

## **CHIRAQ: Oppression, Homicide, Concentrated Misery, and Gangsterism in Chicago**

by

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### ***Abstract***

*Chicago may be a city palace for those who are deeply rooted in the American Dream. Unfortunately, Chicago has not spared a significant portion of blacks from racism, oppression, unemployment, opportunity blockages, resource strain, discretionary justice, questionable policing, neighborhood disorganization, substandard housing, a criminogenic economy, and gangsterism. These social forces were troublesome creating a permanent underclass dominated by disenfranchised black males who seem thoroughly immersed in a subculture where violence is the most valued social currency. Chicago is the host city for Chiraq, a collection of segregated urban enclaves ruled by influential street codes and gangs that appear to endorse fatal violence as the primary means to resolve conflicts.*

### **Introduction**

Chicago is no stranger to historically ranking amongst the top ten cities with alarmingly high homicides rates. However, parts of Chicago are in a new era where participants have seemingly embraced the nefarious trappings of a murderous subculture known as Chiraq (Davey and Smith, 2015). The primary purpose of this article is twofold: (1) to identify meaningful social forces that urban lower-class blacks have encountered that could serve as valid explanations for the subculture of violence in Chicago's south-side neighborhoods; and (2) to discuss racism-oppression as a probable contributor to a criminal and violent subculture that fuels gangsterism. Ultimately, the goal is to examine the social construction of Chiraq. Alternatively, it should be noted that examining the social construction of Chiraq, is not an exercise in excuse making for residents' deviant, criminal and violent behavioral outcomes.

On the surface, the optics of Chicago's Chiraq more than anything appears to have highlighted mainstream society's fears about the depravity of black males (Glaude, 2016; Wilson, 2009; and Welch, 2007). Chicago's Chiraq may be more than subscription to a violent subculture by impoverished south-side black residents. There are some longstanding social forces that seem to have contributed to the subculture of violence in Chicago. For example, Tucker (1968) contends that life and death in the ghetto is significantly related to oppression and injustice. Tucker argues that black males have the ability to interpret oppression as strategic and deliberate injustice, which creates a miserable mindset that manifests as senseless violence. Tucker's (1968) sentiments seem relevant with respect to the impact of racial legacy on stratification and behavioral outcomes. Tucker states:

*Yesterday is part of a continuum and, therefore, is part of today's problem. What is happening today is precisely because of yesterday's occurrences (Tucker, 1968:57)... We have seen that the Negro's heritage in America at best has been one of willful neglect at the behest of his white brother. At worst, it has been conscious subjugation by a white community which has stripped him of his manhood, his pride and his incentive by throwing him into the pit of the city and daring, indeed taunting, him to survive amidst squalor, disease, unemployment, depravity. What little the black man has left when he enters the city's bowels, the ghetto kills off forever. Everything that is, but vengeance. For the street-corner text books of the inner city teach the lessons of hatred well, even to the student who refuses to listen. The depravity, the ugliness, the powerlessness, all combine to make learning easy. Classes are short---men graduate early (Tucker, 1968:123).*

Tucker's comments were meant to capture a 1960's reality; however, there does seem to be a continuum of oppression that transcended time and could very well be related to modern day Chiraq. Apparently, Chiraq residency presents a difficult set of normative expectations, which highlights predatory behavior as necessary for successful manhood. It should come as no surprise then that black males would turn to street gangs to cope with situational circumstances associated with urban residency in economically strapped, class segregated, isolated enclaves because gangs offer a reasonable coping strategy. Chiraq has emerged as a place where black males negotiate ways to matter in an environment where murder is commonplace. Essentially, it's about being a Black Caesar, specifically in areas that promote Chiraq as a culture of honor (Cureton, 2011(a); Cureton, 2010; Williams, 2004; Anderson, 1999; Gilligan, 1997; Short, 1997; Shakur, 1993; Anderson, 1990; and Katz, 1988).

### **Logical Assumptions**

The author agrees with Knox (2009) in that examining historical social forces reinforces knowledge of correlation and causation with respect to behavioral outcomes. Examining race legacy variables should not be categorized as a form of sociological liberalism by conservative readers who may be inclined to think that this research is nothing more than an exercise in excusing blacks' criminality (Knox, 2009; Wright and Calhoun,

2006; and Becker and Horowitz, 1972). The following assumptions do not remove personal responsibility, nor do they imply that any person engaging in violence should not be held legally responsible and morally accountable for their actions, no matter the degree of deprivation or obsession with the supposed lifestyle of Chiraq.

West (2001) contends that black flight (i.e. economic, social, cultural, and residential separation by middle class blacks from lower class black communities), was so devastating to those blacks left behind that communities spiraled into nihilism and became vulnerable to criminogenic subcultures and groups. Additionally, centralized misery at some point will manifest as destructive behaviors and victimization will be intra-racial due to isolated proximity of like circumstanced residents (Glaude, 2016; Wilson, 2009; Williams, 2004; Anderson, 1999; Dyson, 1996 and Shakur, 1993). The first assumption is that a permanent underclass of blacks reside in locations considered the south side of Chicago, and this permanent underclass is the product of racism, oppression, and government policies concerning housing issues. The second assumption is that the emergence of a counter-culture included the formation of black gangs. Black gangsterism is attractive to young black males because gangs help ghetto confined males frame their immediate social world, and provides access to financial and social success in the absence of legitimate resources (Cureton 2011(b); and Cureton, 2009).

Hagedorn (2009) suggests that gang genealogy is important to investigate in order to arrive at some level of understanding relative to Chicago politics, differential cultural and racial processing of gangs, black market economy participation, and gang violence.

The third assumption is that Chicago institutionalized white gangs through opportunities for assimilation and social acceptance, and alternatively declared war on black gangs without necessarily eliminating the illegal vices (e.g. drugs, gambling, and prostitution) that continued to contribute to community decline. The war on black gangs has extended generations, which led to an even more unstructured and undisciplined way to pursue resources and settle disputes. Therefore, the fourth assumption is that gangster's traditional rules of engagement has taken a back seat to fragmented neighborhood cliques and individual conflicts. Fundamentally, Chicago has a problem, like many cities with impoverished generational urbanity. What this means is that there is a permanent underclass with a devastating subculture of violence that seems to be powerful enough to contribute to a consistently high homicide rate that appears to fuel acceptance of a murderous Chiraq as a badge of honor.

Gilligan (1997) contends that routine interactions amongst similarly circumstanced peers contributes to sub-culturally specific normative expectations and social hierarchies where public persona is a form of social capital. Gilligan's culture of honor perspective predicts fatal violence in those instances where males have encountered events that lead to peer group ridicule, scorn, and criticism. According to Gilligan, when a male is subjected to challenges to his manhood or made to feel uncomfortable in the presence of his peers, he may entertain the idea of violence to offset any perceived loss of respect (Gilligan, 1997). Gilligan states:

*People will sacrifice their bodies if they perceive it as the only way to avoid losing their souls, losing their minds, or losing face (Gilligan, 1997:96)... I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed and that did not represent the attempt to prevent or undo this loss of face, no matter how severe the punishment..The purpose of violence is to diminish the intensity of shame and replace it as far as possible with its opposite, pride, thus preventing the individual from being overwhelmed by the feeling of shame. Violence toward others, such as homicide, is an attempt to replace shame with pride (Gilligan, 1997:110-111).*

These quotes seem to suggest that fatal violence is a defense mechanism against personal challenges. For those on the outside, murder seems to be unnecessary but it is a firm protest against any individual perceived as encroaching upon one's manhood, resources, territory or social networks. Following through with violence would be bolstered in instances where an individual is representing a neighborhood gang, clique, posse or group. Therefore, the fifth assumption is that Chiraq represents a sub-group of black males inclined to commit murder because Chiraq has become a badge of honor that they embrace with full understanding (no diminished capacity) that murder is a requirement for survival.

### **Chiraq: A Collection of Hoods with Blood Stained Streets and Heart Broken Mothers**

Chicago may very well be a tale of two cities. Chicago has a rich history of progressive liberalism, economic prosperity, suburbanization and satellite city expansion, religious and worship diversity, a winning professional sports' tradition, and a cultural renaissance that makes Chicago extremely attractive. Alternatively, Chicago has neighborhoods that have a legacy of oppression and disenfranchisement resulting in hood enclaves with terrible economic, resource, social and cultural conditions. The beauty of Chicago has taken a back seat to the present narrative about Chiraq.

The city moniker, Chiraq came into existence by way of music, known as Drillinois, in 2009; however, the seeds of ghetto residents' discontent was planted perhaps as early as 1912 (Rubenstein, 2016; Kaba, 2014; Alderman and Caspsersen, 2015; Cureton, 2009; Hagedorn, 2009; Knox, 2009; Wilson, 1987; Keegan, 1971 and Tucker, 1968). Chiraq is far more than a moniker that is gaining traction as a sub-genre of rap music. To be certain Drillinois' mid-west music is the equivalent of the west coast's gangster rap music. Drillinois' lyrics represent a declaration about the horrors of extreme social conditions that have become significant predictors of murder and victimization. Drillinois has also garnered social acceptance by way of social media allowing people who have never been to Chiraq to become voyeurs. The Drillinois music scene has resulted in a legitimate cash flow as talented artists have signed music deals that propelled them into ghetto superstardom. Drill music, boasts about coming of age in a war zone, and how murder is a necessary ingredient of masculinity in Chiraq. Drill music has appeal because it allows gangsters and street cliques to demonstrate their predatory prowess in a way that can lead to making enough money to

get out of the neighborhood and/or to have instant social acclaim (McClelland, 2013). There is no denying that segments of the black community have been exposed to rampant violence and murder. Danger elevates in public places and spaces, and unfortunately there is no guaranteed safety even while in the home. Chiraq is guns, gangs, violence and a steady procession of funerals. It's more than some juvenile subculture of violence as evidenced by a slow aging out of the culture of violence (Alderman and Caspersen, 2015; Kaba, 2014; and McClelland, 2013).

Chiraq has been rebuffed by political officials, social control agents, and residents who are exposed to the reality that they are living in an area where their fundamental rights to safety and security have been compromised. While it is understandable that there would be some level of discontent with Chiraq, it should be expected that at some point the poverty, resource strain, blocked opportunities for social mobility, substandard housing, neighborhood isolation, urban warfare amongst gangs, prevalence of gun violence, and murder would eventually be given a label by those suffering from these social ills on a daily basis (Alderman and Caspersen, 2015; Amnesty International, 2014; and Kaba 2014).

### **Statistical Revelations: No Peace of Mind**

The murder rate in Chicago reflects a city that has homeland insecurity in south and certain west side areas. City officials and some residents contest notions that areas with high incidences of murder resemble that of two war zones, Iraq and Afghanistan (Alderman and Caspersen, 2015; and Kaba, 2014). The murder of civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2001 and 2011 suggests that such a comparison is an exaggeration (Wagner, 2015; Amnesty International, 2014; Lutz, 2013; and Papachristos, 2013).

According to Table 1, Chiraq's narrative comparing its body count to the Afghanistan or Iraq wars taking place between 2001-2011 and 2003-2011, respectively, while infamously boastful, fails to come close to these war torn Middle East countries in terms of civilian deaths for both Afghanistan (220,000) and Iraq (1,000,000). Chiraq did have 1,934 more black victims of murder than United States' uniformed soldiers killed in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2011; however, there were 1,322 more deaths of United States' uniformed soldiers in Iraq from 2003 to 2011 than black residents of Chiraq during that same time period (Wagner, 2015; Lutz 2013; and City of Chicago Police Department 2011).

Afghanistan and Iraq were identified as the front to fight the war against terrorism because both harbor terrorists and threaten homeland security. Afghanistan and Iraq are consumed by civil and sectarian wars, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes against its citizens. The United States has spent billions of dollars, and lost too many American soldiers on foreign soil in combative situations. Currently, the United States is witnessing alarming instances of soldiers committing suicide. Arguably, both Afghanistan and Iraq have refugee issues, the absence of a competent government, which paves the way for common criminals, nationalists, insurgents, foreign, and domestic jihadists to engage in some jaded version of social order. Both countries continue to be unstable as jihadists engage in terrorism as a hard

line declaration of an urgent need for a caliphate. Moreover, these two countries are operating in a region where Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen have serious issues that feed into regional instability. This brief summary of the Middle East illustrates that Afghanistan and Iraq are unsettled locales where the limits of the law is constantly being strained (Wagner, 2015; Lutz, 2013; Byman, 2008; Murawiec, 2008; and Phares, 2008).

Alternatively, Chiraq is part of Chicago with laws that a disproportionate number of disenfranchised black males (between the ages of 17 to 35) have decided to violate in lieu of subscribing to a value system that endorses murder as acceptable behavior (Kaba, 2014; Voisin and Guilamo-Ramos, 2008; Stewart and Simons, 2006; Anderson 1999; Shakur, 1993; Gilligan, 1997; and Katz, 1988). Chiraq embodies a permanent underclass of blacks who have experienced population disenfranchisement, housing segregation and isolation, poverty, tense police interactions, increased access to guns, criminogenic and gangster activities, violence and lethal predation.

Chiraq initially represented Englewood; however, there is an undeniable murderous campaign that spreads across many Southside and Westside areas. Hence in many respects Chiraq represents a collection of neighborhoods with elevated levels of poverty, police militarization, access to guns, gangster predation, and murder. The following list of neighborhoods, public spaces and places are named because of their contribution to Chicago's murder rate from 1991 to mid-year 2016: Auburn, Austin, Chatham, Englewood, Fuller Park, Garfield, Gresham, Lawndale, New City, Robert Taylor Homes, Roseland, South Grand Boulevard, South Shore, Washington Park, and Woodlawn (Alderman, and Caspersen, 2015; City of Chicago Police Department, 2014; Amnesty International, 2014; Kaba, 2014; and Venkatesh, 2008).

An examination of data from a cross section of researchers, a global movement group and the city of Chicago's police department reveals that from 1991 through April 2016, there were 17,024 white, black, and Hispanic murders in Chicago. Black victims counted 11,680 (68%) of the total murders occurring between 1991 and 2016. Data from 1991 to 2011 reveal that the total white, black, and Hispanic murder offenders was 12,174, and black murder offenders were 9,278 (76%) of that total. Chicago's total murder

occurrences for 2009 to April 2016 is 3,413. Chiraq's contribution to that murder total is 2,569 (75%) (Rubenstein, 2016; Davey and Smith, 2015; Alderman and Caspersen, 2015; Amnesty International, 2014; City of Chicago Police Department, 2014; Papachristos, 2013; Heinzman, 2012; and City of Chicago Police Department, 2011).

Certain neighborhoods in Chicago have typically been beset by gangs, guns, drugs, and troublesome behaviors related to relationships. Moreover, it seems that lethal outcomes were far more likely to be the result of guns than knives. According to Table 2, street gang fights was the leading cause of murder from 1991 to 2011. Total murders as a result of gang fights was 3,365, followed by armed robbery (1,207), domestic altercations (1,074), and then gang related killings over drugs (1,020).

Table 3, illustrates that murders in Chicago were the result of gun violence. From 1991 to 2011, there is no single time interval where victims of lethal stabbings were more than those murdered by a gun. In fact, the total from 1991 to 2011 indicates that 1,410 lethal stabbings was eclipsed by 10,258 gun related murders.

Although data from the tables 2 and 3 indicate gang violence, armed robbery, domestic altercations, and gang related drug conflicts as correlates for murder and lethal victimization was due to guns more than stabbing instruments for all of Chicago, it is reasonable to assume that these murders are likely concentrated in poor black communities. Certainly, this is a safe assumption given during the period of 1991 to 2011, black murder offenders accounted for 76% and black murdered victims represented 68% of all murders. Also, the evidence is overwhelming with respect to where the murders are taking place, south-side of Chicago (Amnesty International, 2014; Heinzman, 2012; and City of Chicago Police Department, 2011).

Further proof that blacks are disproportionately involved in Chicago's murders is represented by the fact that blacks had higher percentages of murder, (71% to 81% of the time from 1991 to 2011). However, the overall average was about 75% of Chicago's total murders for over 25 years (1991 to 2016). It is with respect to this consistent pattern of 75% black murder offenders and victims that estimates about race/age were made. The leading age category for black murderers from 1991 to 2011 was 17-25 (5,105), followed by 26-35 (1,933), and then 14-16 (822) year olds. Murder offenders did not start declining until the 36-45 (756), 46-55 (292) and then 56 and over (125) age category. There were no recorded murders by kids younger than 10 years old; however kids from 10 to 13 (54) were also perpetrators of murder. The murdered victim data suggests a similar pattern. For the period of 1991 to 2011, black males were far more likely to be victims of lethal violence averaging (347) per year, while black females were victims of murder about (60) per year. The leading age category for murdered victims from 1991 to 2011 is 17-25 (4,176), followed by 26-35 (3,463), and then 14-16 (774) year olds. Even more unfortunate is that kids as young as ten years old were victims as well. The data illustrates that between 1991 and 2011 there were an estimated (293) black kids under 10 years old murdered. Another (77) kids from ages 10 to 13 and (581) young teens ages 14 to 16, were murdered between 1991 and 2011. In other words, when looking at ages 16 and under, the total number is (951) or (46) youth 16 and under were murdered per year between 1991-2011 (Amnesty International, 2014; and City Chicago Police Department, 2011).

The data support a narrative that 17 to 35 years old are prime ages for lethal violence in Chicago when it comes to murdering and fatal victimization. It is difficult to believe that the violent nature of Chicago is strictly the work of young black males, when ages 17-25 and 26-35 have more murderers than any other age categories.

Perhaps there are two explanations operating at the same time to effect black-on-black lethal violence; (1) Chicago requires young men to consider that being a victim of murder has to be countered by a willingness to engage in murder; and (2) older men view Chicago as an oppressive community that is so segregated as to warrant police occupation and brutality, which effects frustration and anger that is acted out on other black residents

(Kaba, 2014; Wilson, 2009; and West, 2001). Overall, it seems logical to conclude that Chiraq can be classified as a health hazard for blacks as Chiraq is consumed by conflict and an absence of remorse when considering (46) youth a year, 16 and under were the victims of murder from 1991 to 2011. The Drillinois' music sub-genre offers the impression that killing is a badge of honor, and the rampant violence is undeterred by the steady procession of funerals (Kaba, 2014; McClelland, 2013; and City of Chicago Police Department, 2011).

Voisin and Guilamo-Ramos' (2008) community violence exposure (CVE) perspective may have some relevance for Chiraq. According to Voisin and Guilamo-Ramos, "community violence exposure refers to violent acts which occur outside the home between individuals who are unrelated and who may or may not know each other" (Voisin and Guilamo-Ramos, 2008:83). Community violence exposure (e.g. experiencing—witness to or victim of deviance, crime, violence and lethal predation) is a construct of community social disorganization and decline. Far too many Chiraq residents may be operating with the impression that they are living a nightmare with no entry points to the American Dream. The unfortunate result is that blacks, particularly males seeking social status, are negotiating manhood in an environment ravaged by extreme poverty, sub-standard housing, gang warfare and personal challenges to masculinity. The byproduct is a street version of respect, which implies that males must create an aura of street invincibility by demonstrating a willingness to engage in lethal violence (Williams, 2004; Wilson, 2002; Shakur, 1993; Anderson, 1999; Katz, 1988; Miller, 1975; and Miller, 1958).

The impact of gangs is an additional element of Chiraq that cannot be dismissed even after Chicago's war on gangs (Amnesty International 2014; and Hagedorn, 2009). Southside and other impoverished predominantly black locales have a history of gangsterism that subscribes to the philosophy that street success means mastering the environment by getting money (albeit in an illegitimate fashion), confronting personal challenges and emerging with respect. Therefore, black males overly commit to aggressive tendencies and violence as solutions to personal challenges in an effort to validate manhood and to solidify rank in gangs (Cureton, 2008; Stewart and Simons 2006; Stewart, Schreck and Simons, 2006; Williams, 2004; Wilson, 2002; Shakur, 1993; Anderson, 1999; Anderson, 1990; Katz, 1988; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Miller, 1975; Miller, 1958; and Cohen, 1955).

Chiraq is chaotically operating with indifference to public outcry, and appears to be beyond repair. The value of life has been set to zero. Murderers seem oblivious to mothers who have scrubbed the blood of their children off the dirty streets, have walked behind caskets, buried their children, and publicly wept, while decreeing the insanity of innocence lost. Chiraq seems to be dominated by males with the mindset that the streets will be ruled by the gun, and the only lesson worth learning is that when you need a gun, you better have it, or become a casualty of war.

**Racism-Oppression: The Making of an Angry Subculture**

America has been far too patient with dispensing full citizenship rights to blacks. It is fair to state that this country has been passive, when it came to issues related to justice, political representation, equity, fairness, social liberties, and security (Glaude, 2016, Pyke 2010; Wilson, 2009; Hilliard, et al., 2006; West, 2001; Dyson, 1996; Ture and Hamilton, 1992; and Staples, 1973). Racism-oppression was countered by political, economic, employment, social, housing, cultural and religious improvement campaigns that forced America to undergo social changes with respect to blacks' life chances and life course outcomes. There was a measured degree of political and legislative success, equity and fairness amendments prompting improved employment, education, housing and public accommodations as well as attempts to balance heavy handed discretionary justice and policing. However, these improvements led to black flight, which stratified, and disrupted community cohesion. The remaining residents seemingly lost a significant life line to mainstream America and descended into urban physical and social decline. Ultimately, this country has mishandled its black population as evidenced by federal, state, and local institutions being complicit in racially oppressing blacks (Alexander, 2010; Wilson, 2009; West 2001; and Dyson 1996). The aftermath has been black flight and the creation of black permanent underclasses across the United States. The permanent underclass of blacks has generational dependency on the government for social services and living accommodations, earn approximately 10,000 or less a year, with dysfunctional lifestyles, values and habits that are often counter-productive, prohibit social mobility, functional assimilation into mainstream society, and encourages exploring criminogenic opportunities and violence (Cureton, 2011(a); Wilson, 2009; West 2001; Wilson, 1996; Anderson, 1999; and Wilson, 1987).

Chicago, like many American cities had to contend with large scale migration that ended up being troublesome when employment opportunities disappeared. Limited employment with excessive migration created housing deficits resulting in overcrowding. Chicago attempted to address the issue in a manner that satisfied general fears about becoming a city over-run by a deprived and depraved class of blacks; which resulted in housing segregation and isolation. Blacks were concentrated in south side parts of Chicago, known as black ghettos (Hagedorn, 2009; Venkatesh, 2008; and Hagedorn 2006). At one point Chicago took pride in Robert Taylor and Cabrini Green projects as housing solutions. Over time, Robert Taylor and Cabrini Green became physical and social health hazards, forcing gentrification or housing relocation between 2007 and 2011 (Venkatesh, 2008). The result was a wave of housing displacement, which did lead to the kind of stress, anxiety and frustration that produced fragmented ganglands.

Chicago's housing decisions were racist and oppressive given the decisions were influenced by whites' fears that blacks had to be controlled, which meant socially regulated and kept at a distance. Hence, segregation appeared to take precedence over unacceptable living conditions creating generations of blacks who could not afford to escape state dependency, intentional isolation and substandard housing (Popkin, et al., 2012; Pyke,

2010; Hagedorn, 2009; and Philpott, 1978). Chicago's housing segregation was accompanied by cuts in funding to social programs. Stripping a dependent population of people of funds necessary for survival is racially oppressive because federal and state agencies have a responsibility to contribute to the social welfare and well-being of its citizens.

Defunding economic development and job training programs, social service programs geared towards family education and child care, in addition to turning a blind eye to decaying housing infrastructures, ignoring rights to clean water, regular sanitation pick-ups, and having residents become resigned to gang activity, is racially oppressive.

It is racially stagnating, anytime black citizens are denied programs and services that improve well-being because of conservative viewpoints that ghetto dwellers were less deserving, parasitical, prone to violence, and personally responsible for their deprived status (Wilson, 2009; and West, 2001). The conservative movement was successful in cutting funds, and eliminating much needed programs that could have been beneficial in solving the problems of adjustment related to living in impoverished areas (Wilson, 2009; and Wilson, 1987). The family unit became markedly dysfunctional as fathers were noticeably absent, which cleared the way for a surrogate family, the gang. The gang was the perfect organization because gangs were positioned as important street forces and controllers of illegal means to make money. Gangs seemed to be a primary agent of support for black males who were looking for something meaningful to cling to and for those who were in search of respect and independence. Even if gangs started out as a social network for boys to become men, community deprivation, misery, and violence forced gangs to take on a more serious identity (Knox, 2009; Williams, 2004; Short, 1997; Shakur, 1993; and Thrasher, 1927).

Public fear would rise again when black gangs served notice that they were a force to be reckoned with. The demand for containment, control, suppression and elimination cleared the way for heavy handed policing in black neighborhoods, which became another symbol of racism-oppression (Every 36 Hours Campaign 2013; Hilliard, et al., 2006; and Hilliard and Weise 2002). The police presence in black ghettos was met with acceptance by decent families still residing in impoverished areas because they wanted protection, and security from violent gangs. However, this acceptance of policing dissolved into apprehension and suspicion as policing seemed to be more militaristic and brutal. The perception of policing as less protective and more abusive with little regard for the value of black lives served to further integrate gangs and strengthen their resolve (Cureton 2011(a); Williams, 2004; Anderson, 1990; and Shakur, 1993).

Gangs thrived because they offered the kind of protection, security and sense of revenge that the police could not offer, had a surplus of motivated males wanting some type of connection to ways to make money, had access to the neighborhood vices (drugs, women, and gambling), and gangs had the weapons that were coveted by males seeking power (Amnesty International, 2014; City of Chicago Police Department, 2014; Every 36 Hours Campaign, 2013; Hagedorn, 2009; Venkatesh, 2008; Hagedorn, 2006; Dawley, 1992; and Keegan 1971).

The legacy of racism-oppression stratified blacks into camps that pursued integration and assimilation with enough success to separate them from disenfranchised and marginalized blacks. The camp that wanted integration and assimilation were effective participants of a civil disobedience protest era that brought about social change through political and social movements. Unfortunately, these social changes seemed middle class specific and were not expansive enough to include all blacks; therefore, the grass-roots activism that focused on militancy, aggression and retaliatory violence over prayer captured the imagination of the oppressed. Even though the protest era did have activist groups from every community, black gangs were influential at the grass-roots level and were once again the best alternative for those who felt betrayed, and unable to capitalize on social mobility opportunities (Cureton, 2011(a); Cureton, 2009; and Hilliard, et al., 2006).

### **Seeds of Discontent: Chiraq Just Another Name for Black Chicago Gangsterism**

This section discusses Hagedorn's position paper with respect to white and black gangs' assimilation into Chicago's mainstream institutions. The author contends that Hagedorn's research provides important insight about the impact of race and social mobility on gangsterism (Hagedorn, 2009). Black gangsterism is a staple of black communities in Chicago. Black gangsterism has been in shotgun position of any vehicle seeking changes to the conditions of blacks' in Chicago. However, white gangsterism while not a new talking point for Chicago gangsterism, has been given very little attention in terms of its contribution to black gangsterism and Chiraq.

Hagedorn (2009) contends that Chicago's white gangs (early 1900's up until approximately late 1960's) took advantage of political scenes that were open to inclusion, opportunities to informally control, regulate and terrorize blacks' without formal sanctions from political figures or law enforcement, and finally, opportunities to capitalize on socially acceptable, socially mobile assimilation options that secured stability in mainstream America. Alternatively, black gangs (during the same time period) were labeled public enemies, locked out of functional citizenship while simultaneously facing indifference with respect to participating in Chicago's illicit vice economy.

Chicago is a strong political city with close ties to organized crime. Chicago's political institutions and organized crime were significant ingredients impacting the trajectory of white and black gangs. Polish and Irish gangs were embraced and in fact put to work to garner political support during electoral seasons. Winning campaigns usually served to benefit Polish and Irish gang members because elected politicians rewarded gangsters with employment opportunities with civil service agencies (e.g. police officers and firemen). Italian gang members were also seen as beneficial because of their association with organized crime. Organized crime families controlled street vices, and ruled the criminogenic underworld in a manner that was convenient for police officers and politicians. What's more white gangs served as social gatekeepers using violence to restrict blacks' social movements (Hagedorn, 2009). White gangs were in many respects informal foot patrols endorsed by politicians and police officers evidenced by violent and lethal behaviors rarely resulted in

arrests. Essentially, white gangs represented a combination of political, criminal, and territorial groups that were given opportunities to assimilate. Overtime, gangs like the Hamburg Club, 42 Gang, Taylor Street Crew, and the Circus Gang dissolved due to social mobility. Continued migration, and broken neighborhood covenant restrictions led to the remaining white street corner gangs suffering more gang war casualties, and losing territory because white gangs were outnumbered, and strategically out-flanked by black, Mexican, and Puerto Rican super gangs who had higher levels of hostility and an unwillingness to accept any type of status quo conditions (Hagedorn, 2009; and Hagedorn, 2006).

As inter-racial conflicts between street gangs began to subside, intra-racial conflict amongst black gangs became a devastating reality that south and north-west side black communities have never recovered from. The older generation (the 1930's to the late 1950's) males tried to convince the post-Civil Rights (1960's) generation that the illegal drug, gambling, and prostitution economy was a sustainable institution because of long standing agreements with organized crime families, who in turn influenced politicians, and police officers to stay away from black communities.

However, there were segments of the population (e.g. unemployed blacks, younger black males and those who were fed up with intrusive racism-oppression) that did not see any benefits to status quo agreements because the community continued to experience physical decay, blocked socially acceptable employment opportunities, and police harassment and brutality. There was further fragmentation between activists who were fighting for better opportunities to improve life chances, and gang members who wanted to control the trafficking of drugs (cocaine and heroin) in the community (Hagedorn, 2009). In other words, Chicago's ghettos were consumed by an intense general revolutionary campaign for civil rights, while at the same time contending with Chicago's war on crime, drugs and gangs (Hagedorn, 2009: and Hagedorn, 2006).

The 1940's to 1960's era of black gangsterism witnessed gangs like the Vice Kings, Vice Lords, Conservative Vice Lords, Black P. Stones, El Rukn and Disciples become rulers of south and west side territories in Chicago. These gangs built a formidable street reputation and were reasonable caretakers of the Policy (gambling and numbers running circuit) and the drug trafficking market. Certainly, there was an element of violence attached to gaining control of Policy (which was once a mafia stronghold) and drug trafficking (forcing mafia outfits to desist from selling on the streets and accept the role as drug suppliers only) (Hagedorn, 2009).

During the protest era these gangs were at the forefront of social activism by consolidating to become a Lords, Stones and Disciples (LSD) organization that would team up with the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, The Nation of Islam as well as other Civil Rights' organizations. Federal and state government agencies, as well as police departments had a difficult time accepting a coalition of revolutionaries and gangsters as community improvement organizations and would therefore, support the Counter Intelligence Program (Cointelpro) to discredit and assassinate the character black nationalists, Civil Rights and community grassroots leaders. Cointelpro was successful in fueling tension between protest

groups and gangs. Civil Rights groups were successful in improving civil rights entitlements. Black Nationalist groups were successful in declaring the power of religious discipline, a disassociation from Christianity, and neighborhood independence. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was a successful three year campaign that empowered the black community at the grass-roots level and demonstrated how even a poor community could generate enough resources to feed the children in the community (Hilliard, et al, 2006; Hilliard and Weise, 2002; Magida, 1996; Ture and Hamilton, 1992; and Lincoln 1961). In spite of the success of gangs like the Conservative Vice Lords, who had proven that they were smart enough to employ a business model to secure private funding, purchase commercial property, curb lethal violence, and offer job training and self-esteem building, the war on drugs, crime, and gangs was relentless leading to the incarceration of gang leadership (Dawley 1992). The incarceration of gang leadership failed to eliminate communication about what it takes to traffic drugs, contributed to gangster fragmentation, and renewed street warfare for control of territory, and drug trafficking (Cureton, 2011(a); Cureton, 2009; Hagedorn, 2009; Knox, 2009; Hagedorn, 2006; Hilliard, et al., 2006; Hilliard and Weise, 2002; Marable, 1998; Marable 1997; Magida, 1996; and Lincoln, 1961).

Black super-power gangs the likes of Vice Lords, Conservative Vice Lords, Black P. Stones, and Gangster Disciples have existed for consecutive generations and now are so entrenched in south and west side communities, that these areas are now ganglands with gangster politics, and street code ethics dictating normative expectations concerning rites of passage to manhood. Settling disputes with violence has intensified and is now lethally indiscriminate because street soldiers are equipped with high powered guns. Add in the Drillinois music scene that has boosted young black males into social media stardom, enabling a few of them to secure lucrative music contracts and it should be no surprise that Chicago has a Chiraq. In fact, Chiraq is the harvest of generational racism-oppression, political corruption, civil rights violations, illegal market participation, organized crime maneuvers, and inter and intra-racial gangsterism.

### **Conclusion: It will get Worse Before it will get Better**

Chiraq is home for groups of angry, volatile, and lethal minded black males. The first four assumptions are reasonably safe given they can be applied to any number of cities with impoverished black communities or minority communities for that matter. The narrative does provide evidence in support of the first two assumptions that racial oppression stratified blacks, creating a permanent black underclass and that a gangster counter-culture served as a mode of adaptation to cope with residency in impoverished black communities. The third assumption concerning differences in white and black gangs was borrowed from Hagedorn's (2009) contention that white gangs were given a path toward legitimacy while black gangs faced opposition that stifled their social mobility. The additional contention of this article is that black gangsterism became a staple of Chicago's underclass black ghettos to the point of becoming a gangland more so than a functional cohesive community. The

fourth assumption asserts that gang fragmentation negatively impacted rules of engagement paving the way to use lethal violence to resolve territorial disputes, and personal conflicts. The final assumption fundamentally builds on the first four by suggesting that Chiraq is a post-modern version of intra-racial killing fields that is not only influenced by gangsterism but is also influenced by a desire to be known for killing for reasons of social media recognition within the context of a sub-genre rap music style known as Drill music. Capitalism (by offering record deals to Drill music artists) has found a way to market the remnants of racial oppression, gangsterism, and homicide, and it's a deadly carrot to dangle in front of impoverished impressionable black males. Chicago's killing campaign thrives in poor black neighborhoods because of a bastardized version of gangsterism operating in an infamous gangland known as Chiraq.

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#### **About The Author**

Steven R. Cureton is currently an Associate Professor in the department of Sociology at The University of North Carolina-Greensboro. Research interests remain focused on African-Americans' life chances and life course outcomes relative to economics, justice processing, education, access to opportunities, gangs, street corner politics, norms and ethics governing lifestyle decisions, and the impact of family dynamics on behavioral outcomes. Essentially, his research concerns how the "race variable" impacts the African-American experience. His book *Black Vanguard and Black Gangsters: From Seeds of Discontent to a Declaration of War* was published in 2011. Another book *Hoover Crips: When Cripin' Becomes a Way of Life* was published in 2008. Dr. Cureton has published in the *Journal of Black Masculinity*, *Journal of Gang Research*, *Journal of Black Studies*, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *African-American Research Perspectives*, and has book chapters in *The Handbook of Research on Black Males* (forthcoming), *Leadership, Equity, and Social Justice in American Higher Education: A Reader* (forthcoming), *Black Masculinity in America: Can I Get a Witness*, *Gangs in America III*, and *The System in Black and White: Exploring the Connections between race, crime and justice*. Community service outreach was ignited by participating and graduating from Leadership Greensboro (class of 2013). Dr. Cureton has been a consultant on several capital murder cases involving gang members