Contested Neighborhoods and Racial Violence: Prelude to the Chicago Riot of 1919

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CONTESTED NEIGHBORHOODS AND RACIAL VIOLENCE: PRELUDE TO THE CHICAGO RIOT OF 1919

by

WILLIAM M. TUTTLE, JR.

The “18th birthday party given by Mrs. Richard B. Harrison in honor of her daughter,” the Chicago Defender reported in the late autumn of 1918, was “one of the social events of the season among the younger smart set. . . .” Held at Ogden Grove pavilion, the party featured an orchestra and a grand march. A half-year later, however, in May, 1919, there was sadness in the Harrison family, as the front porch of their house on Grand Boulevard lay smoking in ruins, its windows shattered, the victim of a bombing.

Best known for his role of “De Lawd” in The Green Pastures in the 1930’s, Richard B. Harrison was a black actor whose forte in 1919 was Shakespeare and readings from the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar. During World War I he was frequently on the road entertaining, part of the time at Liberty Bond rallies, and as a result his family was alone in the new home. Mrs. Harrison heard rumors in March, shortly after moving in, that the “Colored lady’s house would be bombed.” Warned by a black janitor that there was a plot to destroy her home, Mrs. Harrison telephoned the police, who casually rebuffed her and characterized her fears as “idle talk.” The following evening, a Saturday, the attack came. At 11:00, a Yellow Cab taxi pulled up to the curb in front of the Harrison house, its door sprang open, and a man jumped out and ran to the front porch. There he deposited a package before scur-

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rying back. An explosion rocked the house only minutes after the taxicab sped away.

Anger swept the black community. “This recent explosion could have been easily prevented by the police,” exclaimed the Defender. But not only did the police seem to be uninterested in protecting the property of blacks, “It really appears” that they have been “giving aid and comfort to a certain element of violators of the law.” The police belatedly detailed a squad to protect the family, but the very next night the bombers lobbed explosives onto the roof of the Harrison house from a vacant flat next door. The dwelling’s skylight was destroyed and more windows shattered. Someone had unlocked the flat to admit the bombers and had re-locked it afterward, but the police did not question the occupants of the adjacent building or those leaving it after the explosion. “Neighbors Planned Bombing,” charged the Defender. “The people in the block appeared to have information as to the exact time the explosion would occur.”

Nor was this the end of the story. The Harrisons had bought the property from a white realtor, William B. Austin, a man who apparently was sympathetic to the equal access of blacks and whites to adequate housing. Anonymous letters began to arrive in Austin’s mail after the two bombings, assuring him that police guards would be useless and promising that the bombing campaign had only commenced. The Harrisons moved from Grand Boulevard in mid-June, 1919, only a few weeks after “a man on a bicycle” while riding by had hurled a bomb at Austin’s home on Lake Shore Drive.

The Harrison and Austin bombings were not isolated occurrences. From July, 1917, to the eruption of the Chicago race riot in late July, 1919, no less than 26 bombs were exploded at isolated black residences in once all-white neighborhoods and at the offices of certain realtors who had sold to blacks. Over half of these bombs were exploded during the tense six months leading up to the riot. According to the virulent denunciations by the black press of both the bombers and the police who failed to apprehend them, the single most important cause of the riot was housing. Out of the
interracial conflict over housing there arose in the black community a marked lack of faith in the willingness and ability of the police to provide impartial protection. This sentiment, based in some cases on actualities and in others on rumors, led blacks to depend more and more on their own resources for protection. Furthermore, participation in the war, a recently realized and potent political voice in Chicago's affairs, and the self-respect of a courted wage-earner had kindled a "New Negro" attitude. The "New Negro" was resolved to defend his family and home with militance.

The housing crisis also stimulated the formation of property owners' associations avowedly hostile to blacks. The threats of these organizations and the bombings accentuated the blacks' racial solidarity, thus retarding even further the possibility of interracial accord through mutual interchange.

In light of the strident contention of numerous white property owners that blacks were alien to Chicago's institutions, it is ironic that the city's first resident was apparently Jean Baptiste Pointe Du Sable, a San Dominican Negro who built a trading post at the mouth of the Chicago River in 1779 and lived there for 16 years. Despite this beginning, however, only a few blacks trickled into Chicago before the Civil War, largely because of laws excluding blacks, slave and free, from the state. From 1860 to 1870, however, Chicago's black population rocketed 285 per cent, although nationwide the increase was 9.9 per cent. Most of the new arrivals obtained domestic employment; and, although there was no one black settlement or ghetto, concentrations of black servants evolved in vicinities near their wealthy white employers. After the Great Fire of 1871, a second fire in 1874, and the dispersal of blacks as well as whites to the undamaged areas, the concentration of blacks and their social institutions on the South Side took vague shape. Chicago was expanding with such rapidity after 1870 that the black influx, though proportionately large, little more than kept pace with the flood of white immigrants. New residential districts emerged; but, as these were often segregated, the black arrivals gravitated to their own increasingly dense set-
Racial Violence: Chicago Riot of 1919

tlements, especially the major concentration on the South Side. Although at the turn of the century “coloured” residences were scattered throughout the city, R. R. Wright, a black studying in Chicago at the time, reported that “no large Northern city shows a greater degree of segregation.”

As evidenced by several incidents in the 1890’s and the first few years of the twentieth century, the most effective enforcer of residential segregation in Chicago was organized white resistance. In 1897, for example, Woodlawn property owners met and “declared war” against the small colony of blacks living in the neighborhood. Owners who rented to blacks were angrily denounced as “enemies” who “should be tarred and feathered.” Intimidated by threats of violence, blacks often chose to move. Five years later, whites in Woodlawn succeeded in having construction terminated on an apartment house that was being remodeled for black occupancy. Celia Parker Woolley, the founder of a black settlement house, noted at this time that she could not obtain property for the venture. Realtors “were not averse to Negroes living on the premises if they were servants,” she reported, “but so soon as they heard that the Negroes were to be considered on a par with white people they refused to lease the property.”

By 1906, well over one-half of Chicago’s black people lived on the South Side “black belt,” between 12th and 57th Streets, and Wentworth and Cottage Grove avenues. And while blacks, as one of their leaders wrote in 1905, did “not occupy all the worst streets and live in all the unsanitary houses in Chicago, what is known as the ‘Black Belt’ is altogether forbidding and demoralizing.” The next largest settlement was on the West Side, and blacks had filtered into Englewood, the near North Side, and Hyde Park.

Between 1906 and 1912, the black belt and satellite areas absorbed almost 10,000 new black residents; by 1912, many of these neighborhoods were saturated.

Alzada P. Comstock, a sociologist who surveyed housing conditions in 1912, particularly in the South Side enclave, outlined the debilitating effects of such human density. On the South Side, he reported, most build-
ings were of the pre-1902 vintage, that is, before the city ordinances governing the construction of tenements had imposed specific, encompassing restrictions on builders. More toilets were outside than were inside; they were in hallways, yards, and basements, and included some “privy vaults” which the city had outlawed in 1894. Sleeping rooms were overcrowded, usually because black tenants paying appreciably higher rents than whites took in lodgers to compensate for the racial differential. Outside stairways and porches were falling apart, and lighting and ventilation were inadequate. The residents complained to Comstock that since black quarters were nearly always tenantable the landlords refused to make necessary repairs.

Other social investigators corroborated Comstock’s findings. “In no other part” of the city, wrote S. P. Breckenridge of the University of Chicago, “was there found a neighborhood so conspicuously dilapidated as the black belt on the South Side.” “No other group,” she added, “suffered so much from decaying buildings, leaking roofs, doors without hinges, broken windows, insanitary plumbing, rotting floors, and a general lack of repairs.” This was the deplorable state of black housing in 1912, several years before the migration more than doubled the city’s black population.

As the migration increased during the war, the disquieting aspects of the housing situation likewise multiplied. Between 1910 and 1920 the expansion of the areas of black residence was negligible, migration resulting instead in the drastically intensified density of the existing areas. On the South Side, for example, within the same boundaries the black community almost tripled from 34,335 to 92,501, which was close to 90 per cent of Chicago’s black population. None of Chicago’s blacks in 1910 had lived in a census tract that was more than 75 per cent Negro; in 1920, 35.7 per cent of the black population did. Only 30.8 per cent in 1910 had lived in one that more than 50 per cent Negro; in 1920, 50.5 per cent did. Rents soared, moreover, since the demand for housing in the black belt far exceeded the supply. As before, rents for blacks were 15-25 per cent higher than they were for whites, prompting the De-
fender to protest that “the principal idea . . . of some of these rent vampires is to gouge, gouge, gouge. . . .”

In addition to the excessive rents levied by black and white landlords alike, the migration accentuated both the overcrowding and the shabbiness of the facilities; and with lines of migrants waiting to occupy any vacancy, few landlords felt obligated to maintain their buildings in a decent state of repair.

Numerous blacks naturally wanted to escape these surroundings. Not only was the black belt dilapidated, decaying, and overcrowded, with landlords who overcharged and were obdurate in their refusal to make needed repairs; it was also a breeder of disease and the city’s officially-sanctioned receptacle for vice. Chicago’s medical authorities boasted of the city’s low death rate, pointing to statistics which indicated that it was the lowest of any city in the world with a population of over one million. Their statistics told another story as well; and it was that Chicago’s blacks had a death rate which was twice that of whites. The still birth rate was also twice as high; the death rate from tuberculosis and syphilis was six times as high; and from pneumonia and nephritis it was well over three times as high. The death rate for the entire city was indeed commendable; but the statistics indicated that the death rate for Chicago’s blacks was comparable to that of Bombay, India.

Vice and crime, controlled by men of both races, proliferated in the black belt. Such infamous operators as “Teenan” Jones, “Red Dick” Wilson, “Yellow Bill” Bass, “Mexican Frank,” “Billy” Lewis, and Isadore Levin conducted their lurid businesses apparently without restraint before the migration; and, if anything, vice did not abate in the black belt during the war and in 1919. Guides to Chicago’s night life boasted of the city’s “‘black-and-tan’ cabarets,” establishments like The Pekin, The Entertainers, Dreamland, and The Panama, where “promiscuous dancing and the intermingling of the races may be observed . . . freely.” Reformers, on the other hand, castigated these biracial houses of amusement, bemoaning that “the patrons were negroes and whites who danced together in a most immoral way.”
Whether friend or foe of this entertainment, there was no denying the abundance in the black belt of houses of prostitution, saloons, cabarets, billiard rooms, and gambling establishments.\textsuperscript{12} Crime, petty and felonious, also abounded. Boys, for example, would steal lead pipe and other salvageable items from vacant houses and then sell them to junk dealers. Other crimes like murder, assault and battery, and arson, however, were vicious, and the incidence of felonies in the black belt spiraled during the migration.\textsuperscript{13}

Whether this aggressive and disruptive behavior was a function of overcrowding, or social disorganization, or despair, or perhaps of combinations of all these, the net result was the same: the desire of countless blacks to move away and leave the black belt far behind. Despite an ethnic preference to reside near familiar social, economic, and religious institutions, numerous blacks with the financial resources sought sanitary, adequately maintained homes elsewhere.\textsuperscript{14} In addition, vacancies in the black belt were practically non-existent. In the spring of 1917, the Chicago Urban League, which met many of the migrants at the train station and was more instrumental in securing homes for them than any other agency, noted sadly: “It is impossible to do much else short of the construction of apartments for families and for single men.” That summer, the Urban League canvassed the real estate dealers who supplied dwellings to blacks to ascertain the seriousness of the shortage. The dealers replied that of 664 black applicants, they were able to assist only 50. Since the migrants ordinarily could not afford to move into white neighborhoods, and since they were probably apprehensive of direct social contacts with whites, it seems apparent that those who sought to leave the black belt behind them were generally the city’s earlier and more prosperous black residents. In a sense, the migrant, whom the more established residents felt to be an undesirable neighbor, and with whom they increasingly identified such distasteful traits as prostitution, gambling, juvenile delinquency, and illegitimacy, was forcing the old settlers out, just as their “invasions” would subsequently encourage whites to move.\textsuperscript{15}

The directions in which the black belt could expand
were few; it was in "the zone of transition—the interstitial region between residence and industry." To the north were many of the city's light factories and businesses. Although a rundown district, prices were far beyond the reach of the ordinary househunter due to the industrial potential of the property. To the west, across Wentworth Avenue, were the Irish whose hostility excluded blacks from that market. This hostility was so intense that the population in one Irish-dominated neighborhood bordering on Wentworth would tolerate only 29 blacks out of 3,762 residents; while in the neighborhood just on the other side of Wentworth, 1,722 out of 3,711 residents were black. To the east the blacks could move into the limited area from Wabash Avenue to Lake Michigan. But as soon as they occupied this, the only direction for sizable expansion was southward—to the neighborhood of Hyde Park and Kenwood.

Being immediately adjacent to the black belt, Hyde Park was the inevitable destination of numerous blacks. Also important, Hyde Park was a deteriorating neighborhood, one whose homes blacks could afford. Of the over 900 black property owners there in 1920, scarcely ten could have purchased their properties at the original prices. For 20 to 30 years property values had declined because of the odors of the stockyards, the smoke and soot of the Illinois Central trains, the conversion of large homes into apartment buildings and flats, and the fear of an "invasion" of blacks from nearby areas. The residents of Hyde Park fled to escape further depreciation, and in 1916, just as the migration from the South was gaining momentum, an estimated 25 per cent of the buildings in the district stood vacant. The earlier black inhabitants, and the few migrants who brought money with them or united with others to purchase properties at the prevailing low prices, streamed into Hyde Park to join the few blacks who had moved in earlier, almost unnoticed. Other blacks rented in the neighborhood. This process of expansion continued for nearly two years.

During the war residential construction largely ceased in Chicago as elsewhere. In the early months of 1918 the first effects of a housing shortage, which was soon to be acute, were felt. The demands of whites for dwellings
began to exceed the supply. Ugly interracial competition for homes broke out, as enterprising realtors touched off artificial panics with rumors that the black were “invading,” and then proceeded to buy the properties of whites at less than their values and to sell to blacks at sizable profits. Many whites soon blamed blacks for the perplexities of property values, the scarcity of housing, and urban decay. In truth these neighborhoods were generally run down before blacks arrived. It was natural, moreover, that black renters and lessees should exhibit a lack of respect for properties upon which their landlords bestowed few improvements, actually allowing them to deteriorate further. In addition, because of excessive rents and exclusion from adjoining vicinities, blacks overcrowded both their abodes and districts.

To be sure, the migrants were unaccustomed to city dwelling. During the sultry months they paraded without shirts or shoes; they hung their washings on stoops to dry; they loitered on street corners. But no one more fully appreciated the incompatibility between this behavior and the higher aspirations of the race than other blacks. The Defender, the black belt’s aldermen, churches, the Wabash Avenue YMCA, and other social service agencies staged such events as Clean Up and Grass Seed Weeks in 1918, and a Tin Can Day and Health Week in 1919. Saturday, April 26, was Tin Can Day, and hundreds of boys and girls combed the alleys and back yards. “Old trunks, suitcases, tubs, baby carriages, push carts, and wagons were commendeered for hauling cans.” Five dollars in gold was the prize, and the minimum entry was 300 cans. This minimum figure, as it turned out, was superfluous; for the winning entry was 6,840 cans, and altogether 100,587 were turned in. The Defender also featured a column entitled “Neighborhood Improvements.”

Moreover, the Urban League issued to the migrants a brochure entitled “creed of cleanliness,” which sought to appeal to the blacks’ national pride. “I AM AN AMERICAN CITIZEN,” the creed proclaimed. “I AM PROUD of our boys ‘over there’ who have contributed soldier service.” These soldiers had learned “NEW HABITS of SELF-RESPECT AND CLEANLINESS,” habits
which the migrants then vowed to observe for themselves. “I WILL ATTEND to the neatness of my personal appearance on the street or when sitting in front doorways. I WILL REFRAIN from wearing dust caps, bungalow aprons, house clothing and bedroom shoes out of doors. I WILL ARRANGE MY TOILET within doors. . . . I WILL INSIST upon the use of rear entrances for coal dealers, hucksters, etc. . . . I WILL DO MY BEST to prevent, defacement of property either by children or adults.” Two photographs accompanied the creed, one of a slovenly front porch, strewn with articles of clothing; the other of a clean, well-policed front porch. Seated on the first porch were three women in houserobes and kerchiefs; one of them peeled potatoes while the second combed the third’s hair. The four women on the other porch entertained themselves by reading and engaging in polite conversation; they were neatly dressed, all with their buttons buttoned and without bandanas on their heads.

These efforts at neighborhood and personal improvement persevered despite the unabated influx of migrants and the sustained demand for dwellings even approaching habitability. But for many if not most of the migrants, the adjustment to their new status as citizens of the North proved to be herculean. “During their period of absorption into the new life,” Walter F. White of the NAACP wrote after the riot, many of the migrants tended to be “care-free, at times irresponsible and sometimes even boisterous,” and this “conduct caused complication difficult to adjust.”

Several white property owners’ associations, most of which had organized initially for responsible community projects and beautification, now focused their efforts on forcing out the blacks already residing in their neighborhoods and on preventing the arrival of others. The activities of these associations were conspicuous within the contested districts surrounded by 39th and 59th streets and State Street and Lake Michigan. Mass meetings were held to arouse neighbors against the blacks and journals were published with scathing denunciations of the race. In September, 1917, for example, the Community Property Owners’ Protective Association was
organized with its constituency as the district bounded by 39th and 51st streets, Cottage Grove and Michigan Boulevard. Its purpose was "keeping 'undesirables' out." "We don't want any gentlemen of color or gentlemen off color in our midst," declared one of the Association's organizers, a local realtor.23

Indeed, the property owners' associations and most realtors attempted to restrict the blacks to the black belt. As early as April, 1917, a committee of seven representing the Chicago Real Estate Board, including four realtors in contested neighborhoods, estimated that the "promiscuous sales" to blacks of residences on all-white blocks had brought about immense property depreciation ranging from $5,000 to $360,000 per block. The committee recommended two courses of action to obviate the alleged decline in values.24 It first of all urged the property owners' associations to build up the solidarity of their neighbors to assure that no more defectors would sell out to blacks. It then called for a meeting with the blacks to discuss the practicability of block-by-block segregation. The same month the Real Estate Board committee met with Jesse Binga, Chicago's leading black banker, Robert S. Abbott, editor of the Defender, A. L. Jackson, and other leaders of the race, and asked them to persuade the black realtors to "desist" from selling abodes to their people in white neighborhoods. To this request the blacks refused. Several months later, the committee of white realtors adopted a resolution calling upon the Real Estate Board to prevent "race hatred, violence, and bloodshed" by appealing to the city council to enact legislation prohibiting further immigration of blacks to Chicago "until suitable provisions are made and such reasonable restriction of leasing or selling be enforced as to prevent lawlessness, destruction of values and property and loss of life." No such legislation received the consideration of the city council; but news of the realtors' appeal did serve to outrage leaders in the black community. "At this time," complained Binga loudly, "when the black men and the white men are asked to do their bit, it is nothing less than a crime . . . for real estate men . . . to begin an agitation on Race segregation." Black men would hesitate to enlist in the Army if they suspected
that their wives and children would be "subject to designing promoters, who are conspiring to develop race hatred in their neighborhood. . . ." 25

Two obstacles blocked the possibility of legislatively quarantining the blacks. In order for the Chicago City Council to enact zoning legislation, racial or otherwise, it first had to obtain an enabling act from the Illinois General Assembly, which was dominated by representatives from southern Illinois whose antagonism for Chicago was renowned. 26 The second roadblock was a decision which the United States Supreme Court delivered in 1917. In Buchanan v. Warley, the court invalidated a Louisville, Kentucky, racial zoning ordinance. 27 As a direct result of this ruling, restrictive covenants came into being, but these efficacious instruments of segregation did not gain currency in Chicago until the mid-1920's. 28 Lacking the voluntary or legal means to isolate the blacks, the methods resorted to were extra-legal or illegal—intimidation and bombs.

In November, 1917, just days after the Supreme Court enunciated its Buchanan v. Warley decision, the Chicago Real Estate Board reaffirmed the need of founding property owners' associations. The Board resolved to "start a propaganda through its individual members to recommend owners societies in every white block for the purpose of mutual defense." 29 Of these organizations, the Kenwood and Hyde Park Property Owners' Association, which first gained notice in the fall of 1918 for its agitation to "make Hyde Park white," was perhaps the largest and undoubtedly the most vocal. "WE want you to join our organization," began the organization's letter of solicitation. "Hyde Park is the finest residential district in Chicago," and in spite of "the weak-kneed [who] think it is too late," "WE are going ot keep it that way." Joining this "red blooded organization," the letter continued, would put "big money in your pocket besides preserving our homes for ourselves and children." 30 The Hyde Park-Kenwood Association launched a series of protest meetings at which racial antagonism permeated the speeches, and at which the audiences applauded inflammatory utterances promoting the use of bombs and bullets. "The depreciation of our property . . . has been
two hundred and fifty millions since the invasion,” one of the association’s speakers declared in the spirit of World War I. “If someone told you that there was to be an invasion that would injure your homes to that extent, wouldn’t you rise up as one man and one woman, and say as General Foch said, ‘They shall not pass’?” The avowed purpose of the organization was the prevention of the alleged depreciation of property by blacks, although from the speeches and editorials it was apparent that the implication of an inferior status for whites residing near blacks grated on the members. The *Property Owners’ Journal*, the organ of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Association, inevitably linked whites’ fear of intermarriage to the blacks’ quest for better housing: “The effrontery and impudence that nurses a desire on the part of the Negro to choose a white as a marriage mate will not result in making the Negro a desirable neighbor. . . .”

Bombing might have been viewed as a last resort against the black “invasion,” but it was attempted early. The first of the bombs arrived in July, 1917, when one exploded in the vestibule of the home of Mrs. S. P. Motley on the South Side. Mrs. Motley and her family had moved into the house in 1913, the first black family on the block, and they had lived there for four years before violence struck. She had purchased the property from a Mrs. Hughes, who, blacks charged, was a “nigger hater” and “an ardent supporter” of the Kenwood-Hyde Park Association; and what seemed particularly to rankle Mrs. Hughes, in addition to her hatred of blacks, was that a white agent had negotiated the transaction for Mrs. Motley, and she had not discovered that blacks had been the buyers until the Motleys moved in. When several other black families joined the Motleys on the block in 1917, the white neighbors denounced Mrs. Motley for enticing them there and for operating a rooming house. Fortunately, the bomb claimed no victims, but a family residing in a first-floor flat barely escaped injury when the bomb was detonated, showering them with plaster, blowing out part of the parlor wall, and demolishing the vestibule and porch.

After an eight-month hiatus during which the black
expansion continued, the bombers returned in earnest. From March, 1918, to the outbreak of the riot, 25 bombs rocked the homes of blacks and the homes and offices of realtors of both races. Of the eleven bombings in 1918, four were of properties merely held by black real estate agents, while the other seven were of black-inhabited dwellings. Moreover, mobs brandishing brickbats and other weapons and missiles stoned buildings; intimidation and threats of further violence burgeoned as well. “Look out; you’re next for hell,” read a “black hand notice.” Another was addressed to the black tenants on Vincennes Avenue: “We are going to BLOW these FLATS TO HELL and if you don’t want to go with them you had better move at once.”

Realtors persisted in commercializing racial antagonism in 1919. Panicky whites focused their wrath on the black race; and blacks, suffering increasingly from the police department’s failure to discourage the bombers, viewed the whites with suspicion and made ready to defend their homes and families against further violence. During the first six months of 1919, the bombers struck on fourteen occasions, and one of their bombs killed a six-year-old black girl. In January, explosives damaged the offices of one white and one black realtor; and on March 20, two bombs exploded in the doorways of Jesse Binga’s real estate office and an apartment building for which Binga was the agent.

In April explosives tore a gaping hole in the hallway of an apartment building in Hyde Park which a black, J. Yarbrough, had purchased from Binga scarcely three months before. The Defender intimated that Yarbrough’s white neighbors knew of the bombers’ plans, and were possibly conspirators. “It is strange . . .,” noted the newspaper, that even though “the explosion occurred at 2 a.m.,” the whites on the block “were up and fully dressed and over to inspect the damage.” Since any neighborhood explosion would no doubt rouse the nearby residents out of bed and into their clothes in less than ten minutes, the Defender betrayed an understandable bias in its indirect accusation. Yarbrough, however, agreed with the Defender’s suspicion, for he filed a $300,000 damage suit against the Hyde Park-Kenwood Associa-
tion, citing by name four real estate brokers, including the president, secretary, and a former secretary of the association. In filing the suit Yarbrough's attorney explained: "We believe the men who placed this bomb are in the employ of real estate men and that the purpose of their work is to frighten negroes out of . . . the neighborhood."

Possibly there was substance to Yarbrough's claims. The Chicago police arrested only two suspects in connection with the siege of bombings, one of whom was a clerk in the real estate firm of Dean and Meagher in Hyde Park. Both Dean and Meagher were members of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Association, and Dean put up bond for the suspected bomber. White homeowners and real estate dealers of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Association had earlier threatened to "bomb out" blacks residing there. In addition, although two other predominantly white neighborhoods in Chicago were in the "reaction" or conflict stage of residential transition, the agitation against the blacks where there was no Hyde Park-Kenwood Association was unorganized and assumed no more violent form than that of warning letters. The Association was dominated by realtors who held extensive property in Hyde Park and who affirmed unequivocally that blacks and property depreciation were synonymous. They endeavored, therefore, to preserve their interests by encouraging the blacks to move away and by discouraging any future influxes. Some residences were bombed just after the blacks purchased them, but months before occupancy and before the public learned of the sales; yet, probably only realtors, along with mortgage bankers, deed registers, and the principals, had occasion to know of these transactions. Finally, the waves of bombings ensued straightway after, and apparently as a result of, the Association's virulent protests against black occupancy.

Whether or not the realtors of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Association conspired to bomb out the blacks, two facts were evident: that the bombings usually occurred shortly after the speakers at the Association's meetings had denounced the blacks in vitriolic language (four bombs succeeded the organization's May 5 meeting);
and that these denunciations were becoming decidedly more vitriolic in the hot summer of 1919.

"PREVENT FURTHER INCURSION BY UNDESIRABLES," proclaimed a poster announcing the June 6 meeting of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Association. No doubt the Association would have been shocked to discover that blacks, among them the white-skinned, blue-eyed Walter F. White of the NAACP, had infiltrated the meetings, and that White would attend on June 6. White’s descriptions of the meeting’s “inflammatory and incendiary remarks” were corroborated by Mrs. Meta Harvey, a black who attended the June 20 and 27 gatherings. When she entered the June 20 meeting, which was convened at a bank, she heard the speaker outlining a plan for removing a black hospital from the South Side within the next two months. A voice from the floor interrupted to demand action, not talk; and there were other references to the need for “pep” in forcing the hospital’s removal within 30 rather than 60 days. Mayor William H. Thompson and the city’s health commissioner were castigated for “their favorable attitude” toward blacks and for “assenting to the location of the hospital where it was.” Some voices urged caution, but their advice was ignored. Blacks had armed, said one man; they had bought 800 rifles and buckets full of ammunition at a local department store; there would be bloodshed “if they went at the matter the way they were talking about.” “Bloodshed, nothing!” another man shouted in anger. “Let them step on my corns and I’ll show them what I’ll do.” “If we can’t get them out any other way,” agreed a voice in the rear, “we are going to put them in with the bolsheviki and bomb them out.”

Throughout the evening, speakers referred to blacks as “niggers” and “undesirables.” One speaker told what he had done to three blacks “hanging around his place.” He had put a “bolt” in his fist and knocked one down; “that’s the way to treat the ‘niggers,’” he added. The Association’s officers, practically all of whom were local realtors and officials of the Chicago Real Estate Board reported that any real estate agent who did not refuse to rent or sell to blacks would be blacklisted; that block captains had been selected to report any attempts by
blacks to move into the district; and, finally, that three hotels in the neighborhood had agreed to cooperate in in a plan whereby black employees who did not consent to vacate their residences in the district would be discharged. With these announcements, the meeting was adjourned.\textsuperscript{37}

And, indeed, blacks repeatedly advocated arming themselves in the summer of 1919. For the police’s flagrant negligence and misperformance of duty had convinced them that they would have to provide their own protection against the property owners’ associations and the bombers. Even when blacks reported bomb threats, for example, and the police staked out these dwellings beforehand, they made no arrests after the outrages. A delegation twice attempted to file a complaint with Mayor Thompson in June, 1919, but the mayor’s secretary refused to permit the blacks to see him. The \textit{Defender} expressed the consensus of the black community when it protested: “Police activity has been so deliberate and brazenly neglectful that one might construe that they are working in harmony with the bomb throwers.”\textsuperscript{38} The following week the \textit{Defender} offered the only practicable solution it saw to such one-sided law enforcement when it asked: “Why do these things go on unchecked and the perpetrators not apprehended? . . . Something must be done, and something will be done. If we must protect ourselves we shall do it with a vengeance . . . this is nature’s first law.”\textsuperscript{39}

The \textit{Whip} also espoused self-defense. A newspaper which commenced publication in the summer of 1919, The \textit{Whip} voiced the attitude of the “New Negro,” the militant, intensely race-conscious black who felt acutely the blighted hope of heightened status for the race after the war:

\textit{The Whip} informs you, the whites, that the compromising peace-at-any-price Negro is rapidly passing into the scrap heap of yesterday and being supplanted by a fearless, intelligent Negro who recognizes no compromise but who demands absolute justice and fair play . . . WE ARE NOT PACIFISTS, THEREFORE WE BELIEVE IN WAR, BUT ONLY WHEN ALL ORDERLY CIVIL PROCEDURE HAS BEEN EXHAUSTED AND THE POINTS IN QUESTION ARE JUSTIFIABLE \textsuperscript{40} . . . THE BOMBERS WILL BE BOMBED.
With the advent of summer, the housing situation appeared still gloomier. The shortage in Chicago approached 50,000 apartments and houses, affecting upwards of 200,000 people; this, in turn, created boosts in rents from 10 to 30 and, in some cases, up to 100 per cent.\(^4\) Returning servicemen aggravated the scarcity. Worse yet, expectations of an enormous summer-time construction program to offset at least part of the dearth of dwellings disappeared in mid-July when Chicago’s contractors locked out 115,000 building tradesmen. Bombings were an accurate gauge of the multiplying housing scarcity and racial tension. Seven explosions punctuated the six sultry weeks preceding the riot. This was the most extensive rash of bombings yet, and it underscored the blacks’ distrust of the police and their need for solidarity. The hostility of the fearful white residents against black “invasion” meanwhile proceeded to fuse with antipathy to blacks in other spheres, thus creating a more nearly unbroken white front. White antipathy and black aspirations mounted into an apex of racial antagonism in the summer of 1919. Conflicts over housing, when fused with bitter competition over jobs, political power, and facilities for education, transportation, and recreation, set the stage for the tragedy that was to follow—the bloody Chicago race riot of 1919.

\(^1\) *Chicago Defender*, November 23, 1918. With a toll of 38 dead, 23 blacks and 15 whites, and well over 500 injured, the Chicago riot was perhaps the bloodiest of “the Red Summer” of 1919.


\(^3\) Chicago *Broad Ax*, June 22, 1918; clipping from *Chicago Post*, June 20, 1919, in NAACP Papers, in possession of NAACP's regional Youth Division, Washington, D.C. (NAACP-2).


7 Fannie Barrier Williams, “Social Bonds in the ‘Black Belt’ of Chicago,” *Charities*, XV (October 7, 1905), 40-44; David A. Wallace, “Residential Concentration of Negroes in Chicago” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1953), 67-69. At the time of the migration, the great majority of blacks still lived in an island between 22nd and 39th streets and Wentworth Avenue, with scattered settlements to Cottage Grove Avenue. Thus the black belt, as it existed in 1906, absorbed most of the 10,000 blacks without bringing new residential areas into existence.


11 These figures are from the 1925 Health Department Records, but all data indicate that the health of blacks was no better and perhaps even worse in 1919: H. L. Harris, “Negro Mortality Rates in Chicago,” *Social Service Review*, I (March, 1927), 58-77.


18 At this time, the Irish were also expanding south, along Halstead Street which was parallel to and only narrowly separated from the Negro expansion. Thus the blacks were not able to penetrate the Irish barrier. Some migrants, however, settled in deteriorating neighborhoods in the near North and West sides: see Harvey W. Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum . . .* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), 38, 147-49. Also about 1,000 blacks lived in Robbins, an all-Negro town incorporated in 1917 near the Calumet area: undated article by Carl Sandburg, “Colored Folk Rule Cook County Town,” in Papers of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

The Chicago Commission defined the general neighborhood of Hyde Park-Kenwood as being from 39th to 59th Streets, and from State Street to Lake Michigan. Hyde Park and Kenwood were often lumped together as simply Hyde Park. To prevent confusion, the author has usually referred to them compositely as Hyde Park.


“Elements in the South Side Problem,” undated memorandum in NAACP-2; *Chicago Defender*, April 12, 19, 26, May 3, 17, 1919; Chicago *Broad Ax*, June 14, 1918.


*Chicago Defender*, September 22, 1917.


Only one attempt at codified racial segregation was made by the city council between 1913-1923 and this was during the heat of the riot. Letter from reference librarian, Chicago Municipal Reference Library, to the author, September 19, 1963.

After many years of concerted lobbying by Chicago's realtors, the Illinois General Assembly passed an enabling act in late June, 1919, which merely allowed the city of Chicago to prohibit the construction of factories in residential areas. It had no black opposition, and was backed by realtors and reformers alike: Illinois General Assembly, *Senate Debates, 1919* (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Co., 1920), 287-289, 312, 1179-1180; *ibid.*, *House Debates, 1919*, 716-717, 897-899.

As early as January, 1920, the Hyde Park-Kenwood Association was excluding blacks through the "united action" of white property owners. See Chicago Daily Tribune, January 10, 1920. By 1925, the bombings, which had plagued blacks and certain realtors, ceased when the restrictive covenants became, as a Chicago judge and member of the Chicago Real Estate Board told the Hyde Park Kiwanis Club, "like marvelous delicately-woven chain armor . . . [excluding] any member of a race not caucasian." Hyde Park Herald, March 20, 1928. Between 1920-1930, the Negro population in Hyde Park-Kenwood even decreased: Duncan, Negro Population of Chicago, 96.


In NAACP-2, "By Laws Kenwood Property Owner's [sic] Association"; letter from W. H. Schendorf to "Fellow Members," March 24, 1919; and copy of solicitation letter quoted in undated memorandum.

Chicago Commission, Negro in Chicago, 118, 119, 590-92; Jesse Binga's article on the Association in Chicago Defender, March 1, 1919; excerpts from letter from Hyde Park-Kenwood Association to Mayor Thompson, undated, NAACP-2.

A. Clement MacNeal to John Shilladay, April 15, 1920, including four affidavits-case histories of bombings, in NAACP-2; Chicago Defender, July 7, 1917.

Chicago Defender, May 11, 25, June 1, 8, 15, August 31, September 28, October 26, November 2, 1918; Chicago Broad Ax, May 25, 1918; Interchurch World Movement, The Inter-Racial Situation in Chicago, passim; Chicago Commission, Negro in Chicago, 31, 123-133, 536, 596.

Chicago Daily Journal, March 20, 1919; New York Age, July 12, 1919; Chicago Broad Ax, June 7, 14, July 12, 1919; Chicago Defender, June 7, 21, 28, 1919; Bontemps and Conroy, Anyplace But Here, 176; Chicago Commission, Negro in Chicago, 539; list of bombings in NAACP-2.

Chicago Herald-Examiner, April 7, July 13, 1919; Chicago Daily Journal, April 7, July 12, 1919; Chicago Daily Tribune, April 7, 1919; Chicago Defender, April 12, 1919.


In NAACP-2, poster announcing June 6, 1919, meeting; notarized statement by Walter White, January 14, 1920; memorandum by J. R. Shilladay, executive secretary of the NAACP, on "Interview with Mrs. Meta Harvey on Kenwood and Hyde Park . . . Association meetings of June 20 and June 27, 1919." August 3, 1919; and regarding the Lake Park Hospital see Chicago Defender, April 19, 1919; Chicago Broad Ax, March 15, 22, 1919.

Chicago's white newspapers were split over the commendability of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Association's purposes. The Herald-Examiner of July 2, 1919, extolled both Booker T. Washington's 1895 Atlanta Address and the association. The Tribune of June 30, 1919, felt that "clash" might "surely follow" the Association's activities.

Chicago Defender, May 31, June 21, July 12, 1919; Chicago Broad Ax, June 7, July 12, 1919; Chicago Daily News, June 4, 1919.
39 *Chicago Defender*, June 28, 1919.
30 *Chicago Whip*, June 28, 1919.