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PROTEST AND THE MAYORAL VICTORY OF HAROLD WASHINGTON:

Chicago Politics, 1983

Abdul Alkalimat and Don Gills

The Harold Washington mayoral election was a historical event of great significance. The success of Chicago's mass movements in the electoral arena is a source of renewal and of inspiration. The point of this paper is to outline the main historical background that shaped the mayoral election in Chicago in 1983, so that we can draw out the present and future implications of the Chicago experience, both for national and local urban politics in general, and for black liberation protest politics in particular.

Black Politics in Chicago: An Outline

The development of Chicago mayoral administrations was summed up this way by Donald Bradley:

The type of men recruited for the mayoralty changed over the 125 years of Chicago's

This article is an adaptation of a draft paper prepared initially as a discussion document. It represents our first attempt to identify the logic of the dynamic events which unfolded during the election campaign of Harold Washington in Chicago. Our work on this event in Chicago is part of much larger research analysis, and publications project focusing on "the Development of Black Power in Chicago" in an effort to contribute to the ongoing discussions focused upon black liberation and the crisis of the (US) capitalist state.

Note: This article is excerpted from a book-length study of the Washington campaign and Chicago politics which will be published by People's College. For further information: People's College, P.O. Box 7696, Chicago, IL 60680.

history. The office was initially (1837-1869) the prerogative of the early promoters and original business elite of the community. Alteration in the economic structure of the city, the proliferation of public services and official responsibilities, the qualitative and quantitative changes in the population, however, all created a new trend in political recruitment. The rapid change experienced by the city in all of its aspects produced an atmosphere conducive to the cult of the personality that obtained between 1880 and 1930. The 1930s saw the stabilization of the community and the ascendency of a dominant party machine. Thus, between 1931 and the present, the chief elected office in the city has been held by a group of political entrepreneurs who came up through the ranks of the party organization.

When viewed in the broad perspectives of the changes that have taken place in Chicago, two factors stand out as responsible for the observed trend in political leadership: the desirability of political office for those differentially situated in the community fabric, and the type and distribution of political resources within the community. Related to, but analytically distinct from, the ambition to hold political office is the ability to muster the

necessary support.1

Black politics fits this model to some extent. Early black politicians from 1870 to the 1920s were individualists who attached themselves to a political faction when it served their ends, and frequently changed sides as political expediency dictated. They were "race men" in that their





Oscar DePriest (left) first black on Chicago City Council and first black member of U.S. Congress since Reconstruction; John Jones (right) abolitionist and first elected black official in Chicago, Cook County Commissioner.

overriding concern, as individuals, was to work for the good of black people, or community.

A second stage in black politics emerged when the "black submachine" was built. James Q. Wilson identifies its origins:

The Negro machine owes its existence in part to the existence of a city-wide Democratic machine; it is, to use a clumsy phrase, a "submachine" within the larger city machine. Although, Negroes have held important political office in Chicago since 1915 (when Oscar de Priest was elected alderman) in Cook County since 1871 (although continuously only since 1938), and in the Illinois State Legislature since 1876, the rise of the present Negro machine did not begin until 1939. In that year, Dawson, an independent Republican who had served in the City Council, switched parties and, with the active support of Mayor Edward Kelly, entered the Democratic Party as committeeman of the second ward. Real political power in Chicago is vested in the ward committeemen. Although nominally they are elected by the voters of each ward, in fact, they are selected by the party leadership. All political matters, including the control of patronage, are decided by the ward commiteemen, either individually on matters within each ward, or collectively on matters concerning the party as a whole. Negro political strength is coterminous with the number of Negro ward committeemen, and the existence of a single Negro machine is dependent on the extent to which these Negro ward committeemen can be led as a group by one of their number.2

Beginning with massive civil rights demonstrations in the 1960s, a third stage began to emerge—independent politics. Rooted in radical movements, and including activists who would later rise to prominence (e.g., Harold Washington, Gus Savage, Bennett Johnson) blacks began a movement often discussed as "Protest at the Polls," the first organized thrust for black political power. At times they supported regular Democrats, but by the time of the militant anti-Daley demonstrations in the 1960s, a stream of independents began banging



March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963.

on the door of City Hall.

Despite these actions, they gained little substantial benefit for the masses. The 1960s, a decade characterized by sustained mass protest, struggle, and involvement, won some benefits for middle-class blacks. But in Chicago, the middle class lost interest in local voting because they had not derived sufficient material gain from it. Further, the machine did not work for a large voter turnout, so the masses of blacks were not encouraged to vote.

Daley and the Machine

Richard J. Daley's tenure in office (1955-1976) was important in several respects. First, he presided over the structural transformation of Chicago from an industrial city into a monopoly metropolis where the leading role in the economy was played by corporate banking.

insurance, and investment capital organizations. Second, Daley was able to hold together a tenuous political coalition including increasing numbers of blacks who could not be readily absorbed into the patronage exchange system. Local contradictions which were apparent within the old Democratic coalition were held in abeyance by the influx of urban renewal dollars into the central city and under control of "The Mayor."

The undisputed dominant figure in the Democratic Party, Daley was pointman for the Irish, and administered their disproportionate control of power and jobs despite their declining numbers and percentage of the population. In 1955, when Daley was first elected, the Irish were 10 percent of the population, but held one-third of the City Council positions. Irish mayors have been in office from 1933 to 1983,

except for 1976-1979 (when Daley's floor manager in the City Council, a Croatian, was installed after Daley's sudden death). This has been a source of grievance to the Polish, the largest white ethnic group in Chicago, who have never had their own mayor.

Many interest groups were co-opted and held together by the machine, through an exchange of material rewards for delivering the vote based on precinct organizations within the wards. Jobs and economic favors were differentially and disproportionately allocated. Irish votes counted more than black votes, and blacks were given jobs on the lower levels, in the less well-paying agencies. The black middle class was given honorific positions of status with little control of jobs because they could not be trusted to hire "right"—meaning, hire mainly loyal Democrats and blacks who would work for the organization.

Daley was unopposed for four of his six elections. He was a formidable opponent who could scream four-letter words on national television, order police to shoot and kill looters during riots, and force prominent civil rights leaders to give him the "black power" handshake. In fact, when he did these things, working-class white ethnics loved him even more.

Things began to change in 1975 when Daley was challenged in the primary by an independent (William Singer), a reform-oriented black (Richard Newhouse), and an out-of-favor machine hack (Edward Hanrahan, the infamous butcher who ordered the murder of Fred Hampton of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in 1969). Then Daley died on December 20, 1976. As in all political regimes run by a strong leader, the question of succession is a critical issue, and it is here that the seemingly invincible machine revealed its internal tensions, and fundamental weaknesses.

Post-Daley Factionalism

The position of president pro tem of the Chicago City Council had been held by three blacks (Ralph Metcalfe, Claude Holman, and Wilson Frost) up to Daley's death. When Daley died, Frost believed that conventional constitutional precedent would elevate him to the posi-



City Life/Vida Urbana, Boston

tion of acting mayor. Armed Chicago police met him at the mayor's office, however, and rudely turned him away. Power was seized by using the armed force of the state, and blacks on the City Council were forced to swallow pride of self and community in exchange for Frost becoming chair of the Council's finance committee. Michael Bilandic, a Croatian who was Daley's Council leader, became the fourth consecutive mayor from the predominantly Irish 11th ward.

The special election in 1977 attracted some challengers: Roman Pucinski (running for the Polish), Harold Washington (replacing Newhouse as the black reform candidate), and Edward Hanrahan (the machine renegade). This was the last race to be controlled by the old machine regulars. Blacks were now less reliable,

and no charismatic white candidate who could rally the old coaltion was in sight.

Bilandic was not an exciting mayor. He presided over factional fights and simply tried to hold things together. An academic insider, Milton Rakove, in his book Don't Make No Waves, Don't Back No Losers, sums up the end of the Bilandic administration:

In the winter of 1978, one year into Bilandic's mayorality, there was, however, a minor upheaval of some consequence. Jane Byrne, who was Commissioner of Consumer Sales, Weights and Measures, a small city department, accused Bilandic in the media of "greasing" the city's taxicab companies with regard to a projected fare increase. After a short brouhaha in the press between Byrne and Bilandic, the mayor fired the Commissioner.

Byrne, aggrieved by her sudden dismissal, convinced that the new regime headed by Bilandic constituted "an evil cabal" that had corrupted the political organization and city government built by her mentor, Richard J. Daley, and bent on revenge for the wrongs done to her and Daley, announced that she would run for mayor against Bilandic in the February 1979 primary....

Under normal circumstances, Bilandic and the machine would not have suffered from their political mistake. But the winter of 1978-79 was not normal. The worst snowstorm in the city's history paralyzed the city and aroused the citizenry. The city government's inability to clear the snow away, the breakdown of public transportation and garbage collection, the anti-

city hall posture of some key media figures, and Bilandic's handling of the public all combined to encourage a massive anti-machine turnout on primary day. Byrne received all of the normal antimachine vote in the city plus an outpouring of normally lethargic non-voters who trooped to the polls to register their anger and vent their frustration on the machine's candidate, Mayor Bilandic.⁴

By January 1983, the combined total of black registrations was 610,000 out of an estimated 750,000 eligible black voters. These potential voters had to be protected from challenges by the machine-controlled Board of Election Commissioners. This was done successfully, mainly through strong community monitoring and vigilance.

Then in November 1982, although the black community leadership was lukewarm about Adlai Stevenson candidacy, the black turnout against Republican Governor James Thompson was overwhelming. This mobilization demonstrated to the black leadership and to Washington supporters in particular, that the black community would unite to support a viable black candidate for Mayor.⁶

The Washington strategy had been predicated on at least two strong white Democratic Party candidates vying for the primary nomination. The theory was that Byrne and Daley would split the white vote and neither could afford to attack Washington for fear of alienating the black vote. The campaign was the most expensive (over \$18 million was spent), the most corrupt (Byrne's blatant payoffs to

Table 1
POLITICAL MOBILIZATION OF RACIAL-NATIONALITY GROUPS:
REGISTRATION AND TURNOUT AS PERCENTAGE OF VOTING AGE POPULATION,
1979–1983

	Black	Registration Latino	White	Black	Turnout Latino	White
Primary 1979	69.4	31.5	77.4	34.5	18.3	50.6
General 1982	86.7	35.1	78.3	55.8	20.9	54.0
Primary 1983	87.2	36.1	82.2	64.2	23.9	64.6
General 1983	89.1	37.0	83.2	73.0	24.3	67.2

and poor whites to rally in support of black protest.

Byrne ran against the machine, won, and then the machine took power after the election. The "evil cabal" became her closest advisors, and the people she feared most were those who had elected her. Further, her protest vote had also elected new young black Democrats to the City Council—Danny Davis, Niles Sherman, Timothy Evans, and Marian Humes—all with independent postures. She had to deliver, or be challenged as she had done to Bilandic. Byrne blew it. She gave virtually every aspect of the movement fuel for building a protest movement against the machine. Further, and more decisively, she did this when black and progressive forces were conscious that they had created her with their votes and could eliminate her the same way.

The Byrne Interregnum and Mass Protest

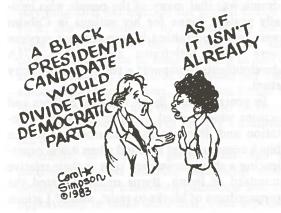
In the period from 1967 to 1979, black representation in the City Council leaped to virtual proportional representation. From 1918 to 1947, there were only two blacks in City Council. By Byrne's inauguration there were sixteen blacks in City Council. Byrne's administration becomes important in several respects. First, a significant number of black aldermen within the Council began to vote consistently against the machine on issues viewed as vital to the black community. Second, and related to the first, black aldermen came under mounting pressure from a black electorate which had demonstrated a growing tendency to withdraw support from machine-backed candidates in

primary elections. This forced black aldermen to take more independent stances particularly around representational issues (i.e., black appointments to public housing, public school and police review boards, etc.). Finally, and in conjunction, local activists involved in a series of welfare and substantive issues targeted Jane Byrne's administration and the mayor's office as the focus of protest against the deteriorating conditions blacks faced in housing, health care, employment, distribution of welfare benefits, and educational opportunity.

Thus, a most important dimension of the 1982 voter registration drive was the linkage of organizations and community activists involved in struggle around "economic" issues into citywide networks which aimed their protest demands at City Hall.

The People's Choice

Beginning in 1980, a movement to find a Black mayor began again. A "Committee For a Black Mayor" had been formed in 1974. In 1977, Harold Washington tested the waters and garnered 77,000 votes. Now, anticipating the 1983 election, a consensus-building process had emerged. A variety of surveys within the black community all showed that Washington was the strongest potential candidate. By the summer of 1981, led by some activists from across the city, a concerted movement began to "draft" Washington. Harold Washington had been a Democratic Party regular, the son of a precinct captain whose position he assumed, but he bolted the party machine in 1975 and became an independent. He had achieved national visi-





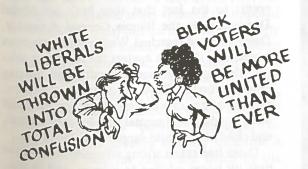
bility as the popularly elected replacement for Ralph Metcalfe as Congressman, and he was elected national vice-president of the liberal Americans for Democratic Action.

Washington knew that low electoral participation was a serious historical problem facing any "challenger" who represented excluded constituencies. The Chicago Urban League had issues a report on this problem in September 1981: Why Chicago Blacks Do Not Register and Vote. It began with a focus on the 1983 mayoral election:

If Black political participation could be increased five percent to ten percent, Blacks might effectively determine the outcome of this crucial election. Within a year after that, control of the City Council and most services of city government also may well be at stake.

Analyzing whether the 5 to 10 percent increase was possible, the report offered eight reasons why blacks don't register and vote; heading the list were "not interested in any of the candidates" (49.4 percent) and "fed up with the whole political system" (32.2 percent).

Lack of electoral participation appears to be a long-term, deeply-rooted "structural" problem—one for which electoral reform and other superficial stop gap measures can only have very limited and temporary success... Sizeable, sustainable increases in Black registration and voting are unlikely without a rather fundamental effort to make politics and public affairs a much larger part of Black family and community life.⁵



The Campaign Buildup: Voter Registration

While many of the traditional institutionalized organizations (i.e., NAACP, Chicago Urban League, PUSH) had attempted to build for a mass black community registration as early as the previous year, the really significant aspect of the pre-primary voter registration drive was marked by the entrance of grassroots community efforts both within and outside of the black community. Several community groups contributed to the effort (e.g., Chicago Black United Communities, Vote Community, Peoples Movement for Voter Registration, PUSH) but the most innovative contribution was made by POWER, a citywide coalition of welfare recipients and unemployed workers under the leadership of heads of communitybased organizations among blacks, whites, and Latinos. POWER concentrated on nontraditional sites for registering previously alienated new voters (e.g. welfare recipients, youth, and the hard-core unemployed).

The black leadership in most of these groups became the principal actors in the formation of the Task Force for Black Political Empowerment, which emerged as the informal arm of Harold Washington's campaign organization. Added to these efforts was the significant infusion of money from black businessmen to the voter registration drive. Most notable was a cosmetic industry millionaire, Ed Gardner (Soft Sheen).

By September 1982, the earlier goal of 50,000 new registered voters had been reached with the tactic of mobile registrations—taking registration stations to welfare and unemployment offices within the city's South, West and North



Sides. Washington's response was to increase the call to register 100,000 new voters! The leadership of this movement answered him. With combined efforts of POWER, PUSH, Vote Community, People's Movement, CBUC, and Citizens for Self-Determination, an all-out campaign was launched to meet this challenge. Churches were targeted, as were public aid offices, while library centers were established and an extensive absentee-ballot thrust was coordinated by PUSH and CBUC. Gardner put up \$50,000 to sponsor a "Come Alive" media blitz targeting the black community for the weekend of October 5. Over that weekend alone, some 60,000 registrations were made, principally in the black community and mainly independent of the regular party apparatus. Overall 160,000 new voters were registered, of whom 120,000 were black.



Ulrike Welsch photo.

Daley "The Son"

Richard Daley's candidacy brought panic to Byrne's camp and smiles of hope to Washington supporters. Daley had a number of credits which enhanced his viability.

1. He had his father's name and his mother's blessings. "Sis" Daley is the machine matriarch who has carefully guarded the Daley legacy to be bestowed upon her sons.

2. He appeared to have had sufficient support within the party to make winning against Byrne a realistic prospect.

3. Political elites throughout the city owe their careers to Richard J. Daley.

4. He had a significant political base within the black community among the old generation of business and professional people and the clergy who remembered Richard J. Daley, "the Father," and saw "the Son" as one who would have influence among their constituencies.

5. Daley was expected to pick up substantial support among the "Lakefront liberals," city union workers, and many employees who were perceived as having "nowhere else to go" given the hostility directed to Byrne.

Since Daley had to compete with Jane Byrne for white votes, and did not want to embarrass his liberal supporters or alienate his potential black support by attacking Harold Washington, he had to make a relentless attack on Byrne's mayoral record before white audiences. He had to attack her without attacking the Democratic Party. He was not able to dislodge black support from Washington, nor to gain more than an even-split with Byrne among white voters.

If on the surface, most of Daley's reform positions were shared with Washington, it only points to the fact that they both are liberal Democrats. In the Illinois General Assembly, Daley's record matched Washington's on most issues, i.e., the fight against the consumer sales tax, the fight for mental health and nursing home reforms, ERA, prenatal health care, expense of day care centers, equal pay for equal work, medical and mental care for rape victims, and child abuse-child support legislation.

Daley had taken strong administrative initiatives on issues relating to women, and in pro-



Ellen Shub photo

motion of women to positions of responsibility. This enabled him to gain endorsements of leading liberal feminists such as Dawn Clark Netsch, a State Representative who emerged as his campaign manager. However, he did not gain much support among women's organizations. They differed on the issue of patronage. Washington moved from a soft position on patronage reform to a hard position in opposition to it, while Daley was locked into a white ethnic base primarily among white trade union workers and city employees on the Southwest Side and part of the North Side of the city. His strong stand against street violence (as opposed to organized crime) had earned him the enmity of the black and Latino street gangs. Some eventually became paid, active supporters of Byrne. After failing to get money from the Washington campaign, the El Rukns cut a deal with the machine leadership which netted as much as \$70,000 for "polling" assistance. The outcome of the primary election indicated a rejection of both the gangs and Daley by the black electorate.

Washington received 36.3 percent of the 1.3 million votes, Jane Byrne 33.4 percent and Richard Daley 30 percent. Washington took 80 percent of the black vote, Byrne 14 percent, and Daley 6 percent. Byrne and Daley split 88 percent of the white vote, while Washington received 10 percent. The Latino vote went mainly to Daley, 52 percent, while Washington received 24 percent—a percentage that would dramatically shift in the general election. Eighty-four percent of Washington's support came from black voters, 10 percent from whites, and 6 percent from Latinos.

The overwhelming support for Washington among blacks is most significant. In eleven wards with high concentration of black voters—ranging from 91.8 percent to 99 percent black—Harold Washington won 77.7 percent of the 276,678 Democratic votes cast. By contrast, in seven white wards, Washington won only 0.94 percent of the Democratic votes cast—2,131 of 227,327 votes.

The National Party and Realignment

The national Democratic Party, sensing an upsurge in electoral participation among blacks and working people throughout the country, saw in the Washington victory the first step in Reagan's defeat in 1984—a rebuilding or reconstitution of the Democratic coalition. Therefore, recognizing the importance of black voter strength, Democratic party leaders, candidates, and officeholders put Chicago on their calendars and made it known that they would support Washington in "any way he desired." This comment was echoed by the early presidential frontrunners. The venerable Claude Pepper (D-Florida), a leader of the senior citizens lobby in Congress, was brought in to target the white ethnic vote among the aged. Bert Lance of the Georgia State Democratic Party endorsed Harold Washington amidst a great deal of publicity and led a delegation of southern state party chairs to Chicago. Democratic fundraisers were held by black and white party insiders across the country, notably in New York, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles. There would be some degree of reciprocity involved.

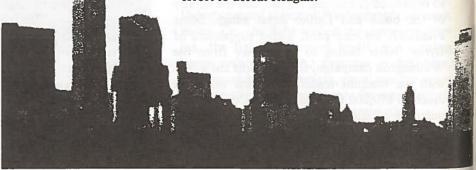
The Congressional Black Caucus and the Southern Strategy

The Congressional Black Caucus represents the formalized political center of the black elite in the US. Since 1980, Washington had been one of its newest but most vocal and progressive members in Congress. But it was only during the later stages of the primary, beginning with the TV debates (in which Washington made the best showing) that the Black Caucus began to view the Washington bid for mayor as a serious one. At this time Caucus members leaned on the national Democratic Party to support Washington if the Democrats were to have any hope of winning in 1984. They were particularly incensed with, but not surprised by, Kennedy's endorsement of Byrne in the primary. However, they reserved their sharpest criticism for presidential hopeful Walter Mondale who endorsed Richard Daley-in a miscalculated under-assessment of the level of local black unity operative in the Washington campaign and an overassessment of Daley's support in the regular Democratic Party.

John Convers (D-Michigan) spent nearly three weeks in Chicago and brought in his leading organizers to head up the Election Day apparatus for Washington during both the primary and the general election. Other members of the Caucus raised money for his candidacy. While over 95 percent of his \$1.3 million in primary funds was raised locally, over 25 percent of the \$3 million raised for Washington during the general election period was from national sources—with Black Caucus individuals serving as conduits for a large percentage of these monies. This is, in part, substantiation for the observation that the Washington campaign had been "nationalized" and taken on as an agenda item of the national black political elite.7

The success of the Washington campaign has led to a significant stimulation of interest in local elections across the country. Clearly, the international, and certainly, the national media attention generated by the Chicago mayoral election has had a major, perhaps enduring impact upon the level of black political participation and the nature of local electoral coalitions. This certainly was the case in Philadelphia, where Wilson Goode withstood the challenge of Frank Rizzo, the arch-villain of the Philadelphia black movement of the late '60s and '70s. It also had a positive contributive effect upon local elections in Boston and Baltimore, where strong black electoral challenges were being waged. It is too early to foretell what the full ramifications of the Washington campaign success will be on the unfolding alignment of race, nationality, and class forces. A part of it will have to do with the outcome of the benchmarks and limitations of Washington's reform administration in its practice, as well as the practice of progressive and radicalized sectors of the Chicago movement scene.

In Chicago, Washington had won the primary without the support of the regular Democratic Party organization. It appeared that he would have to win the general election without broad party support. Should he lose, the Democratic Party would have blown an excellent opportunity to consolidate on a new basis. Should he win, without the party support, there would be no basis for a rapprochment. From this standpoint, national Democratic leaders had nothing to gain and everything to lose by not supporting Washington. In supporting him, they had an opportunity to rebuild on the basis of an upsurge in mass participation among blacks and other dissatisfied segments of the electorate in an all-out effort to defeat Reagan.



The Black Caucus understood this and it became easy for them to influence white Democratic leaders of the national party to put Chicago on their itinerary. And thus, a succession of Democratic politicians and hopeful candidates were paraded through Chicago to convince white Democrats to do what blacks had done for 50 years: support Democratic candidates.

Local Realignment and Intra-Party Struggle

Initially, the white Democratic Party leadership was paralyzed. The primary upset had left them in search of a political center around which they could rally. While a few of the most staunch reactionaries bolted the party and cast their support to Epton, weeks went by before Byrne attempted a short-lived "write-in" candidacy. It fizzled. With only four weeks to go before the general election, a wave of white aldermen and ward committeemen bolted the party. They openly or privately worked for the liberal but little-known Republican, Bernard Epton, who under ordinary circumstances would have been crushed at the polls by a united party organization and a decidedly Democratic electorate. Perhaps it was the early indecisiveness among the regular organization leadership that prevented a united effort to increase white ethnic ward voter registration in the first weeks after Washington's primary upset. Such a campaign could have generated sufficient new voters for Epton to claim a nominal victory and for the machine to retain control over the mayor's office.

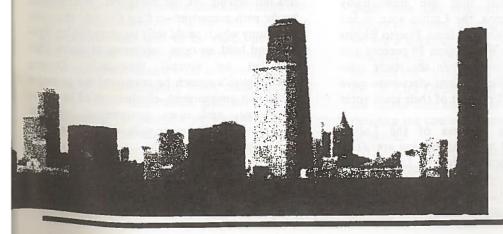
"Fast" Eddie Vrydolyak, the party chair, must be singled out as the center of the racist reaction to the Washington campaign. During

the last weekend before the primary election, he made the clearest statement of the central issue of the campaign: racial power. In arguing before Northwest side party workers, Vrydolyak argued that the party should close ranks behind Byrne and abandon Daley, for a vote for Daley was a vote for Washington. "After all, it's a race thing," he said.

After the primary, Vrydolyak procrastinated and he convened the party central committee only after the national Democratic Party leadership made it clear that Byrne's write-in bid was to cease and the local party leadership should close ranks behind Harold Washington. This gesture of support came a full month into the seven-week-long general election period. Vrydolyak is the leader of the current bloc of "29" aldermen in opposition to Washington's reform-in-government program. This group has been labeled as part of the "Cabal-ocrats"—Republicans masquerading as "Democrats" within the party.

Election Day Voter Turnout

Nearly 1.3 million people, 82 percent of the eligible voters, voted on April 12. Washington received 50.06 percent (668,176) of the votes while Epton received 619,926 votes or 46.4 percent. The mobilization of the electorate along racial and nationality lines (white ethnics included) made this one of the closest local elections in the history of machine politics in Chicago. Washington carried twenty-three wards, two more than he carried in the primary election. Epton carried twenty-seven wards on the strength of the white ethnic backlash and a mass bolt from the fifty-year tradition of Democratic hegemony at the polls.



While Epton carried 86 percent of the vote in predominantly white wards, (compared with 12 percent for Harold Washington), Washington garnered 98 percent of the vote in predominantly black wards. In the traditionally liberal "Lake Front" white wards (usually carried by Democratic candidates) Epton carried 72 percent of the vote, outpolling Washington (24 percent) nearly 3 to 1. When we consider that the Lake Front wards are more racially heterogeneous, and given the pattern of black and Latino voting (9 to 1 and 3 to 1 respectively for Washington over Epton), it is not difficult to argue that Washington received an even lower percentage of the white vote within the precincts.

If the Latino vote (discussed below) were held constant, our data indicate that the general election was even more racially polarized than the vote in the primary. In the primary returns, the leading white candidates received an estimated 88 percent of the total white vote and 21 percent of the total black vote. However, in the general returns, Epton captured 95 percent of the total white vote but only 2 percent of the black vote.

If racial bloc voting was the defining characteristic of the electorate in the primary, then voting along nationality lines was a characteristic feature of the general election vote. The single most important aspect of the nationality vote was the dramatic shift in support among Latinos for Harold Washington.

The Latino Turnout and Nationality in the General Election'

Although Washington received 74 percent of the vote in wards that are numerically dominated by Latinos, the Latino vote varied markedly along nationality lines. Puerto Ricans and Mexicans gave Washington 79 percent and 68 percent respectively while the more conservative, but smaller, Cuban electorate gave Washington only 52 percent of their total voter turnout.

The outstanding features of the Latino impact on the 1983 mayoral election are: (1) a near 20 percent increase in the Latino registrations, (2) the increase in Latino turnout, and (3) the dramatic increase in the vote for Washington between the primary and the

general election. In the general election, in each ward, Washington received at least a 126 percent increase in support over the primary.

What explains this dramatic Latino turnabout? Washington made a major effort to attract the Latino vote. Latinos were put into positions of visibility and responsibility within the campaign. Washington targeted his program and campaign literature to address the needs and aspirations of the Latino population, and presented major campaign publications in Spanish. Also, the Washington campaign underwrote a newspaper project, El Independiente, a "secret weapon" that targeted the Spanish-speaking communities of Chicago. At least three issues were printed. In addition, a Latino "Blue Button" was also produced and distributed.

The Governance Period

The first months of the Washington administration have been akin to war. In typical Chicago fashion, Rudy Luzano, a Hispanic labor leader, and staunch supporter of Washington, was murdered after the general election. In the past two elections since Daley's death, the reconciliation of the Democratic Party has been marked by the negotiation of deals that prevented black leaders from attaining a greater semblance of power and privilege within the Democratic Party. Such deals have not happened this time, since the party bosses had not supported Washington and in many instances actively opposed his Washington had called for a unity breakfast after his primary and general elections victories and many principals in the losing camps did not attend. At the inaugural, Washington broke with precedent—a City Council chamber ceremony which could only be attended by 300-400 and held an open ceremony at Navy Pier attended by several thousands. Washington's speech he reassured his promise of reform government, elimination of machine patronage, and open government without burdening the electorate with mismanagement. unfairness, and inequality.

While Washington attacked the past practices of the machine, he also promised fiscal restraint and stability in government, and sound business practices. Thus, an olive branch

was being extended to the corporate despite its lack of support in his primary and general election bids. In his Transition Team, Washington dispelled any notions of that a "black takeover" was imminent by appointing a majority of whites. While more blacks were appointed to a government Transition Team than at any time in the city's history, the most significant aspect of the policymaking structure of the early Washington governance collective is its overwhelming composition drawn from business and professional elites and political insiders.



Ellen Shub photo

The further working out of the economic (class) contradictions at the center of issues of urban governance has been overshadowed by the persistence, even intensification, of a virulent strain of racist reaction. A major theme in the early Washington administration has been the confrontation between black power and the Chicago "white power" structure. At the heart of the current struggle between the Vrydolyak 29 in City Council and the Washington 21 is the continuation of the struggle of black power vs. white corporate America. This scenario tells us as much about the limitations of reformist electoral black power strategy as it reveals its inability to provide a fundamental redistribution of social resources. All the "29" are white alderpersons and tend to be ward committeemen, and the Washington 21 is composed of black alderpersons and white independents with liberal or predominantly black constituencies. Beyond these distinctions, past all the hype surrounding the struggle to institute reforms which target the machine, there are few substantive bases for unity. Thus, on many classbased issues we can expect fragmentation within both camps along the lines of material incentives and resource redistribution.

Conclusion and Implications

In general, we have attempted to base this analysis on the objective development of the historical forces that led to the campaign, and the social character of the campaign itself. Indeed, this campaign will be discussed as a permanent event in black political history, and the history of Chicago. Our contribution in this paper is to provide the essential facts in an organized manner. Further, we believe this campaign should be studied to understand several major points:

- 1. Black adults demonstrated that under specific conditions they will defy all expectations and mobilize at unprecedented levels. These conditions are unity of black leadership, public attacks from white racism, and a legitimate form of mobilization such as voting.
- 2. Racism, nationality, and class dynamics were operative factors explaining the Harold Washington election and fueling the dialectical, political process of unity building over all three stages of the mayoral politics process that moved a black into City Hall in 1983.
- 3. There was a dynamic tension between coalition development on the inside of the political structure and coalition development among movement forces using resources outside the system.
- 4. During the first two stages, clearly the movement forces had the ascendancy (concrete struggles and community issues, boycott of Chicago Fest, mass voter registration, the formation of the Task Force, etc.). During the general election, a tedious balance was struck between the movement forces which sustained the mobilization and a transition apparatus which clearly was composed of elements whose main base and orientation was from within system structures. During the governance phase we see a decided trend, beneath all the public calamity and rhetoric emitting from the conflict between the "Vrydolyak 29" and "Washington 21" in City Council that the movement forces are taking their lead from City Hall rather than defining the context of struggle and the terrain of battle.
- 5. At this point, the most progressive aspect of the current struggle has been the movement of the struggle into the wards in an attempt by populist-reformists to unseat ward committee-

men and old guard politicians in the March primaries that open the presidential electoral season in Illinois. Other efforts to establish and consolidate independent bases of power and movement resources have been feeble to this point.

In Chicago, decades of electoral political participation on the part of the black community, its political leadership, and movement activists, have resulted in some substantial political gains. Relative proportional representation in the City Council, substantial representation on major political boards and commissions, and a black man occupying the "Fifth Floor" of City Hall were merely fantastic visions in the previous decade. In Chicago, blacks had historically exhausted the limitations of the symbolic representation offered them by the Republican Party, the decades of struggle within the Democratic machine produced substantial gains and the emergence of the black electorate as the pivotal force in city politics. The Washington mayoral victory and the subsequent power struggle within government and the later treachery of the Democratic Party elite have brought blacks, progressive whites, and a growing Latino electorate to a critical threshold of political action and to the brink of a decisive break with the Democratic Party.

Some Concluding Comments

This analysis has demonstrated the vitality and viability of the black liberation movement, specifically an instance of struggle in the electoral arena. The election of Harold Washington, a reformed machine politician, was the result of a crusade in the black community. A network of militant organizations had been developing from the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the spontaneous mass movement was led by these forces. The fundamental conditions for this electoral victory include successful mobilization of masses of people, a broad consensus of political focus, and a united leadership.

Of course, these are the factors internal to the movement. The victory was also possible because a change in the structure of political opportunity beginning with Mayor Daley's death and ending with a split white vote in the Democratic primary in 1983. These many special conditions have led to the discussion of whether Washington will be one-term mayor or not. The main swing factor is whether white liberals can get more whites to vote for political reform led by black people. If white people don't support Washington in increasing numbers, racial hostility is likely to be at unprecedented levels by the time of the next



Harold Washington celebrates his victory.

mayoral campaign.

There is also another issue of great importance: Can Jess run like Harold? In states like South Carolina, Virginia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, and in cities like Chicago. New York, Detroit, and Los Angeles, the answer is likely to be yes. Here, the white candidates split the white vote, and Jesse pulled most of the Black vote. The main thing is that the race issues are definitive in those areas, and up to this point the structure of political opportunity has been virtually closed. The critical question is whether the long-term result will strengthen the Democratic Party or the movement. For the political efforts of Harold Washington and Jesse Jackson, the results should be in over the next three years. The big question is how long will the cathartic ritual of voting black satisfy the hunger of black people for freedom, since the material benefits of black elected officials are so limited?

FOOTNOTES

1. Donald S. Bradley, The Historical Trends of the Political Elites in a Metropolitan Central City: The Chicago Mayors (Working Paper #10, Center for Organizational Studies, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, May 1963). See also Donald S. Bradley and Mayer Zald, "From Commercial Elite to Political Administrator: The Recruitment of Mayors in Chicago, The American Journal of Sociology, (September 1965), 153-167.

2. James Q. Wilson, Negro Politics: The Search for Leadership (Chicago: The Free Press, 1960).

3. Milton Rakove, Don't Make No Waves, Don't Back No Losers: An Insider's Analysis of the Daley Machine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975); see also Len O'Connor, Clout: Mayor Daley and His City (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1975); Mike Royko, Boss: Richard Daley of Chicago (New York: New American Library, 1971).

4. Chicago Urban League, "Why Blacks Do Not Vote," Chicago: Research and Planning Department, 1981).

5. It was widely projected that this high turnout in the November 2 general election represented the resurgence of the Cook County Regular Democratic Party by Chairman Eddie Vrdolyak rather than an independent upsurge based in the Black community. See "Huge Voter Turnout Enhances (Washington) Mayoral Bid," Chicago Defender, November 4, 1982; also the summary analysis articles of the effects of the gubernatorial turnout on the mayoral race in the Sun Times and Tribune, November 3-4, 1982.

6. Given the policy of reciprocity, since his election, Washington has spent considerable time on the road campaigning for local black electoral bids across the country as part of the "payoff" to the NBPE, first and foremost, and to the

national Democratic Party in its electoral push for the 1984 presidential election.

7. For background on Edward Vrdolyak, see the pamphlet Stop Fast Eddie, available from Timbuktu Books (P.O. Box 7696, Chicago, IL 60680).

8. A starting point for an understanding of the historical role of the Latino community in Chicago politics is the work by Joanne Belenchia "Latinos in Chicago Politics," in S. Gove and L. Massotti, *After Daley: Chicago Politics in Transition*, pp. 118–145, *op. cit*. See also, John Walton and Luis Salces (1977), "The Political Organization of Chicago's Latino Communities," Red Cover Report. Evanston: Northwestern University Center for Urban Affairs.

9. We have continued to collect information on the Washington election and his subsequent administration. Included in this material is a regular, ongoing, newclipping project. Moreover, we have continued to monitor Chicago politics and the social protest movement in order to provide the basis for a continuous assessment of Chicago political dynamics as they unfold.

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