?
>
> …What we want is Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School.
> We don't care that it's a new Board. We don't care that it's a new CEO. That's
> their problem. What CPS has earned is our mistrust. We know that they will lie.
> We know that they will play the shell game. They've done it. How many meetings
> have we been in with temporary people in CPS who talk like they're with us and
> then they stab the community in the back? We're done with that. We were
> supposed to have a hearing on august 10, and a board vote on August 26, and we
> want this school. And we want this school as the hub of a sustainable community
> school village. We want Mollison. We want Till. We want Fiske. We want Fuller.
> We want them all. And that's what time it is. We don't trust them with our
> children. We don't trust them.
>
> This is not rhetoric. ...They killed this school. And so we have no more patience
> for this. I'm not tryna go to no more board meetings, I ain't tryna meet with no
> more pencil-pushers. That's it. Where we are is, we want this school…. In order
> to just get a public neighborhood school—we ain't tryna get no contract, we not
> tryna be a school operater, we not trying be insiders, all we want are good schools
> for black children—that's it! And it's come to this point.

Brown also referred specifically to the justification provided in the press release for why

the hearing was delayed—the fact that new Board members had just been appointed.

Chicago does not have an elected school board like other districts and municipalities in

the state; instead, the Mayor appoints members of the school board. Emanuel had just

appointed four new Board members. He also appointed his chief of staff, Forrest

Claypool, to replace Byrd-Bennett as CEO. The argument from the district was that these

new decision-makers needed more time to review the proposals. Brown went on:

> [The new hearing date has] no commitment of a Board vote. That's not acceptable. So we want it, and let them figure it out. They better call an emergency hearing, they better have the Board—how many of us burn the midnight oil as organizers or as educators? How many times you worked and ain't got no sleep? I know I been worked and ain't got no sleep! So how come they get to be comfortable? And looked at the budget if they need to? Bump them! They better do it. And that's where we are. If they're gonna sit up and call themselves the Board and we don't even have a vote, then they better hump. That's the expectation. [Yes, sir!] I'm tired of these people. [Me too!] Sick of 'em. Excise the rant. But that's where we are. This lets you know that they don't love our children. And that's what scares me."

The plan was that the hunger strikers would be present in Washington Park, in

front of Dyett, each day, and would relocate to the nearby Rainbow PUSH Coalition in

the evening or when the weather was bad. They would be available to talk with the

media, answer questions, or just be in fellowship. They would not eat any solid foods,

and volunteer nurses would be on hand to monitor their health and respond in case of an

emergency. Some had pre-existing health conditions, some were older, and some

(including teachers) had to maintain their regular working responsibilities while slowly

going hungry.

This was not the first time that members of a Chicago community put their lives

on the line to fight for a school. In 2001, fourteen parents and community members in

Little Village, a Mexican-American neighborhood north and west of Dyett, held a 19-day

hunger strike after CPS promised to build a new school to relieve overcrowding in the

neighborhood, then delayed the project. The strikers camped out in tents on the land that

had been cited for the school, which they called "Camp Cesar Chavez." ""You all are

making such a big fuss. What's the rush anyway?'" Little Village hunger striker Linda

Sarate said they were told by district officials. "In other words, what's the big deal? They

laughed in our faces. We felt very disrespected. How could a group with the motto

'Children First' treat us in this manner?" (Cholo, 2005). Paul Vallas, the CEO at the time,

refused to meet or negotiate or respond to what he referred to as "blackmail."

"I'm not going to locate it on a site because people are threatening not to eat. You

could have one of these [protests] a week," he said. When Vallas left Chicago and was

replaced as CEO by Arne Duncan, Duncan declared that he had "a hell of a lot of respect

for [the protesters]" and agreed to move forward with the new school. Not only that, but

the strike is immortalized as part of the school's origin story: the campus of Little Village

High School features 14 flowering trees to honor the strikers, and an entryway adorned

with glass partitions set at 19-degree angles to represent the 19 days they went hungry.

In an essay explaining her decision to join the hunger strike, Jeanette Taylor-

Ramann, a parent at nearby Mollison (see Chapter 1), cited feelings of being ignored and

disrespected that echo Sarate's:

> It became clear to us that after six education forums, 2000-plus signed
> petitions, and the support of LSC members, parents, teachers, and
> professional educators, it had nothing to do with whose plan was best but
> with who was well connected with the Mayor. The last straw was when
> CPS violated its own rules.
>
> …I never wanted to be in front of a camera. All I wanted was to be part of
> my kids' education and be part of the solution. I just wanted to drop my
> children off and know that they would be educated the way I was. But I
> found every day that that was far from the reality. I now want children in
> this city and country to know that there are people out there fighting,
> willing to go hungry — for them.
>
> In a perfect world there would be no racism, and I would not have to
> challenge people by calling out their racism. I was brought up in church
> and taught that we must love everybody. But how can I love people who

see my children and me as numbers, as a way to profit from us (Taylor-Ramann, 2015).

As the strike wore on, observers from around the city and the country began to appear in Washington Park. One day, I showed up to find Jitu being interviewed by someone from Reuters. Another day, I got into a conversation with a man from the *New York Times* who was trying to make a video feature. "Where can I find some closed schools?" he asks me, but becomes impatient and flustered when I began to talk in detail about which schools in Bronzeville were closed, which were co-located with another school in the same building, and which were now home to neighboring schools. On another day, a teacher from Lane Tech, a selective enrollment high school on the north side, brought a group of his students to meet with the hunger strikers. "Go on in," he instructed the students, who stood shyly a few feet away from the seated group. "They're on a hunger strike to save their school. Something you don't do at Lane Tech. Go." One student asked how they could support the group. Dr. Aisha Wade-Bey, a teacher and Bronzeville resident who was on the design team for the Coalition proposal, responded.

> Let them know… that it is a shame. It is a pity. It is every word negative that you can think of that we have to sacrifice our bodies because our voices will not be heard…. There is no neighborhood high school in this community. And I think it's sad that we have elected officials who wanna say that 'based on my friendship with this person, I support them,' not support our children. So we want our children and you to know that this hunger strike is not in vain. Because we want you, and all the children in this community to stand on our shoulders. To let them know that we are fighting for you. And that you deserve the best education in the world.

At other times, there were no visitors, and the hunger strikers and Coalition supporters simply spent the day keeping each other company. To a casual onlooker, the situation may have looked like any other gathering in Washington Park—older faces and

younger faces, situated in a circle of portable fabric picnic chairs abutted by coolers, chatting amiably. But rather than pop, many of the coolers were filled with infused water or pureed high-nutrient juices. Hot thermoses full of broth were propped against a tree, and worried-looking nurses were flitting from person to person. There was no music. Sometimes, folks would laugh and joke cheerfully; other times, they would look off into space, exhausted. Behind it all, the black building loomed like a broken promise, always present and always silent and always closed.

The American Sociological Association conference was in Chicago that summer, and I was on my way to a morning session when I found out that Ms. Irene was in the hospital. Her doctors had already advised her to quit the hunger strike, but she refused. That morning, going to the conference felt like a willfully negligent choice. Instead, I picked up a bouquet of flowers before going to Provident Hospital.[xviii] When I gave them to Ms. Irene, sitting in a wheelchair in the lobby, she said what I knew she would say: "I love you!"

All of Us Wanted Dyett

The very next day was August 26, when the Board of Education would meet. In order to attend, one has to sign up in advance, and the online registration notoriously closes within minutes of opening. Many days before the meeting, I had set an early alarm clock so that I could get my name on the register the second it opened. I thought back to several weeks ago, when this meeting was supposed to be the day that the Board would make a final determination regarding Dyett. Now, things seemed no closer to a resolution. When I arrived at the meeting, the chambers were already full, and I had to sit

in an overflow room watching the proceedings on a television. When it was time for public comment, Jeanette took the podium and spoke, despite appearing physically weak and tired. She was wrapped in a blanket. "The only mistake I ever made was being born black," she said to the Board. Others took to the podium, exemplifying, one after another, how much pain was manifest in the city's school communities. A mother spoke about how when her family was homeless, they were denied the transportation benefits they were supposed to receive from the district, and she had to spend food money to get her children to school on public transit. The treasurer of the Chicago Teachers Union spoke about how proposed special education cuts would hurt students with disabilities, began to cry, and was removed by security. A teen girl spoke about how her college and career counselor was being laid off, and that she didn't know how she would get to college, and was removed by security.

Suddenly, Rico burst into the overflow room. "Is anyone here a doctor? Jeanette just fainted." Everyone looked up at him, wide-eyed, and he whirled away. I got up and went to the exit, where a security guard stood. "Yes? There's no room in the chambers," he said, moving between me and the door. I peered around him, craning my neck to see through the window where Jeanette was now being led away in a stretcher. The meeting continued, uninterrupted.

Two days later, I had to drive back the fifteen hours back to Boston. The semester was starting, and I had already missed an introductory session for a course I was working on with my advisor in order to attend the Board meeting. The day before I was to leave, I hugged Jitu, seated in his chair in front of the school. "The next time I see you," I said, "it'd better be in there"—I gestured toward the school—"or out here, eating." He

laughed, and I laughed, but I felt a pang of fear. I thought of Ms. Irene in the lobby of

Provident Hospital, and I felt afraid, even though she said so many times how unafraid

she was. For a long time on the drive east, I played and replayed versions of "His Eye is

on the Sparrow": *Why should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows come?*

<div align="center">***</div>

I furrowed my brow as I watched the video of the press conference announcing

that Dyett would be re-opened. Will Burns stood at the podium, raising a finger and

gesticulating to emphasize his points as he spoke. "We *all* fought for Dyett. Together," he

said, with CEO Claypool standing behind him. "All of us wanted Dyett to be an open

enrollment public high school" (Negovan, 2015).

Dyett was going to be open again. At the press conference, Claypool announced

that in fall 2016, it would become an open-enrollment arts high school, featuring an

"innovation technology lab." Although it was to be a arts-focused school, Little Black

Pearl would not be involved. Nor would the plan developed by the Coalition be used. In

fact, none of the proposals or any aspect of the RFP or proposal process were mentioned

in the press release (Chicago Public Schools, 2015b). No members of the Coalition were

admitted to the chambers where the press conference took place. They sat outside.

The next day, Jitu Brown told Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!* that the hunger

strike would continue.

> We do not see this as a victory. This is not a victory for the children in
> Bronzeville….I got a call from CPS CEO Forrest Claypool 15 minutes
> before the press conference, that we were locked out of by CPS, and he
> told me—I asked him, "Well, where is the room for negotiation?" And he
> said, "Well, we're moving forward." So my message to him today is: So
> are we. We're moving forward. This is a human rights issue. You know,
> the great poet and author Alice Walker said, "No one is your friend who
> demands your silence or denies your right to grow." This is not something

that we take lightly. These are our children. These are our communities. We have to live with CPS reforms after the people that implement them get promoted to some other job. So we will determine the type of education that our children receive in Bronzeville (Democracy Now, 2015).

Two weeks later, I am back in Bronzeville, riding the Cottage Grove bus to Operation PUSH for a candlelight vigil. The hunger strike is still going on. "I don't know how to quit," Ms. Irene tells me on the phone as I make my way southward on the bus. The weather is miserable, typical of September in Chicago. School has just let out, and riding the bus is like taking a tour of the educational policy landscape. One boy has on Urban Prep blazer, with their signature red crest emblazoned on the lapel. Unfamiliar teens greet each other and ask where they go to school: King College Prep. Kenwood Academy. No uniforms for them. A girl gets on with a white polo embroidered with the logo of Young Women's Leadership Charter School. As continue south, out the window I see a group of boys in royal blue football uniforms go to the field to practice—the Phillips Academy Wildcats. I watch the students take turns flirting and teasing and ignoring each other, yelling out jokes, staring at their phones or down at their Nikes, and I recite each school back to myself. Charter, selective enrollment, overcrowded, charter, turnaround. Lost in my thoughts, I regain my attention when a group of boys behind me calls out. "What?! He tweakin!" The bus driver has just called out that this bus is running express and will be getting off at 79th. One of the boys is upset that he will miss his stop. His friend makes fun of him.

"Yo stay on the bus, bro! Come to my block! You scared?"

"Nah, but he didn't even say that when we got on the bus!"

"He still finna stop. Express means the bus gets on the express*way*."

"No it don't. You so stupid."

Well, I'm not going all the way to 79th. A bunch of people hop off the bus, including me. But in the corner of my eye, as my shoes hit the ground, I see the bus driver grin, pleased with himself. I look back up and realize his trick, scowling at him from the cold, drizzly sidewalk.

"You was playin?"

"Uh-huh."

"Man you bogus as hell!" I'm mad. He had devised a way to get raucous young people off the bus, and I had fallen for it. I get back on, passing the fare box defiantly, and find a seat again amongst those who didn't fall for the ploy, and watch out the window as the boys make their way down the block without turning back, headed home. In June, I might have watched them go and wondered how many of them might someday be students in the new Dyett. Now I am not so sure.

By the time I get to PUSH, I am just glad it's not raining anymore. A man with a hoarse voice gives the instructions: this is a silent march. No cheering. We walk together in silence from PUSH to President Obama's house, just a few blocks away. As we walk I am amazed at how ordinary and beautiful the city looks. Twilight is coming behind the clouds, and everything is verdant and wet. There are still flowers blooming. I am equally amazed at how sad I feel. and stand together holding small candles in the darkness. It is windy and it's hard to keep them alight. The woman next to me frowns as one of the organizers lights hers. "It's gonna go out," she says.

"Long as it gets lit."

I've always thought it fascinating that the President's house is so close to Dyett.

In the summer, I would pass it on my way from my apartment to the school. It's a little over a half mile away, less than 15 minutes by foot in a straight shot down 51st Street. As we stand outside now, the view of the house obscured by the trees, I wonder what kind of community organizer the President was in his time. I wonder if, since becoming Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan has ever told him the story of the Little Village hunger strike, and whether he would be like Duncan and have a "hell of a lot of respect" for his neighbors, who have now gone 25 days without food in order to see their vision enacted for a school where his own daughters could attend.

Nine days later, the hunger strike was over.

"While we cannot yet claim complete victory," said hunger striker Monique Redeaux-Smith, "we do understand that our efforts so far have been victorious in a number of ways…. Through community resistance, [Dyett] was slated to be reopened in 2016-17. And even though there was a request for proposals, we know that the plan for that space *was* to become another privatized school within Bronzeville. But again, with community resistance and this hunger strike, we pushed CPS and the Mayor to commit to reopening Dyett as a public, open-enrollment neighborhood school. And that is a victory" (empathyeducates, 2015).

"I hated to end the strike," Coalition supporter and Bronzeville parent Anna Jones would tell the *Chicago Reader* (Ford, 2015) three months later, "because I didn't want the mayor or the aldermen to feel like we were giving up. But we had to end it because we knew that the mayor would leave us out there to die."

The Veil of "Process" and Embargoed Democracy

I have looked through a lot of old photographs of Walter Henri Dyett. Dyett

served in the military, and I have seen his formal portraits taken in uniform. I have seen

photos of him in childhood. I have seen photographs of him leading distinguished groups

of musicians arrayed all perfectly in rows, decked out in pristine black and white. But my

favorite photograph of Dyett is of him standing in Washington Park. It is spring, and

several young women are gathered for the baton-twirling training camp, as majorettes.

My own grandmother, who was born in Mississippi and migrated north in 1943, was a

baton-twirler, and I always envied the skill. In the photo, Dyett stands amid the trees, and

seems unaware of the camera. He is demonstrating how to twirl the baton as the girls

watch intently, hands on their hips. The girls have on shorts and Dyett's sleeves are rolled

up, and when I look at the photo I think of these regular days as an educator, the moments

of intense focus and commitment where trying to help someone understand seems like

the most important thing in the world, deserving of all of your energy. In this photo I see

Dyett not as anyone famous or historically important, the kind of person whose name

ends up erected over the door of a building, but as a regular person trying to do what he

could for the young people of Bronzeville. And I see a warm day in Washington Park,

and people convened to be together but also to pursue something they think is vital for

their very lives.

We knew that the mayor would leave us out there to die, says Anna Jones. How

did it get to that place, where a group of citizens felt that the only way to get the attention

of the city's leader was to put their lives on the line? To close this chapter, I will discuss

the ways in which the Dyett story reveals something fundamental about the failure of

participatory process in Chicago, a phenomenon which I call *embargoed democracy.*

Schools and School Systems as Democratic Institutions

As one of the purposes of American schooling is often identified as the need to inculcate students with the principles of citizenship in a participatory democracy, scholars have noted the ways in which schools and school systems themselves can promote or hinder democratic processes that reflect this ideal (Apple & Beane, 2007; Dewey, 2008; Levinson, 2012). "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experiences," wrote Dewey famously in *Democracy and Education.* As such, schools are vital institutions for the cultivation of democratic social practices. If there are inequities in opportunities to develop and manifest such practices, as theorists and policymakers we ignore them at our peril, argues Levinson (2012). Such inequities are harmful "*all* Americans because it weakens the quality and integrity of our democracy. Democratic governance relies on participatory citizens. The legitimacy, stability, and quality of democratic regimes are all directly dependent on the robust participation of a representative and large cross-section of citizens" (p. 48).

Indeed, we can find examples large and small of the ways school processes are or are not democratic. For instance, Chicago parents are able to elect representatives to a Local School Council, that has some limited powers of governance over the school. This is a democratic process. The appointment of a school superintendent, on the other hand, has no pretense of democracy; the Mayor simply appoints someone, without the approval or input of the Board or members of the community.

In the case of Dyett, we see a third phenomenon. Throughout the story, decision-makers refer to the existence of a "process"—a set of internally coherent and consistent rules, protocols for action, roles and rights allocated to stakeholders, and criteria for evaluation. However, in practice, aspects of the process are repeatedly foreclosed, internally contrary, unclear, or shifting. Thus, I call this embargoed democracy: a context in which citizen-participants ostensibly have pathways for public governance and institutional decision-making, but their efforts at democratic participation are stymied. One of the ideas behind participatory democratic structures is that there should be a transparent form of governance. The hierarchies around schools—school boards, hearings, Local School Councils—are ostensibly there so that citizens understand, if they want to take action or initiate change, how they ought to do so. While the story of Dyett has many trappings that make it appear as though such a process was present (e.g. the role of elected officials, public meetings), the constant subversion of "process" made the structures at play very undemocratic; they were instead shifting and opaque.

Dyett was slated for closure, with the promise that until its final day, it would receive the same treatment and resources as any other school. This did not happen, and students and community members had to fight for rites of passage that other students across the city would take for granted. When the Coalition presented a plan for the school to remain open, they were denied. Then, the RFP process was announced, in a pseudo-contradiction to that denial, and without any formal acknowledgement that the RFP was the result of community protest. The first half of the RFP timeline moved forward like a "process," as defined above: there were clear rules, guidelines, steps for community members to follow (complete the proposal, attend to the rubric, create a presentation for a

meeting), which they dutifully did. But the second half of the timeline cannot accurately be called a process: first the delay in announcing a date, then the delay in announcing a time and location for the hearing, then the last-minute cancellation of the hearing, and finally the announcement that the school would re-open without 1) a hearing or Board process as had been announced previously, 2) any clarity as to how the decision was made or who made it, and 3) a model selected from any of the proposals submitted through the RFP.

Each time CPS decision-makers pivoted toward a new action (opening the RFP, cancelling the hearing, announcing the new school) they did so without acknowledgment that it was political protest and agitation—itself a violation or a disturbance of the process—that was the impetus for change. In that sense, much like during the school closing hearings, a process was presented as neutral or natural (even through the phrase "there's a process") when in fact it was constructed by human decision-making.

The confusion around the "process" was made worse by the fact that the executive overseeing the future of Dyett continued to change, thanks to a lack of internal organizational coherence within CPS. One CEO, Brizard, announced the closure of Dyett in 2012. Another CEO, Byrd-Bennett, announced that she would be accepting proposals for the school to re-open, in 2014. In 2015, a *third* CEO delayed the hearing, refused to meet with protestors, and ultimately announced the opening of the new Dyett. Those who support an appointed—rather an elected—superintendent and school board argue that this system provides the assurance of consistency, insulating schools from the whims of political preferences. But in the case of Dyett, the outcome was anything but consistent or predictable. Nor was the process safe from political complications, as is evidenced by the

complicated role of Alderman Will Burns in the matter.

Like any resourceful people faced with an embargo, the Coalition sometimes looked for a way around, and sometimes looked for a way through. They looked for a way around when they created a parallel participatory structure, inviting community members, teachers, and scholars to work together to create a school proposal. They looked for a way through when they held sit-ins, rallies, and a hunger strike to demand that the mayor and the Board of Education admit them into the inner confines of the democratic circle.

For a black community, this phenomenon has particular salience. For African-Americans, citizenship—which is partially defined by one's eligibility for participation in a democratic process—has long been contested, and some theorists continue to question whether black people are or can even be citizens (Roberts, 1996; Weiner, 2007). As Roberts puts it, "from the founding of the nation, the meaning of American citizenship has rested on the denial of citizenship to Blacks living within its borders" (p. 1574). The incidents of police violence that drew so much public attention throughout 2015, and were very much at the background of the fight for Dyett, called this question to the fore.

What does one have when one does not have the means for political participation? Words like *spirit, will,* and *hope* recurred in the story of Dyett, as they do in the African-American political tradition. "I don't know how to quit," Ms. Irene tells me. She believes that, as the hymn says, "his eye is on the sparrow"—that in the face of despair, there is every reason to maintain a resilient faith that goodness will prevail. The story of Dyett is a story of great spirit, and great will, and great hope. Chicagoans, particularly the residents of Bronzeville and the activists who put their lives on the line to try to bring

back a school they could believe in, proved an outstanding capacity of spirit, and will, and hope. But these forces, while they may be far more important to the human condition than something like citizenship, nevertheless cannot replace it. Functionally, an embargoed democracy is not a democracy at all.

Chapter 4: Something Left to Love:

Toward a Theory of Institutional Mourning

For long years we of the world gone wild have looked into the face of death and smiled.
    - W.E.B. Du Bois (1920)

School Closure as Emotional Phenomenon: Death by Another Name

To the extent that school closure in Chicago has been empirically and

theoretically explored in existing literature, scholars have paid primary attention to its

structural and material impact: the ways in which closure contributes to privatization and

gentrification (Lipman & Haines, 2007), the academic impact on students (de la Torre &

Gwynne, 2009), the decision-making processes families undergo when enrolling their

children in a new school (de la Torre, Gordon, Moore, & Cowhy, 2015). The literature

offers less analysis of school closure in Chicago as an affective or emotional

phenomenon, with the notable exception of Lipman, Vaughan, and Gutierrez's study on

parental opinions and feelings toward school closure (2014).

From an empirical perspective, our understanding of the systemic impact school

closing has on young people and communities is crucial. It is imperative that we

catalogue patterns of inequity as they occur on a broad scale. However, when an

individual experiences the effects of such inequities, they do so on the level of subjective

personhood that may render the structural phenomenon less visible or less relevant. The

experience of falling serves as a useful analogy: while it is important for physicists to

understand, identify, and quantify the phenomenon of gravity as it impacts life on our

planet and the interactions of bodies across the solar system, we also have to document

the subjective experience of tripping over a curb, or jumping from high rocks into a lake,

or throwing a basketball into a hoop—the experiences that comprise the phenomenological truth of gravity. In the case of school closings, while we continue to chronicle the material effects of closure policy, it may also be useful to develop theoretical frameworks for understanding their impact on the emotional lives of students, families, teachers, and community members.

In this chapter, I present a theory of *institutional mourning* to describe the experiences of individuals who have faced the loss of a school with which they were affiliated. I define institutional mourning as the social and emotional processes undergone by individuals and communities facing the loss of a shared institution—such as a school, church, residence/residential area, or business district—with which they are affiliated, particularly in instances where the individuals or communities in question occupy a socially marginalized status that amplifies their reliance on the institution or its relative significance in their lives. While institutional mourning can occur in many contexts, here I develop and explore its traits within the context of school closure as a sort of death, and what it means for the African-American community of Bronzeville.

The idea that individuals might mourn institutions or other intangible entities, much as we mourn people, is not new unto itself. In his classic essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud includes this possibility in the definition he offers of mourning: "Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, *or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one [loved person]*, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (1994, p. 243, emphasis mine). Johnson (2012) describes a community's experience of school closure in Austin, Texas as a form of "social and civic death," one "characterized by the loss of natality and history" (p. 15). Drawing on

Foucault, Johnson describes a school's death by school closure as a form of state violence: "Such procedures are based on the disposability of racial bodies, upon which direct and indirect modes of death are deployed in order to improve life for the 'greater' public." The idea of "social death," a death that is spiritual or political more than literal, is one that has been extensively explored in the field of black studies, as a lineage of theorists identified as "Afro-pessimists" frame all American social life as overdetermined by a shadow of slavery that makes real participatory citizenship all but non-existent for black people in America. Sexton (2011) calls social death "another name for slavery and an attempt to think about what it comprises" (p. 17), a definition that both expands a concept of death beyond the loss of a physical human body and establishes a lineage between social death and the broader condition of black oppression, historical and contemporary, in the American context. This lineage is important to consider since, while as noted above, institutional mourning can occur in the context of any marginalized community, the idea was developed in and through an African-American community, and as I will discuss, institutional mourning has a particular salience in this context.

The notion of institutional mourning is an inductive theory, emerging from a series of interviews with stakeholders impacted by school closures in Bronzeville. I interviewed thirteen individuals affiliated with closed schools as teachers, parents, students, or community members, selected for their ability to share a variety of representative perspectives. [xix] They occupy many overlapping spheres of identity within the context of the community: five were teachers in schools that are now closed (and one in a school that was a receiving school that moved into a closed school; see Chapter 2), three are parents of children who attended schools that are now closed, four were students

at schools that are now closed, and eight live in Bronzeville. All but two (both of them teachers) are African-American. They represent six different closed schools, and three of them (two teachers and one student) experienced multiple consecutive school closures, a reflection of what the *Chicago Tribune* called "a chain reaction of school closings that has besieged the greater Bronzeville area" (Ahmed-Ullah, 2012).

These interviews took place between July 2015 and January 2016, and each lasted one to two hours. I used a semi-structured interview protocol (see Methodological Appendix) to ask general questions about participants' experiences of school closure and their opinions of race and racism, as these were guiding ideas that interested me at the outset of this study. None of the questions mention death, dying, or mourning. Rather, I observed that death and mourning emerged repeatedly in participants' accounts. The emergence of death as a metaphor for school closure did not itself surprise me. Mentions of death are common in public discourse around school closings, exemplified by Chicago Teachers Union president Karen Lewis referring to Rahm Emanuel as the "murder mayor" because he was "killing schools" (CBS Chicago, 2013) and the more recent headline "Will school choice kill Chicago's neighborhood high schools?" (Kelleher, 2015). Johnson (2013), in her study on the closure of a Texas high school, notes the expansive use of death as a metaphor in local reporting, through phrases such as "pass or perish," "slow dying," "struggling to survive," and "funeral" (2013, p. 245). However, despite the familiarity of these references to death, I nevertheless found it remarkable how often participants made broader references to feelings of loss and processes that were reminiscent of grieving, and it is from this repeated observation that the present theory emerges. In retrospect, perhaps I should have anticipated the emergence of

mourning as a theme in participant accounts, given my own personal reflections on the feelings of grief and sorrow I experienced: "When I found out that the school where I taught would be closing, I was visiting my father in Florida for spring break, and I locked myself in the bedroom and cried like a little kid. I started replaying life there in my head, over and over, like a sappy montage in a bad movie" (Ewing, 2015). But, as Lawrence-Lightfoot notes, "through documentation, interpretation, analysis, and narrative we raise the mirror" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xvii). In this case, I had to raise the mirror to my participants first, in order to see a reflection of both my own personal experience and a broader phenomenon.

In the sections that follow, I will first explore aspects of African-American life— namely, institutional attachments, and modes of grieving—that make a theory of institutional mourning especially salient in the context of Bronzeville school closures. I will then explore two major strands of mourning accounts as they emerged from participant interviews: first, *love* for and within the school before its demise, and second, the emotions and processes that comprise a profound sense of *loss*. Within each of these threads, I draw parallels between the accounts as presented and the experience of mourning a lost love one. I close by briefly discussing the ways in which institutional mourning as a framework may be applicable to other contexts, and by suggesting some implications of the theory for how we understand school policy and the effects of closure.

African-Americans' Relationships to Institutions

Human attachment to a "home" or a sense of place is arguably a universal phenomenon, albeit one that manifests differently across time, geography, and subculture

(consider how the meaning of "home" may differ for a nomadic herder in Morocco in the twentieth century and a westward colonizer traversing the Rocky Mountains in the United States in the nineteenth century). I contend that for many African-American city-dwellers, the conditions of Jim Crow, segregation and subsequent social and spatial isolation, and economic disenfranchisement have cultivated a notion of "home" that not only encompasses but relies on a particularistic relation to institutions. Here I am not referring to "institutions" in the sense of broadly-practiced customs, but the places where shared cultural practices are enacted. Put simply, I mean "institution" to refer to a church or a school, not religious practice or education more broadly. I define *institution* as a spatially-bound entity of collective enterprise convened for some communal purpose beyond the immediate needs of one individual or family. While many institutions may therefore be publicly owned and operated (e.g. a school, a public housing project), this definition also includes privately-owned enterprises that serve, beyond their explicit primary function, some secondary communal social function (e.g. a barbershop that not only offers a place for haircuts but also a site for community discourse; a corner store that not only sells packaged goods but also serves as a gathering place). For African-Americans in cities, both segregation and its wide array of effects lend such institutions a magnified importance.

As Jargowsky (2014) demonstrates through an analysis of Census data, black-white residential segregation in American metropolitan areas, although it has declined since 1970, remains very high. "Despite the Fair Housing Act of 1968, despite the emergence of a substantial black middle class, and despite black progress in many professions, the color line remains the primary division in America's neighborhoods.

Indeed, at the pace of the decline in black-white segregation since 1990, it would take 150 years to achieve a low level of segregation ([a dissimilarity index of] 0.30 or less) of blacks from whites" (p. 104). Such segregation has contributed to what Wilson (2012) terms social isolation, creating closed social networks that have limited overlap with the institutions of mainstream (white) society. While Wilson's theory refers specifically to poor black city-dwellers, middle-class or affluent African-Americans may retain attachments to many of the same institutions as poor African-Americans, whether through utility (e.g. going to a certain hair salon that serves black clientele), emotional bonds (e.g. being a member of the same church as one's parents or other relatives), or because the majority of middle-class and even relatively affluent African-Americans in the United States still live in neighborhoods that are majority black, and neighborhoods that are comparatively poorer than white Americans at the same income level (see Reardon, Fox, & Townsend, 2015). The continued wealth gap between black and white Americans may also increase an African-American reliance on shared institutions and resources as opposed to individual resources and autonomous pursuits (Shapiro, 2004).

In addition to (or perhaps because of) segregation and social isolation, African-Americans have a political sensibility that enhances the significance of institutions and their communal function, as opposed to private property and private practices. As Dawson (2003) describes, black political ideologies include a sense of communitarianism that historians date back to the era of Reconstruction. "The advancement of the self, the liberation of the self, is a meaningless concept outside the context of one's community… even the most individual of liberal political acts, the casting of a vote, was embedded in community relationships" (p. 255).

Even African-American practices of mourning reflect the importance of such communal bonds. In a survey study of about 1,500 bereaved individuals, psychologists Laurie and Neimeyer (2008) have found that compared to white people, African-Americans maintain a significantly stronger sense of continuing bonds with the deceased after death. As the authors note, this finding serves as a counterpoint to dominant American ideologies of grief, which promote the importance of "moving on" by severing such bonds with the deceased. African-Americans are also more likely to grieve the loss of extended family members beyond the nuclear family unit, a finding which the authors attribute to the phenomenon of fictive kinship (see Chapter 2). Black survey respondents also showed more symptoms of *complicated grief,* a prolonged form of grief characterized by symptoms such as unbidden memories or intrusive fantasies of the lost relationship, strong spells or pangs of severe emotion related to the lost relationship, and a loss of interest in social activities (Horowitz et. al, 2003). As I will detail in the next section, these aspects of the grieving process—a sense that bonds continue after death, and symptoms of grief present long after (in this case, two years) after the occurrence of loss—are present in the accounts of the participants I interviewed.

Bronzeville teachers, students, parents, and community members I spoke to described these institutional attachments in their own words. "In essence, you know how your school, your church, that's the place, that's what makes it your home. I still see those folks coming back to the Robert Taylor Homes, and sitting out there in that grassy area with their lawn chairs," said Sharon Munro[xx], a teacher who experienced two consecutive school closures. Munro is referring to the practice, described by Pattillo (2015), of former Bronzeville public housing residents demonstrating loyalty and

commitment to the projects in which they once lived, even after they have been demolished, by holding regular picnics on the sites where they once stood.[xxi] James Roberts, a parent and local business owner who was born in Bronzeville and is now raising his three children in the area, describes the way Chicagoans' attachment to their schools functions along racial lines. "When you meet somebody, first question—where'd you go to high school? Or grammar school? Or white people, especially on the South Side, what parish? And those are the issues you have to deal with. It's generational."

Irene Robinson, a Bronzeville resident who sent several children, grandchildren, and foster children to the same school before its closure, describes some residents' reliance on schools as a source of social support as a matter of personal strength and resources—those who don't have them draw upon the institution for support. "Everyone is not strong like some of us are," she says. "And everyone has their separate issues. The schools were like second homes for some people, and there were resources out there for children who didn't have that safe haven at home." Amanda Moss, a teacher who experienced three consecutive school closures (two in Bronzeville), also emphasized the nature of school as a source of social support. "A lot of times the school is the safe place in a community. You know, that's a place where the students feel safe. That's a place where the parents can come and have meetings, discussions, whatever. It's kind of like a little hub."

Other scholars have described the strength and salience of such institutional relationships for African-Americans across the United States. Morris (1999) describes the "communal bonds" felt between black families and their school, characterized by shared participation and ownership, and draws a parallel between the existence of such bonds in

school and their presence in public housing and in the black church. As Hunter (2013) argues, communities densely populated with black residents in the early twentieth century came to comprise, in many cases, a *city within a city*—the Black Seventh Ward in Philadelphia, Bronzeville in Chicago, Harlem in New York City, and so on. Within this narrowed context, institutions become accordingly grander in the scale of their significance. Structures like the Supreme Life Building on 35th and King Drive (home of the north's first black-owned insurance company) or the Pilgrim Baptist Church on 33rd and Indiana (designed by famed architect Louis Sullivan, and known as the birthplace of modern gospel) take on the importance of the World Trade Center or the National Cathedral, but bolstered by their quotidian proximity—cultural icons looming large not only in the collective imagination, but in daily life.

In the next section, I explore two features of institutional mourning: the recollection of one's love for and attachment to the institution after its passing, and the description of one's sense of loss at its absence.

Love: "Linked Arms" and Familial Bonds

When asked to recall the lost institution, those experiencing mourning recall the good times first, not the incident of death. We remember first with love. Indeed, it is love that defines the attachment to the deceased; without love there is no mourning. This may comprise love for the institution itself, or for the people affiliated with it—or something else entirely. A key facet of the mourning process is that it demands the bereaved re-assess their very place in the world and their understanding of its functioning, as the loss they have experienced challenges their sense of personal identity, and "the underlying

structure on which our self-narrative depends… on which we rely as our taken-for-granted senses of security, trust, and optimism" (Neimeryer, Prigerson & Davies, 2002, p. 240). In *The Sociology of Teaching*, one of the earliest works in the sociology of education, Willard Waller described schools as a "social organism," defined in part by what he referred to as the "we-feeling" (1962, p. 7). This pervasive feeling invites a sense of belonging, through which individuals within the institution understand themselves as one of its component parts. Thus, the love which the bereaved feel for the lost institution is not only a love *of* the institution, but may also be a love for and familiarity with *oneself within* the institution. "At [my closed school], I never felt vulnerable," says teacher Katherine Warner. "I felt safe and strong. And then they closed it."

Many participants described the love they felt for the lost institution in terms of their relational bonds with other members of the school community (similar to the language of relational strength described by community members in Chapter 2). Chanelle, a former student of a school that is now closed, speaks fondly of her teachers, who she said made learning fun, and who supported her when her family was facing a challenge. "Once my mom had to go through a surgery. She had to take time off work. So my teachers helped me. Like if I needed my hair done, my teachers would help me. My teachers loved me!" Lynn Ross, a former teacher at the school Chanelle once attended (though she never had her as a student) describes this love between teachers and students from the other side of the coin, defining it as a relationship of protection. "We had that mindset of *those are our babies*," she says emphatically. "Those were *our* babies. We gon talk about 'em, but you better not! We will fuss at them. We fussed at 'em all the time. But don't treat our babies unfairly. You will not. No." Ross's description of her and

her colleagues' attitudes toward their students reflects the trope of the "warm demander" (Kleinfeld, 1975; Ware, 2006), the teacher who approaches students of color with equal parts discipline and care, authority and nurturing, and who engages in the black feminist practice of othermothering (Collins, 2002).

Ross, a youthful teacher with an upbeat attitude and a high-energy spirit, maintains relationships with her students even as she has moved into another teaching position following the closure of her school. "I still talk to these kids. Like Damon, he had a baby. He still calls me Ms. Ross. I see kids all the time in just the neighborhood. I see their mamas. One of the girls [who was] in [our mentoring club] Girls Are Leaders, Jessica, she's about to get married. She called me on my birthday last Sunday. She was like 'hey, Ms. Ross, I just wanted to say happy birthdaaaay!'" Ross also felt a close sense of kinship with her colleagues, noting that co-planning and collaboration between teachers happened naturally because they often socialized with one another outside of school.

Martin, a former student of two schools that are now closed, says of his grammar school, "I loved being there…. We had computer lab and we had after school programs and stuff like that. It was, it was just—I liked being there." Recalling his high school experience, he, like Ross, invokes the language of a family, where there is interpersonal conflict or challenges but they are superseded by bonds. "We had teachers there that was like family…. At the end of the day we were family. We made sure that we was together. Because we argued, but we were still family and we were still together."

Warner, the teacher who described how she "felt safe" at her school, described her love in terms of both such familial bonds and her own sense of personal and

professional development, particularly as a white teacher in a school with mostly black faculty and virtually all black students. "I was the [school] cheerleader. I loved [the school].… I was one of the people who brought in the restorative justice program. And people came from all over. Not just Chicago—we had a whole group from Wisconsin to observe our program. It was fun, and interesting…. [My colleagues and the students] were always teaching me things. [I enjoyed] being able to talk about stuff. Being able to talk about racism and prejudice and creating that environment where they're really fascinated by having that conversation was wonderful. I loved it." Warner describes staying late hours, working on projects with colleagues and enthusiastically attending extracurricular and sporting events. She contrasts that level of involvement with her current teaching position, at an elite school on the North Side with far more material resources at her disposal. "[At the closed school] it was very much a home-community situation. Which was great. It was really great. [Now] I'm doing the best teaching I've ever done, because it's all I'm doing. But I'm not enjoying it the way I enjoyed being an integral part of a community, which I think is what neighborhood schools have to be in order to survive and function. This idea that everybody there is just an integral part of this mission. You're in it together. And even if it's bad, it's okay, because we're all in it together and we've got our arms linked."

Robinson, the parent, grandparent and foster parent, described a similar sense of shared mission at her family's closed school, which had housed a child-parent center where teachers worked in collaborative teams with a community representative to provide comprehensive resources for parents. "It was a circle of love," she says, describing the activities her children did at school, which she felt enhanced their sense of

self-love as African-American children, such as memorizing poems like "Hey, Black Child" by Bronzeville poet Useni Eugene Perkins, and "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou. "They were happy," she says of her children and the others she worked with at the center. "They knew they were loved. They wanted to be there. We [parents] wanted to be there."

Prentice, a student whose grammar school was closed and consolidated, echoes the relationship with non-faculty school personnel that some community meeting participants described in Chapter 2. "I really liked some of the security guards," he says. "They used to look out for me." Of his teachers, he says, "I always ended forming a relationship with them. Because they always used to see some things that I didn't see in me. So there'll always be a connection there, there will always be a relationship. And they always push you to do better." Like Warner, he defines his school relationships not only in terms of emotional support, but in terms of a relational environment that allowed him to grow and improve as an individual. Moss, the teacher who experienced three school closures in a row, describes a similar trajectory of personal and professional development nurturing. Her first job was at a school which she knew would be closing and she was only hired to complete the year, which allowed her to maintain a degree of emotional attachment. However, at her second school, she settled in comfortably for seven years before its closure was announced. She speaks animatedly about the experience of developing curricula and activities in her field of English literature, and about the satisfaction of seeing students thrive:

> And I mean that's where I got really invested. You know? I mean, I really learned to teach there…. And I got to be the AP English teacher! And I was so excited and I just—Because you could totally make your own curriculum. And I got to do that. And I you know, I *loved* that class. And I made it thematic…. And of course it was heavy on the writing. Because I wanted them to read—I wanted them to be able to read, to be able to get evidence from their work, you know from the text.

And I wanted them to be able to write an argument and be able to cite their sources….Because even if they know how to read and they can find evidence and stuff. If they can't write it, you know they're not going to survive that first year of college…. I had a lot of positive feedback from students coming back to me [to visit after graduation] and telling me, "you know so many of the other students in my class are panicking, but I knew how to write the paper…. I feel like I'm a little ahead, because I already read *Civil Disobedience* and we're reading it now." Or "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." You know what I mean….We had an after school mentoring program… and I started a drama club….I had some students who participated with me in that CPS Shakespeare [with the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre]. It was a beautiful experience… and I mean they just they so shined. I mean they were so involved, so dedicated, you know to this experience. It was awesome. So I loved [the school].

Defending the Dead

Each of these Bronzeville school closures took place within the cloud of a narrative of the school's own failure as an institution—from Barbara Byrd-Bennett's description of children "cheated" out of an education because they were "trapped" (see Chapter 1), to the quantitative comparisons between schools at closure hearings (see Chapter 2) and the language of Dyett as "chronically underperforming" (see Chapter 3). Interview participants were keenly aware of this narrative, and its implications—that in naming the school as a failure, public discourse also implicated them, as students, parents, and teachers, as a failure. Much like a relative tasked with eulogizing someone who was imperfect, perhaps even deeply flawed, but nevertheless loved, participants flinched under the weight of these public characterizations and spoke both candidly and protectively in defense of the lost institution. Like a person, the school does not have to be perfect to be mourned; it can be acknowledged as flawed and its death is no less unjust.

"I felt bad," says Chanelle. "Because I felt like [the closed school] is actually a good school! [The school] is not what people make it seem. People make it seem like it's

just a horrible place." Martin uses similar language to describe his closed high school. Like Chanelle, he uses the present tense in his account of the school, despite the fact that it is already closed. "The thing about [the school] is when you're in that school—when you're *in* the school, though, it's like, it's not what they try to make it look."

Lynn Ross also uses the present tense as she returns to the theme of love while also acknowledging the flaws of the school and its students. Because she lived near the closed school, she often witnessed the troubling out-of-school behavior of students whom she loved, such as physical abuse and drug distribution, and sometimes struggled with how to contend with this knowledge within the confines of the school building. "These kids are *not* perfect. In any sense of the word. But because we proved to them through our words and our actions that we were there for them, that we cared…we loved them and they knew that we *loved* them. It wasn't put on, it wasn't. And we showed it.

Amanda Moss, the AP English teacher, responds specifically to the rhetoric of "failure" that surrounds school closure: "I never considered us a failing school or a failing teacher or failing students. I felt like pretty much everyone in that building was working really hard for those kids whether it was at [my third closed school] or at [my second closed school]. Trying to push them forward as far as they could go. You know you meet the students where they are, not where you would ideally want them to be…. And you keep pushing….And it's possible." Here, Moss insists on the school as a site not of failure, but of persevering possibility, despite external language of failure and the real complications of student and teacher limitations.

Loss: "You Just Remember Everything"

Many of the Bronzeville school community members with whom I spoke described feelings and behaviors that indicated grief for an institutional entity using personified language. That is, they spoke less of the material resources or forms of capital they lost when they lost their schools—the loss of a convenient commute, of a source of employment—and more often of the emotional bonds that were severed and the ongoing acute awareness of that severance. This grief seemed to be not only directed at a group of social relationships in aggregate, but rather at the school itself as a distinct institutional entity that was now gone. Rosenblatt & Wallace (2013), in their study *African-American Grief*, found that bereaved interviewees spoke of the ongoing pain of not being able to access the bonds once held with the lost person. One participant described grieving as "a mourning and a sorrowfulness [about]… having [lost] physical access to engaged in dialogue and to recall memories and to use as a resource for guidance, and so that is no longer there, as being able to call them up on the phone, to stop in to their house, because it's not available to us in this realm that we live in, so that's the sorrowful part" (p. 51). Martin, the student who had both his grammar and high school closed, frequently walks past his former grammar school on his way to work, or encounters it on his way to events at King College Prep (see Chapter 3). The building does not house a new school and simply sits vacant and dark. He vividly describes the emotions and memories that rise to the surface as he passes.

> Because sometimes when I walk [by] I do feel disappointed and sad because when I go to [work] I cut through my old school all the time and I go by King all the time. And as a kid that's the same walk I made going to school every day. And it's just like, you just remember everything, like, you remember—I don't know if you feel that way? [Ewing: Yeah.] You remember a tree! We played near that tree and my brother would take us

to school.…Like you'll walk to school with your brother and I see the tree and I see the school and then I see King and then I walk into my school. So it's like I would take a left and you would walk down and you just start remembering everything. Because like, it's this house, it's a house that you always remembered…. I remember I walked past it and I remember they were building it. Then I walked past this tree and there was a beehive there. And you know we were kids so— [Ewing (laughs): You're throwin—] You're messing with the bees (laughs). I know it's not good now, but you're messing with the bees and we're running from the bees and every time I walk past that tree I just think about the bees. When I walk past that house, I think about when they was building that house. And then make it to the corner…and then like it's different memories everywhere you go. You make it to this corner and you look down this way and you look down that way. And down this way is where you walked into the alley when you was in seventh grade….And I just remember how a bus used to sit in front of the school….And then you just remember how when school had end-of-the-school-year bashes… how people who graduated would come back, and then you're like "Who was that?" …but he's cool because he's older. And you go through all that. And you just get a little bit angry because they use the school to for different stuff now. And it's like you just see that. You just…. We got a field right there—I think I even remember when they was building that field. Wow….And this is behind the school and then we used to play football there every morning….And when I walk in there I just remember, this is on my journey to [work], I just remember, like, we played football there. And I get a little bit angry cause now you'll just see cars parked…. You just get a little bit angry because all the memories and stuff.

In this extended narrative, Martin describes, with great specificity, the quotidian details of his life at the now-closed school: a specific tree where he played, the childhood misdeed of tampering with a beehive, seeing older graduates of his school and looking up to them, playing football, walking with his brother. He speaks fluidly, the memories coming one after another, punctuated by descriptions of how he feels (disappointed, sad, angry). As he switches between a first-person and second-person narrative, he periodically invites me into the memories with him, and I find myself internally encountering a set of memories both real and imagined, a blend of his football field, his alley, his tree, and my own. At the beginning of the narrative, Martin seems concerned

that what he is about to say may somehow be deviant or might make me uncomfortable,

and checks for my affirmation ("I don't know if you feel that way?") before continuing.

He speaks candidly about this sense of uncertainty, telling me that he hesitates to share

these feelings with others but has a hard time articulating at first precisely why.

> I don't know how to say it though. But it's not something—it's kind of embarrassing sometimes. And it's not embarrassing as "oh you're embarrassing, this is stupid." It's embarrassing as I don't know how to… it's like you have to talk about it and people are like—I don't know. I don't know how to say it, but I don't find myself talking about it a lot. [Ewing: Do you feel like people will look at you a certain way?] A certain—I don't even know how to say it but it's like not something you want to talk about a lot. It's not easy to talk about…it's not something that you just bring up. Because like I said it's not normal. It's not something that everybody has gone through. Sometimes when stuff is different it's like—oh, put it like [this]: you came to school with a mark on your face right? And maybe it was a mark because you was doing something stupid and then people are intensely asking you questions….

Kauffman (2010) argues that shame is a pervasive but rarely-discussed aspect of the

grieving experience, and that the process of grief can induce feelings of shame through

many routes: shame at the stigma of death, shame at one's feelings of rage or anger,

shame at one's own fear of death, shame at feeling weak or like a failure. Martin

describes not wanting to share his experience because others may find it aberrant or

strange, "not normal." He compares it to the experience of coming to school with a mark

on one's face; since teachers are mandated reporters, CPS requires them to immediately

call the Department of Children and Family Services. Thus, the "mark" is like a scarlet

letter: not only is it ugly and disfiguring, but it prompts uncomfortable personal questions

regarding one's home life, and therefore one's own value as a person and the value of

one's family. Given the rhetoric of school failure discussed in the previous section,

Martin has reasonable fears that a frank conversation about school closure might result in

similarly invasive and judgmental questions and personal assessments. After all, what kind of person goes to a failing school? The teachers I interviewed expressed similar fears, that in trying to seek a job after school closure they would be irrevocably marked as bad teachers and would have a hard time finding employment.

Coping with the Trauma of Loss

Teachers also recalled the intensity of the emotions they felt upon first learning that their schools would close. Munro called it "an amazing shock to the system," echoing Johnson's (2013) description of school closure as "shock therapy" and Lipman, Vaughan, and Gutierrez's description of their impact as "root shock" (2014). Carlina Baker was a teacher at a school that was slated to receive students from a closing school, and then move from its original building into the building of the closed school. While officially this meant that Baker's school remained open, she and her colleagues experienced it functionally as a closure—they would be leaving the building that was familiar to them and going to another building, and most of their students, unhappy with the decision (largely because of the new building's proximity to public housing), transferred to other schools. During the process, she says, "Everybody was scared. You know, scared shitless basically… everybody was really scared. Everybody went to all the meetings and we wrote speeches and got our best and brightest up there and said speak for [our school]. And when I realized how the meetings were going it was like, why waste your time? You know? It was like a slap in the face. And I still get like a little emotional about it just because [long pause] just because of like—of how *voiceless* we all felt. Yeah. So it was really hard. And at the end everybody kind of said, 'okay we know this school is going to close, and we'll probably be moved somewhere else.' That was the

consensus that we were kind of—the reality, I guess, of it. Now my son's school closed as well."

Baker describes a cycle of feelings that precipitated the actual loss of the school: fear surrounding the process, followed by collective efforts to fight the closing, then the startling realization that their efforts would not succeed ("like a slap in the face"), followed by feelings of futility or voicelessness, and then resignation, coupled with the unsettling news that her son's school, also in Bronzeville, would be closing as well. The cycle she describes is reminiscent of the five stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) of the well-known Kübler-Ross model of grief, developed through interviews with terminally ill patients coming to terms with the inevitability of their own death. Baker, who in addition to being a classroom teacher is trained as an art therapist, uses this lens to draw direct connections between the experience of losing a school and the experience of grieving a death: "You go through a mourning period. Definitely. It's like a loss. And you're constantly reminded by this empty, this empty building that you still have to pass every day. Like a tombstone. You know it's just still sitting there so yeah it's sad. [small laugh] It really is sad." Like Martin, Baker finds herself triggered by the experience of passing the shuttered school as she goes about her business in the neighborhood. Also like Martin, she responds to the perceived social taboo of talking about the death of the school, laughing with a slight awkwardness or embarrassment in the middle of her account as though to mitigate any discomfort I might feel at her frank discussion of her own sadness.

Warner called the experience of closure "so demoralizing." She draws a connection between the experience of the closure and the deaths of students that occurred

at roughly the same time. "It was just—it was really bad. And that last year, in the last 8 weeks of school, we lost three kids to violence. And then they closed my school. And not only did they—ugh, this is where I get really angry. They did it in the slowest, most insane, painful way possible." Warner went from the closed school to another school, where she felt deeply unhappy, before moving to her present position at the North Side school; thus, she has had time to forge new bonds and move on professionally and personally. However, she says, "I don't know if I'll ever recover from losing that school." After leaving the closed school, she experienced such severe anxiety in her new position that she was hospitalized.

Other teachers describe how their own emotional responses were compounded and amplified by an overall climate of stress, anxiety, and sadness, as students and teachers struggled to cope with loss. Moss says she felt "devastated," and that everyone was "feed[ing] off of the same energy" to create a pervasive sense of stress and despair. "We were all depressed," says Moss. "I remember I started having panic attacks. So many people were just under so much stress. And the kids were very anxious. They didn't know what was going to happen to them."

Robinson describes similar feelings of despair and hopelessness, and feels anger toward the Board of Education for subjecting the community to these experiences. Like Baker, she describes a moment of resigned certainty when she understood that attempts to save the school would be futile, and calls the hurtful decisions "intentional, premeditated to destroy."

> I sat right there on the corner…and I cried my eyes out. Do you know how it feels for me as a mama? I have raised my kids and my grandkids. And for them to do them like that—you can hurt me. I really don't care. But you don't have to hurt the babies. You don't. This is a hate crime. I said,

> "I don't care what you say. Y'all talkin about kids." Look…. That hurt. Ain't no mama gonna let you hurt their kids…. So I knew then that it was a formula of destruction.

Robinson describes this hurt as continuing long after students were supposed to be settled comfortably into receiving schools. She tells of an eighth grader whom she found breaking down in tears on her walk to school. "She said she hated school. Ain't never hated school! She grew up there…. They have broken, they have knocked the life out of many of these children. They have made them so unhappy. But besides that, they have hurt them. They have hurt them to no end." In the face of this pain, she asks plaintively, "Who can we run to? Who can we really run to?"

Speaking from her perspective as an art therapist, Baker uses the language of trauma to describe students' and teachers' attempts to cope with the experience of closure, suggesting that the decision-makers behind school closure need to be more acutely aware of its effects. "I have to say that Rahm Emanuel has to understand that it's a violent act against a community when you constantly do these type of things. And so there's definitely a PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] response. Even for the teachers, they're like 'are you going to leave us too?' [when they are] talking to the principal." Like Munro, she mentions public housing reunions as a comparative point to demonstrate that people in Bronzeville retain institutional bonds long after the institution itself has ceased to exist. "Even with the closing of the projects," she says, "Stateway Gardens, they have a big reunion every year where people come to Dunbar Park and meet up. It's like a humongous event. So it's like… yeah you're losing your family."

This connection between the mourning of schools and the mourning of public housing may reflect the Bronzeville community's particular history (see Chapter 1).

Some participants suggested that Bronzeville residents might be especially unsettled by having their longstanding institutional bonds disrupted because of the community's insularity. Steven, a high school senior, is a fourth-generation Bronzeville resident, but has attended four schools (the one in Bronzeville is now closed) and lived briefly in another state, giving him a comparative perspective on the community. "Everyone knows everybody…. Everyone grows up the same around here…. It's a strong community," he says. "Everyone is like a big family. That's how I see it." He finds himself unsure about the fate of other young people when he sees closed schools around the area. "I just wonder what happened to them. I do see schools that when I was younger were open. They're closed, it's boarded up now. I wonder what happened to all those kids. Where are they going now?"

While models such as the Kübler-Ross cycle of grief are intended to help us understand mourning as something that eventually ends, in some cases the cessation of mourning is all but unattainable. In some instances, "recovery" from a state of mourning is impossible, leaving the bereaved in what Freud would call a state of melancholia and what contemporary psychologists would refer to as complicated mourning. Butler (2003) describes how when it is a *place* that is lost, an encounter with the site where it once stood provides a persistently renewed source of pain:

> Places are lost—destroyed, vacated, barred—but then there is some new place, and it is not the first, can never be the first. And so there is an impossibility housed at the site of this new place. What is new, newness itself, is founded upon the loss of original place, and so it is a newness that has within it a sense of belatedness, of coming after, and of being thus fundamentally determined by a past that continues to inform it. And so this past is not actually past in the sense of "over," since it continues as an animating absence in the presence, one that makes itself known precisely in and through the survival of anachronism itself. (p. 468)

An Unjust Death

If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
    - Claude McKay

Novelist R. Clifton Spargo, analyzing the works of the Jewish philosopher and World War II prisoner of war Emmanuel Levinas, writes that Levinas's work centers "the historical specter of the unjust death." Understanding the death of another as occurring within the shadow of a larger incident of injustice renders the process of mourning at once personal and historical, such that "mourning a figure of the past [has] everything to do with the injustice of the present" (2006, p. 21). Many of the participants I spoke with adamantly criticized the process through which their schools were lost, and their belief that it was fundamentally unjust shaped their mourning after the fact. That is, the fact that the death of the institution was seen as unjust enhanced their feelings of sorrow, or made them angry in a way that prolonged their mourning period. Amanda Warner said that the closings were painful because they were "so capriciously done." Asif Wilson, a teacher who joined the Dyett hunger strike (see Chapter 3) in solidarity after experiencing the closure of his own school on the West Side, described being struck simultaneously by intense emotions and by a sense of injustice regarding the nature of the closure process.

> I was on my couch when we heard about my school closing on [the local affiliate of] Fox News. They put a picture—they did their nine o'clock news broadcast from the front of [my school]. Like "we're standing in front of [this school], one of the fifty schools that will be closed," and I'm like…[exhales] *oh*. It goes to show the level of fucking disrespect these people have—I'll define it for you specifically: the Board of Education, the fucking Mayor—for black communities. They didn't even have the compassion or care to tell the community before they told Fox News. They didn't send a memo out, they didn't send an email, you could have sent an official letter out to the families. You could have done a lot. But

you only engage through a press release. They're fucking cowards. They're cowards…. I started crying. It was a really emotional time for all of us at the school. Because it was like…it was such an uninformed process. It was like, 100 schools today. 50 schools. And CPS—they'll do this! Sit, sit, sit. Hit real hard. Sit in our fucking closet, plan, be decisive, be very strategic in private. Which shows their lack of public accountability. They are not a transparent organization.

Prentice, a former student at a closed school, also blamed the Mayor for not being present or transparent about the school closure process, saying that if he were Mayor he would personally visit schools before closing them. "If you're a boss, or if you're the mayor or whatever your position is, you shouldn't be scared to go out to the public….A lot of them are scared. You don't see them making any type of appearances in public. You know they're doing something secret. They're grimy. He's scary [scared]." Roberts, the local businessman, was even more straightforward, calling the public closure hearings "all bullshit. Public hearings are just there to let you talk. 'We already know what we're gonna do, but we're giving you a chance to feel good about talking.'" He echoed Prentice's point about district employees' failure to engage with the community, saying, "some of them live in the suburbs. Some of them live in Lake View, Lincoln Park. And they don't leave that office. They don't go to any meetings in the community. They don't know and they really don't want to know."

Other participants shared Wilson's sense of the school closings as being part of a broader pattern of disrespect for people of color in Chicago, particularly black Chicagoans. Martin, the student who spoke so vividly about his memories of playing football at his school, referred to the symbolic importance of the closed schools' names as evidence of this (similar to closure hearing participants in Chapter 2 and Dyett supporters in Chapter 3).

> When you take over, when you take over a hood—because the people that lived [the history] aren't going to live forever. The people that actually experienced, that lived that. And as you're getting older and you're listening to these stories at some point you still gotta move on and you can't—you're not going to remember everything your parents told you. So that's how you get black history to go away. That's how you get black history to go away. Closing schools. The schools I went to… [lists Bronzeville schools named for famous African-Americans]. They're closing these schools down. That's how you get black history to go away…. It's like we've been through a lot and people always try to—I mean the same people who will take everything you have will blame it on you for not having anything.

Baker, the teacher and art therapist, concurs, arguing that to change the names of schools is "almost like they're erasing history." Like other teachers I spoke with, she challenges the narrative of the "failing school," but with a critique tied directly to a critique of racism and white supremacy. "The idea of closing a school based on test scores is just, it's so absurd to me. Especially with the standardized test scores and how they are, how they are centered in eugenics…. So you're closing schools in these areas that have been like harmed by institutionalized racism and white supremacy. You're closing these schools, these institutions that are pillars and blaming them." Robinson makes a similar historical connection, comparing the impact of school closures to the murder of Emmett Till and arguing that Chicago's black youth have faced a continuous thread of injustice: "Emmett Till was pulled deliberately out of his house, taken from his grandma. We still repeating the same death of every black child that dies and don't get justice. It's Emmett Till all over again."

Richard Collins, the director of a community non-profit in Bronzeville, compares the 2013 school closures with prior instances of closure to make the case that it was not only or primarily the fact of closure, but the injustice of the process surrounding closure

that made the community protest with such fervor.

> The Shakespeare thing [the closure of Shakespeare Elementary in 1992] was seen as, like, an anomaly. It was like, man, that's not cool, but it happens. When KOCO organized to get King High School built [in 1971], it was because the old Forrestville [high] school was overcrowded. And so before that happened, Forrestville closed. It's not like people are unreasonable and don't ever see the need to close a school. It was just like, "wow, that's not cool, but sometimes these things happen," we move on. But then Einstein closed, right there in the footprint of Ida B. Wells. And then, Big Picture closed…. So that was like, there's something different happening here. These school closings aren't about good education policy. They're about something else. Of course, people in the neighborhood, they knew what it was.

Ross echoed this sense of being angry not only at the outcome of school closure, but

primarily upset with the means through which it was done. As a social studies teacher,

she felt that she was sensitive to and understanding of concepts like supply and demand

and the economic constraints of a district budget, but felt insulted at the hypocrisy with

which these concepts were deployed by the district.

> What pissed me off so much was….I mean, I *get* economics….So some schools have to close. I absolutely get that. But you can't tell me that you don't have money, and in the same breath open charter schools….I was aware of what was happening in the neighborhood and understood, because I'm a social science teacher, that it was because of gentrification. I don't even think that there was a real attempt to cover up the fact that… I mean, maybe they thought it was, because they just thought we're so ignorant. But I just thought, this is so *blatant*. And it started with the closing of King High School. It's almost like, "I poured gasoline on your house, and then it's your fault that it's on fire."

This metaphor of gasoline is reminiscent of Martin's comment (people will take

everything you have, then blame you for having nothing) as well as Baker's point about

the injustice of misplaced blame. Ross referred, as well, to the fact that many Bronzeville

schools were primarily constructed to house public housing residents (see Chapter 1), and

extended the issue of [a lack of] community input from schools to housing policy: "They

were just putting up these factory schools. With no input from the community. Why?

Because the community was black. And poor…. If you look at it, the schools in the

projects are the ones that closed first. 'Oh, project schools, projects are no longer here,

oop! Do away with the school.' But if they would have thought about making these

community schools in the first place, you wouldn't have as many issues."

Roberts argued that the real sense of injustice arose from a district logic that

conflated an economic rationale (closing schools because they are underutilized and

draining the budget) and an academic rationale (closing schools because they have low

test scores), since the latter was unnecessarily "insulting" to community members. He

believed adamantly that if CPS had focused purely on a resource-based argument, while

also acknowledging the reality of the racist history of segregation, public housing

construction, and public housing demolition, residents would have been amenable to

change.

> "Well, these kids are failing anyway." Don't do that! Don't do it! Just
> take it strictly from the business part of it and tell people, if we can close
> this school and take your kids to a school four blocks away, now those
> kids are gonna have a full library, nurse, arts program, everything. We can
> move it there. Keep that narrative. And then people would say, "oh, I'm
> leaving my school even though my granddaddy went there, I went there,
> this is gonna be better because they're bringing over all the resources."
> And *do* something. Put new windows in. Do what you gotta do. Just make
> it nice. And then you ingratiate people. People aren't blind, really, that
> much. But they always have to add the insult…. Just leave it alone. It's
> always a comparison [between schools' test scores]…. I think they should
> have just said, "yes, this is a race issue, because the projects were built
> because of racial bias. So when the projects came down, it affects black
> people more than people in Lincoln Park." And it is a racial issue. Don't
> dodge it. And the schools that are being closed are in black areas for a
> reason. Look at the history…. To me, if you strike people with the truth,
> swift and hard, then they have a different perspective of you.

Roberts also felt that the multi-step closure process extended residents' suffering

unnecessarily: "Oh, my goodness. People said it was too fast, but I think it was way too slow. Way too slow. It just made it more painful. And it kept it… it stayed on people's minds."

Reflecting Chicago's deeply entrenched history of street organizations and organized crime, some participants characterized Mayor Emanuel as a gang leader beholden to his "cronies" instead of to average citizens, deploying district employees as "enforcers." (We also saw this characterization in Chapter 2, when one community participant at a closure hearing shouted "y'all are a gang!" at district representatives.) Robinson put it explicitly: "They ain't worried about the consequences. They worried about how much more money I'ma get. This is a big hit. They talk about the gangsters, they talk about Al Capone, they talk about the Vice Lords, they talk about the [Gangster] Disciples. But this government is the worst example of interrogating and railroading the people, and gangsters. We [citizens] don't have nobody." Describing the mayor, Prentice said, "He's just trying to collect his money, he's just trying to get his. And whoever is in on it, they get theirs. And they just go about their day and stay quiet." Roberts said of district employees, "They don't care. They get their $150,000 or $160,000 a year to enforce things." These uses of gang imagery are complicated, because for many Chicagoans gangs are an embedded part of social life, not a distinct criminal class but a set of multi-generational social bonds (Ralph, 2014). Thus, for some participants, the mayor's transgression was not the fact of being a gang leader, but his failure to act honorably within the ethical logic of gang social codes—in contrast to his predecessor, Mayor Richard M. Daley, who was seen as a "real" gangster. "And no matter what people outside Chicago say," says Roberts, "people in Chicago respect that. Because this

is a gangster town." Collins, the non-profit director, made a similar comparison to Daley:

> What he's doing isn't drastically different—in some ways it is. I mean, he just doesn't care. Appearance means nothing. He's doing the same stuff: Daley closed schools, Rahm closed schools. Daley tore down public housing, Rahm's tearing down public housing. Daley was cookin the books, Rahm's cookin the books. It's the same thing. It's just, what Rahm is doing is so egregious that it's hard to look the other way. It's like, you know, everybody knows that the Mafia kills people. But you just can't kill people in broad daylight and not expect anything to happen…. It's like dude, I'm with you, but dag!

Much like Ross's characterization of school closings as "blatant," Collins here is suggesting that the Mayor is not adhering to "the Chicago way," a political tradition that embraces a certain amount of cronyism, nepotism, and corruption—but bears with it the expectation that one be discreet or at least maintain the appearance of propriety. In contrast to Daley's behind-the-scenes dealings, Emanuel's actions are seen as disrespectful, like committing a murder in broad daylight.

Participants' overall focus on the *way* in which the loss of their schools occurred is similar to perspectives heard by Deeds and Pattillo (2015) in their study of a school closure in Newark, New Jersey. "You know, first off, sometimes it's not what you do but how you do it," one teacher told them. "How it was done was just totally wrong… and disturbing in the case of teachers. They *are* employees but it's not what you do, it's how you do it" (Deeds & Pattillo, 2015, p. 487). Fay (2015) argues that such contestation results from the "abnormal justice" inherent in urban school closure: a context where competing entities do not share a common set of presumptions regarding what constitutes justice; further, Fay argues, community members face the perceived injustice of *misrepresentation* (being denied political participation as legitimate actors and decision-makers in the process of school closure) and *misrecognition* (feeling disrespected or

subordinated). Both misrepresentation and misrecognition are pervasive in the participant accounts. Warner said she felt like the district was telling her and other teachers implicitly, "'You're just stupid women. Shut up and do what we tell you to do.' That's the attitude that comes from downtown and comes from the mayor's office," while Moss said of the school closing hearings, "It was already decided pretty much. I mean I don't think it mattered what we said. I really don't believe it mattered at all."

The Importance of Narrative and Meaning-Making

The ability of the bereaved to construct a meaningful narrative out of the experience of loss is crucial to the mourning process. Related to the discussion above of just versus unjust deaths, Rosenblatt & Wallace (2013) describe how, for African-American mourners, the process of meaning-making can be influenced by the question of whether racism was directly or indirectly responsible for the loss. "When economic discrimination or direct racism seems to a grieving African American to be partly or fully responsible for a death, it may add elements of anger, rage, and indignation to the grief…. There are also matters of meaning making. People make meanings about the death as a part of the grief process. In making meaning, they come to a story about the person who died, what happened that brought about the death, and what feelings are appropriate" (p. 9).

Many individuals that I spoke to were candid about their own attempts to process and understand what had happened in the wake of a school closure. For Wilson, the teacher whose West Side school closed, the experience made him think critically about the very nature of his profession. "It brought up a lot of stuff. It was like, now I know

what teaching is about. Teaching is not about math, science, reading, writing, gym, music. It's about engaging young folks in a political process where they can go out into the world and think about it deeply and do something about *their* world." While Wilson found the lack of a transparent process frustrating, it renewed his sense of mission as a teacher dedicated to helping students be active political agents. Martin looked back on his two consecutive school closure experiences and was able to articulate patterns that he believes preceded the official decision. "I liked my grammar school, but as far as I can remember I really can't really remember any disinvestment in it [until] my eighth grade year is when they started changing people…when they start changing people I feel like they're going to try to attack the schools. Because they take away our principal… it's people in a school that you're supposed to have there for a while….I feel like when they start changing people that's when you need to watch what's happening to your school."

When asked how community members whom he works with have experienced and processed school closures, Collins explained Bronzeville residents' response in terms of larger patterns of pain, loss, and resilience, suggesting that some people shut down emotionally rather than let themselves experience the full weight of their loss.

> As resilient people, as I would imagine is the case for most oppressed people around the world, you're constantly used to adapting to the new normal. Nothing is ever stable. Nothing is ever stable. And so instability is the norm. …And so it's sort of that operational system that's constantly running in the background that we encounter when we run into people….And you have people when the school year starts who still aren't in school, because they're like "what do I do?" I think that without being in the moment and actually experiencing it, people are just incapable of processing the different layers that people have to navigate on a daily basis. It's stressful. It's emotionally tumultuous to experience the loss of your housing, or your school for your child, or the loss of your child, or your child experiencing the loss of one of their friends to violence. But we have to do it every day. And so there's an aspect of us that does become dehumanized. Because we can't. It's like, who in their right mind would

deal with that kind of a letdown? You'd go crazy. And so we cut off parts of ourselves.

Perhaps recognizing this possibility—an emotional shutdown in lieu of an honest reckoning with loss—the Bronzeville teachers with whom I spoke talked emphatically about their belief that they were responsible for helping children process and make meaning of school closure, even as they themselves were mourning. Baker expressed concerns at students repeating the language of failure that they heard in the news media, rhetoric that positioned them (and their low test scores) as being to blame for the loss of their school. In her current teaching position, she invited the students (relocated to a new building after their old school closed) to share their feelings and recollections about what happened. "Many of them remember the school closings and how they felt about it…. It's interesting what they say. They're like 'yeah the schools were closed because we're black and we were failing all our tests.' And it's like 'well, actually you know, the schools were closed because they were underutilized.' And they're like, 'but we weren't—there were kids everywhere!' So how do you explain that to someone?" From a therapeutic perspective, Baker feels that having these conversations with students openly is important to help them "heal and move on, or cope and move on."

In the days between the announcement of potential closure and the final decision, Moss says, she and other teachers tried to mask their own feelings to better support the young people around them. "You know, I think we tried to put a nice face on it…. 'You'll have new teachers, but I'm sure those teachers are going to care about you as well.' Do you know what I mean? I don't think we sat there and like tried to paint an even uglier picture. We didn't want to exacerbate their anxiety or their fear or their pain of loss. Because they were feeling loss too."

Teachers' Reluctance to Love Again

Three of the five teachers I spoke with expressed a sense of hesitation and fear regarding the possibility of growing attached to another school and facing potential additional trauma. A fourth teacher did not discuss such reluctance openly, but has left the teaching profession in favor of another field altogether. Among those who mentioned it explicitly, I was struck to hear that they spoke of this reluctance with a language of intimacy and vulnerability, reminiscent of someone who has experienced a romantic or other interpersonal heartbreak. Katherine Warner, the teacher who said she would not "ever recover" from losing her school, described how difficult it was for her to try to integrate at the school she went to subsequently. Even though the school was geographically close to the closed school and served a similar student population, she had a hard time working with the students, faculty, and administration. "I was in tears with my principal at [the new school]. Because he was like, 'I don't know how to make this better with you.' And I said, you know, I was so heartbroken after what they did to [the closed school] that to open myself up, to be that integral part of a school again? I don't know I could do it."

Lynn Ross also compared her level of commitment and intense social bonding at the closed school to a much different sense of herself at her new school, an academically competitive school on the South Side. "At my old school, I felt like, I'ma give you everything, and I'ma stay till 7 o'clock at night. And you can sit in here if you don't wanna go home…. [But] after everything that happened with [the closed school], I was like, "I have spent five years of my life doing this, and it's gone. So what am I going to… I need to figure out what's going to fulfill me, because clearly this can be gone. Any day,

any time…. I loved doing what I do and it's gone." Ross's boundless attitude toward her students, her willingness to "give you everything," was curtailed when the experience of loss made her realize that the social bonds she thrived on could be temporary and could be taken away. At her new school, she maintains only a half-time position (a rarity in CPS, especially for teachers who teach core academic subjects as Ross does) and is spending the rest of her time pursuing a singing career. In addition to managing her time differently vis-à-vis her students, Ross is also reluctant to bond with her colleagues at the new school. At her old school, "we were going to the bar together, we were going to hang out, we were having lunch together. We were friends." At the time of our interview, Ross had weekend plans to visit one of her old colleagues, who had just purchased a new house. Other old colleagues would be visiting as well, and they planned to spend the day together chatting, eating, and drinking in celebration of the milestone. Despite the fact that she was about to enter her fourth year as a faculty member at the new school, Ross says, "There's not that many people [there] that if I was going to leave, I'd be like 'oh, let's go [hang out]!' …I can't see myself doing that."

Amanda Moss, too, had a hard time handling the move from a closed school to a new school (which would also ultimately close as well). "That first year was really, really rough. I was unhappy, I didn't want to be there. This was not my choice, right? I was sort of mourning, I guess, my loss." When news came down that this school would also face closure, Moss felt that, based on her previous experience, trying to resist was pointless. "It was already decided and they were just going through the motions. The downtown people, not the people on the ground, but the downtown people were just going through the motions, saying we're going to have a hearing and decide. So that's when I started

applying to graduate schools." Now, Moss is a substitute teacher, and using the flexible

schedule to pursue a literary career, rather than continuing as a classroom teacher after

nine years in the district. "At this point I don't envision myself going back to teaching

full time. I don't really trust—the students that I would want to teach, I just don't trust the

system to allow me to teach them. I wouldn't want to get all invested again, and all of

that time and energy and focus."

Institutional Mourning in a World Gone Wild

In *African American Mourning Stories*, Karla Holloway shares reflections on

grief, death, and mourning that are intended to illustrate something fundamental about the

nature of mortality in black life, and thereby something about the nature of the world.

"The stories constructed from reflection on these deaths are mourning stories. Their

performance constructs a narrative that rehearses the permeability and violence of our

culture's racialized boundary conditions. The narratives are imagined in fiction and are

improvised in performative community rituals" (Holloway, 1997, p. 34). The personal

stories related in this chapter, similarly, are grounded in individual truths, but together

they construct a narrative about the nature of loss itself, and the ways in which communal

institutions can be mourned much as people can—with recollections of love in the face of

their imperfection, with poignant expressions of pain and intense emotion, with a keen

sense of whether the death was just or unjust, and with an accompanying fear of loving

again, lest the mourners find themselves vulnerable to further pain when they can barely

make sense of what they have already borne. These "mourning stories" are an illustration

of what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) call the "persistent irony... that as one

moves closer to the unique characteristics of a person or place, one discovers the

universal" (p. 14). While the idea of institutional mourning is derived from the stories of

school closures in Bronzeville, the utility and implications of the framework exceed this

context. At its core, institutional mourning is an important counter-story to the narrative

of neighborhood and city transformation as a form of progress that is inherently positive

or, at worst, value-free. As Smith and Stovall (2008) write, the changes wrought in

Bronzeville are done so under the promise of a positive metamorphosis, but while "the

discourses of 'transformation' and 'renaissance' evoke such promise for the new gentry,"

write Smith and Stovall (2008), but "a counter-story is omitted, or masked" (p. 140). Or,

as a group of four black teenage poets put it during the 2014 Louder Than A Bomb Teen

Poetry Slam Festival[xxii]:

> Hammer in one hand, paintbrush in the other
> Rahm Emanuel singlehandedly destroying our city
> Mister Wreck-It Rahm / look at what Chicago's becoming
> Bending the rules to fit a lie of building a new Chicago
> Building new streets when your own plan got some potholes
> Tearing down dreams / it's getting real windy in these streets
> Where Xs mark the spot where his wrecking ball is next to drop
> We are not included in the blueprint of the new Chicago
> We're being pushed out / our buildings being transformed into condos
> And we know those ain't for us.

<center>---</center>

Wilson and Chaddha (2009) suggest that while many qualitative researchers,

particularly ethnographers, have a dichotomous view of whether there should be an

inductive or deductive relationship between their empirical work and their theoretical

preoccupations—that is, whether a good sociologist ought to enter the field armed with a

clear theoretical lens that shapes her observations, or develop a theoretical framework

purely in response to the findings in the field—there can in fact be a more nuanced—dialogic rather than dichotomous—relationship between theory and empiricism. "[Some] studies start out with a deductive theory and end up generating theoretical arguments in an inductive process that integrates old theoretically derived ideas with new and unanticipated theoretical arguments based on data uncovered in the field research" (p. 551). Ultimately, the authors argue, "[t]he extent to which work can withstand critical and prolonged scrutiny in the context of validation will be based in large measure on the researcher's creative insights in the discovery and integration of empirical findings and theoretical ideas" (p. 560). While the theoretical ideas presented in this chapter were developed from insights in the field, they are bolstered by a body of existing literature on mourning and its functioning, and it is my hope that other scholars will determine whether, how, and to what extent they have veracity in contexts other than the ones I discuss here.

That said, as the loss of schools and black institutions is a broad national phenomenon, I suspect that institutional mourning may be a useful framework for understanding affective responses to institutional loss in cities such as New Orleans, Philadelphia, Detroit, Washington, and many others. In his account of the closure of his historic New York City alma mater (an essay with the online title "The Life and Death of Jamaica High School"), Cobb (2015) describes visiting the site of the old building and finding it covered in tarp. "It looked," he writes, "as if it were draped in a shroud." Hunter (2013) describes the contemporary Black Seventh Ward in Philadelphia as a "graveyard," a site of collective black memory where residents honor the institutions they have lost (p. 190). Demby (2015) describes taking a friend on a walking tour around his

native Philadelphia, only to find the school he once attended is no more.

> [M]emory was the only place that Durham—my Durham—still existed. The school had closed its doors in the late 1990s because of the city's crushing budget problems, and was later swept up in a wave of charterization that took over Philly after I graduated. The old Durham building now housed something called the Independence Charter School…. It was a peculiar sense of loss that I felt the day I visited Durham — one of unmooring.

Butler (2003) argues that when a community is faced with the loss of a place, that loss can become so insurmountable for the community that it becomes part and parcel of the community's own sense of self-definition, "where community does not overcome the loss, where the community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as community" (p. 468). Understanding these tropes of death and mourning as they pertain not to the people we love, but to the places in which we love them, has a particular gravity during a time when the deaths of black people at the hand of the state—through such mechanisms as police violence and mass incarceration—are receiving renewed attention. In response to calls for social transformation and an end to such violence, critics of the movement for black lives often refer to notion of "black on black crime": the suggestion that violence at the hands of the state is dwarfed by the phenomenon of "black people killing themselves," a discursive move that pivots accountability and culpability away from state-sanctioned structures and firmly within the bounds of individual responsibility.

Such rhetoric is uncannily mirrored in some citizens' justification of school closures, using language that suggests the students of closing schools themselves harbor some kind of pathology that will inevitably infect and kill any institution of which they are a part. Johnson (2013) cites a local newspaper's commentary on a school closure in

an editorial: "Those same problem students who wrecked [the closing school] will shift to other schools, where they might again cause dropout statistics to rise and test scores to fall" (p. 18). Martin, the recent high school graduate whom I interviewed, described himself as a habitual "comment-reader" who couldn't help but scroll down to the comments section and read average people's responses to the news of his school closing, even though what he saw was painful—commenters suggesting that the students themselves were the problem.

Another Bronzeville recent high school graduate told me that his best friend of many years had recently been shot, and encouraged me to look up the reports surrounding his death. In one news story, amidst commenters who knew the slain young man saying how senseless the murder was and others offering prayers and support, one commenter wrote: "If and I mean if [the alleged shooter] did what they are saying then he had a reason. [The deceased] was in the game heavy so what did u expect was going to happen... if u in that life thats what happen."[xxiii] Through these logics, black death— whether experienced by an individual or by an institution—is unfortunate, but traceable to the subjects themselves, who are the source of the problem. In this logic, the black subject is not the victim, but the pathogen.

In her reflection on rites of mourning in the black community in which she grew up, bell hooks describes how funerary rites are also a chance for communion and celebratory ritual among mourners: "One celebrates the passing of life, not only to ease the transition of the dead but to make it known that the moment is also a time of reunion, when those who have been long separated come together" (hooks, 1993, p. 3). Faced with the rhetoric of black pathology, of school failure and the fundamental unworthiness that

underlies it, a theory of institutional mourning thus becomes not only a framework for understanding, but also for reclamation—an insistence on the rites of remembrance and honor, of eulogizing, of making space for sorrow, and coming together in celebration. In the practice of institutional mourning, those who have been scattered by loss retain the possibility of coming together again, like displaced public housing residents gathering for a picnic—making a new place where the old place once stood, with the understanding that even if it is not the same, it is better than no place at all.

Conclusion

"I gave him the letter t read and when he finished he said, 'You go, my child; you're the one to go, for you have the story to tell.' It seemed like an open door in a stone wall."
- Ida B. Wells (1928)

On a fall afternoon, I stop into my favorite bakery on 47th Street. The last time I was here, the boy working behind the counter was a newly-graduated eighth-grader pulling summer duty at the family business. Now he is a freshman at a competitive, well-regarded school not far from here. His grandfather watches him as he rings me up for my peach cobbler, standing amid the faded calendars, handwritten signs, and newspaper clippings of glowing restaurant reviews from over the years. "I swear you grew three inches over the summer!" I exclaim. He blushes and nods slightly, handing me my change and assuring me that high school is going well so far. In Bronzeville, a visit to a place like this—a family-owned business, an artist's workspace, the park on a sunny day—can lend you the feeling of being lost in time, like the community has stood still as the rest of the world has rushed forward. And yet, though much remains the same, so much has changed. Where high-rise projects stood, vast lots of grass or concrete sprawl toward the horizon. Where children once ran and tumbled and called out to one another, playgrounds sit defunct, surrounded by darkened windows. Mayo is gone. Williams is gone. Pershing West is gone. Overton is gone. Dyett, as the world once knew it is, gone. The State Street Corridor is gone. With it, so many families have gone. What remains are questions and stories, and the people who keep them.

The preceding chapters leave us with several discomfiting questions. What does school closure, and its disproportionate clustering in communities like Bronzeville, signify about a fundamental devaluation of African-American children, their families,

and black life in general? Shall we remain hopeful that, after years of fervent critique, we can topple the positivist calculus of school accountability, one that places maximal weight on metrics such as test scores and interchangeable cost-cutting measures to the detriment of child development and equity? Is there room for establishing democratic governance and real grassroots participation in a school system that has been run more like an oligarchy? More immediately, how do we shape a future for a community that has lost so many institutions, through a lens that values the desires and dreams of community members above all else?

And what of the stories? In the preceding pages, I have tried to tell some of the stories as I can discern them: the story of how migrants from the south were hemmed into Bronzeville by an invisible wall of prejudice and violence, and the segregated schools that sprang up to serve children and families only to see those families scattered when public housing projects were demolished. I have told the story of how the descendants of those migrants spoke out against the school district in a way that challenged a version of reality with which they did not agree, asserting the primacy of their families, their history, and an acknowledgment of racial injustice over and against a narrative that diluted or even erased all three. In the Dyett story, that same resilient insistence showed itself in a willingness to risk life and limb with the hope not only of resurrecting one school, but of reclaiming a sense of influence in the city's political machinations that seemed all but impossible to attain. The final story I tell, the story of mourning, of love and loss, is in some ways an epilogue—a narration of what comes *after*—but in other ways, marks the potential for a space of new beginning, grounded in the shared experience of communion described by bell hooks.

Chapter 1 includes Richard Wright's detailed descriptions of Bronzeville's kitchenette buildings. Later in the same volume, *12 Million Black Voices*, he describes the devastating weight on the shoulders of migrants coming northward. "[The world] was destined to test all we were, [it] threw us into the scales of competition to weigh our mettle. And how were we to know that, the moment we landless millions of the land—we men who were struggling to be born—set our awkward feet upon the pavements of the city, life would begin to exact of us a heavy toll in death?" (p. 93). Though the four stories described above may seem distinct, they actually form a continuous arc. What Wright describes is the opening chord of a century-old tale. It began with a promise of something better and the immediate and sustained violation of that promise. Where it will end—where, after death, life persists—remains to be seen.

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Methodological Appendix

Here, I include some of the reflective and technical details of the methods I employed to conduct my inquiry in the preceding chapters.

Notes on My Own Subject Position

In Chapter 3, I describe my position as witness. While it is common to discuss one's positionality from a relational or social perspective, one aspect of social position that often goes undiscussed—perhaps because it is awkward or uncomfortable—is the body. During this research process, I became very aware of how my physical presence as a small-framed, lightskinned black woman informed people's perceptions of me. At times, it made it easy for me to go relatively unnoticed, which could be either beneficial (allowing me to quietly observe) or detrimental (making it hard for me to get someone's attention for a conversation). Other aspects of my position created a complexly interwoven insider-outsider status: I was a CPS teacher, but am not currently employed by the district. I am black, but can be perceived as racially ambiguous by some people. I am from Chicago, and lived on the South Side for most of my adult life, but am not *from* the South Side, and I have a strange hybridized accent that marks me as being from elsewhere (not the "up south" accent common in Bronzeville). I am affiliated as an alumna with the University of Chicago, which has a terrible reputation in the community for its role in redlining and "urban renewal" efforts.

Reciprocity and Social Life

I am not sure if it is ever possible for a researcher to fully achieve reciprocity—to

give to research participants any objects or experiences that are equivalent to that which participants have given them. However, in all of my interactions with participants I strove to maintain reciprocal relationships, which often meant that we interacted as friends or associates and that I participated in social life in a more or less "normal" way. All interviews took place over food, usually at a place selected by the participant, and I did not making some sacrifices in my fitness or personal finances as a result. We shared coffee, donuts, fried chicken, fruit, cold water, peach cobbler, and other wonderful things that made me feel affirmed in choosing Chicago as a research site over Boston. Because I have a car, I often gave rides to participants after the interview was over. As someone who was dependent on Chicago's public transportation for most of my life, I was keenly aware of the difference a car makes, and drove participants home and to work. In one instance, I took a participant to her house to pick up her mother and her two brothers, and drove them all to Cook County Jail to visit her brother (a difficult trip by bus). I also did my best to provide emotional support, and with my younger participants, assistance with things like job searches.

People in Chicago are friendly, people in Bronzeville are even more friendly, and sometimes observant strangers would become interested in interviews and would chime in to share opinions or advice. After an interview with a young man in which he described wanting a job to support his mother, a man at the next table introduced himself to us and launched into a long speech about the importance of self-reliance. After an interview with a teacher at a restaurant, a woman at the next table—another teacher—jumped in to share her own extensive opinions on school closing and corruption in the city. I believe these individuals' willingness to jump into the conversation also reflected

their perception of me as approachable rather than especially academic or authoritarian.

Institutional Mourning

I mention my own grieving and mourning briefly in chapter 4. In a sense, this entire project represents my own mourning process. It created a way for me to gather with others and talk about something that was causing me great pain. It allowed me to process, through analysis, a series of events that were hurtful and that, at the outset, I felt like I did not understand at all. Like someone who stays up late researching a loved one's diagnosed illness or a bereaved person going through an older relative's personal papers and photos, I set out on the task of research as a way of understanding and managing my own emotional response. Every time I went home I spent less and less time in my own home neighborhood of Logan Square, which has gentrified such that many parts of it are unrecognizable to me and even feels inhospitable. As the process wore on and so much else was happening in Chicago—especially the violent reality about the deaths of Laquan McDonald, Ronnieman Johnson, Rekia Boyd, Quintonio LeGrier, Bettie Jones, and Sandra Bland—I began to mourn my city, as well.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

While I adapted and added questions over the course of each interview, I began every session with the same protocol:

Personal background:

 - Where did you grow up?

 - Where does your family come from? How long have they been in Chicago?

Views on Bronzeville:

- Describe the street where you grew up (or the street where you live now).

- Has the neighborhood changed since you have lived here? If so, how?

- If you had to choose three words to characterize Bronzeville, what would they

be? Why?

- Tell me about some of your experiences as a resident of (public housing

complex, if applicable).

- Who would you say has power in the community?

- If you could be in charge of what Bronzeville would look like in 10 years, what

would you want the community to be like? What are your dreams for the

community?

- Would you raise a family here? (If applicable.)

- How do people respond when you tell them you are from this area?

Views on schools and school closings:

- Tell me about some of your experiences at (local Bronzeville school).

- If you were the mayor, do you think you would have made the decision to close

the schools? Why or why not?

- How do you think the decision to close the schools was made?

- How do you think CPS decided which schools to keep open and which to stay

closed?

- What would you like the (closed school) building to become?

Views on race and racism:

- Some people, like Karen Lewis, argue that the school closings were racist.

Others, like

Barbara Byrd-Bennett, say they were not. What do you think?

- How would you define racism? How can you tell if something is racist or not?

- Do you have discussions about racism with friends, family, or coworkers?

Etic Codes

In conducting the critical discourse analysis described in Chapter 2, I began with a short list of etic codes drawn from the literature and my initial thoughts on what themes would emerge as significant. These codes were:

- black people/blackness

- deflection

- demographic change

- economic forces

- history

- indexicality

- metaphor

- omission

- politics/political power/political leaders

- positioning

- racism

- segregation

Observation Log for Chapter 3

Below is a list of events pertaining to the Dyett school closure that I attended in order to record the observations detailed in Chapter 3.

Date	Event	Location	Start Time	Total Time (Hours)
6/17/2015	Dyett RFP proposal presentation meeting	King College Prep	5:30 PM	2.5
7/23/2015	KOCO action at Will Burns's office	4th Ward Office	10:00 AM	1
7/26/2015	Save Dyett BBQ	Dyett	4:00 PM	2
7/29/2015	Save Dyett Sit-In/Action at City Hall	City Hall	9:00 AM	2
8/22/2015	Prayer service	Mt. Carmel Baptist Church	8:00 AM	2
8/25/2015	Visit to Dyett (after hospital release)	Dyett	10:00 AM	2
8/26/2015	CPS Board Meeting	CPS	11:00 AM	3
9/11/2015	Candlelight vigil	PUSH/Obama residence	5:00 PM	2
9/14/2015	Sit in/Press Conference	City Hall	1:00 PM	1

Notes

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[i] South Park Way, sometimes written as South Parkway, was renamed after Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968.

[ii] The Commission was established to investigate the causes of the city's 1919 race riot, in which over 500 Chicagoans were injured, 31 were murdered by mobs or vigilantes, and seven black men were killed by police. See Tuttle, 1970.

[iii] It may or may not be a coincidence that Overton, who made his fortune selling cosmetics to the black community, would appreciate a term that referred artfully to his readers' skin tone.

[iv] Chicago's "community areas" were defined by University of Chicago sociologists in 1920 and have been used for official reporting and analytical purposes ever since; they also tend to accurately reflect colloquial social names people use for self-identification, with Bronzeville being a notable exception. See Seligman (2004), or view a map of the community areas at https://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/doit/general/GIS/Chicago_Maps/ Citywide_Maps/Community_Areas_W_Numbers.pdf

[v] Personal communication. See also Moore, N.Y., *The South Side: A portrait of Chicago and American segregation* (forthcoming).

[vi] This preoccupation with cost came partially to meet the constraints of Nathan Straus, a wealthy philanthropist who had been appointed the head of the United States Housing Authority. Straus was passionate about proving that the government could effectively house citizens at lower cost than the private market, and was motivated to encourage cost-cutting measures that resulted in the signature bare-bones architecture that have made public housing projects so identifiable in the American consciousness. "There will be no frills in any housing projects," he announced in a 1938 speech to a group of architects, and "all unnecessary features will be eliminated from any plans submitted." See Hunt, 2009, Chapter 2.

[vii] Wood's fear was far from unfounded. In 1947, white mobs infuriated that eight black families had moved into the CHA's Fernwood Homes (an 87-unit housing project intended for veterans, in the Roseland neighborhood) initiated mass rioting. The violence lasted for four nights and brought out over a thousand police officers to quell it. In 1953, a light-skinned African-American woman named Betty Howard was assigned housing in the all-white Trumbull Park Homes; when her family moved in and neighbors recognized them as black, white mobs set off explosives and broke windows at their home until the family required police escorts to leave the house. (See Hunt, 2009, p. 83; p. 102.)

[viii] Hunt points out that "demographers often use percentage of minors to describe age composition" in a certain region, but "using youth-adult ratios highlights the relative numbers of each more clearly. Like a student-teacher ratio for measuring classroom conditions, the youth-adult ratio is one measure of the capacity of adults to manager the youths in their environment" (Hunt, 2009, p. 332, n4). While Hunt measures this ratio using age 21 as the cutoff for youth in this analysis, I use age 18 to reflect the K-12 schooling system.

[ix] Gee (2014) refers to "Discourse with a capital D" or "big D Discourse" as language interactions that draw implicitly on not only individual identities, but also the social significance and history of those identities.

[x] An additional Bronzeville school, Pershing West Middle School, serving grades 4-8, was also closed during this period. Before my time in graduate school, I was a teacher at Pershing West Middle School; it was the principal, teachers, and students of Pershing West who spurred my interest in education policy and social inequality, and who supported me with love and enthusiasm when I was admitted to Harvard. Although there is much I could say from a reflexive perspective about the closing of Pershing West, I opted to omit it from this particular data analysis because of this exceptional relationship.

[xi] Student, teacher, and parent names are pseudonyms, as are those of the district officials present at each of the meetings.

[xii] See, for instance, Patterson, (1998) and Spillers (1987).

[xiii] "Positioning" occurs when a speaker uses discourse to establish a familiar, coherent, and recognizable social position—a location in the world and its social order—for themselves or for another. In so doing, the speaker suggests a variety of social meanings, images, metaphors, narratives, rights, and vantage points implicit in that position. Imagine, for instance, a group of students at a wealthy private school having a conversation about an upcoming ski trip. If one student says to another, "I didn't expect you to be joining, since you're a scholarship girl," this establishes—for the student being addressed, as well as for any students who may be listening in—a social position and a set of implications (e.g. you are poor, you are not fully a member of this community, you are an object of charity).

[xiv] Claypool was appointed to replace Byrd-Bennett in 2015 as she was investigated and later indicted on federal charges that she used district professional development contracts to secure bribes.

[xv] On the use of Derrick Bell's narratives as parables, see Taylor, 2007.

[xvi] Graduation rates for this period should be interpreted with considerable skepticism, as investigators and journalists announced in 2015 that CPS had been artificially inflating reported graduation rates through the mis-classification of dropouts, and the degree of the system-wide error varied from school to school. See Perez, 2015.

[xvii] This was a difficult moment for me to witness. A couple of weeks prior, I had been at a barbecue with about two dozen members of BYP 100, a group of young black community organizers, and our picnic was also interrupted by police asking for a car to be moved from the grass. The incident escalated, and ended with me and two friends in a tense negotiation with police over insurance for the car (which did not belong to any of us). Due to my own personal experiences (not to mention high-profile incidences of police violence that often begins with just such mundane moments and end in death) I am generally afraid of police and I felt frustrated and discouraged to experience, for the second time in the month, a social gathering of black activists and community members interrupted in this manner.

[xviii] Provident Hospital was founded by Daniel Hale Williams (see Chapter 2).

[xix] One interview participant was a teacher at a closed school on the West Side of Chicago, not in Bronzeville, but participated by community invitation in the Dyett hunger strike (see Chapter 3). I include him here because of his perspective on his own experience of school closure as a black teacher at a black school, as well as his activism in service of a Bronzeville school alongside Bronzeville residents. Another interview participant is a former resident of Bronzeville who has moved away from the community ("I got priced out," he told me) but remains the director of a prominent non-profit organization in the area.

[xx] Names are pseudonyms, except in instances where participants requested that I use their real names.

[xxi] Recall, as well, the shirt worn by the man I witnessed in the parking lot of the Jewel in Chapter 3.

[xxii] "Hide Your Schools, Hide Your Homes, Hide Your Children, Cause He's Wrecking it All," TEAM Englewood, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OoPAMWSHWPk

[xxiii] I have altered this text for readability by speakers of Standard American English and to obscure the source, in deference to the privacy of the research participant.