



**Great Cities
Institute**

**The Fracturing
of Gangs and Violence
in Chicago:
A Research-Based
Reorientation
of Violence Prevention
and Intervention Policy**

January 2019

**Great Cities Institute
University of Illinois at Chicago**

**The Fracturing
of Gangs and Violence
in Chicago:
A Research-Based
Reorientation
of Violence Prevention
and Intervention Policy**
January 2019

Publisher

Great Cities Institute
University of Illinois at Chicago
412 South Peoria Street, Suite 400 (MC 107)
Chicago, Illinois 60607-7067
(312) 996-8700 – gcities@uic.edu
greatcities.uic.edu

Authors

John Hagedorn, Ph.D.
James J. Stukel Fellow, Great Cities Institute
Professor (Retired), Criminology, Law and Justice
University of Illinois at Chicago
huk@uic.edu

Roberto Aspholm, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
rasphol@siue.edu

Teresa Córdova, Ph.D.
Director, Great Cities Institute
Professor, Urban Planning and Policy
University of Illinois at Chicago
tcordova@uic.edu

Andrew Papachristos, Ph.D.
Faculty Fellow, Institute for Policy Research
Professor, Sociology
Northwestern University
avp@northwestern.edu

Lance Williams, Ph.D.
Professor, Urban Community Studies
Jacob H. Carruthers Center for Urban Community Studies
Northeastern Illinois University
l-williamsb@neiu.edu

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to participants in the May 2018 GCI conference on homicide, to Ava Meux, Andrea Angulo, and Christiana Kinder for their assistance with the conference, and to Katherine Faydash and Jackson Morsey for their assistance with this document.

Table of Contents

i	Conference Summary
1	Introduction
1	Conference Conclusions
3	Conference Report
16	Summary and Unanswered Questions
18	Selected References
19	Author Bios



Conference Summary

The nature of gang violence in Chicago has been changing, but policies and practices toward it have not. This was the main conclusion of “The Fracturing of Gangs Conference,” held at the Great Cities Institute in Spring 2018. This report shares insights from that conference along with an array of conversations since then.

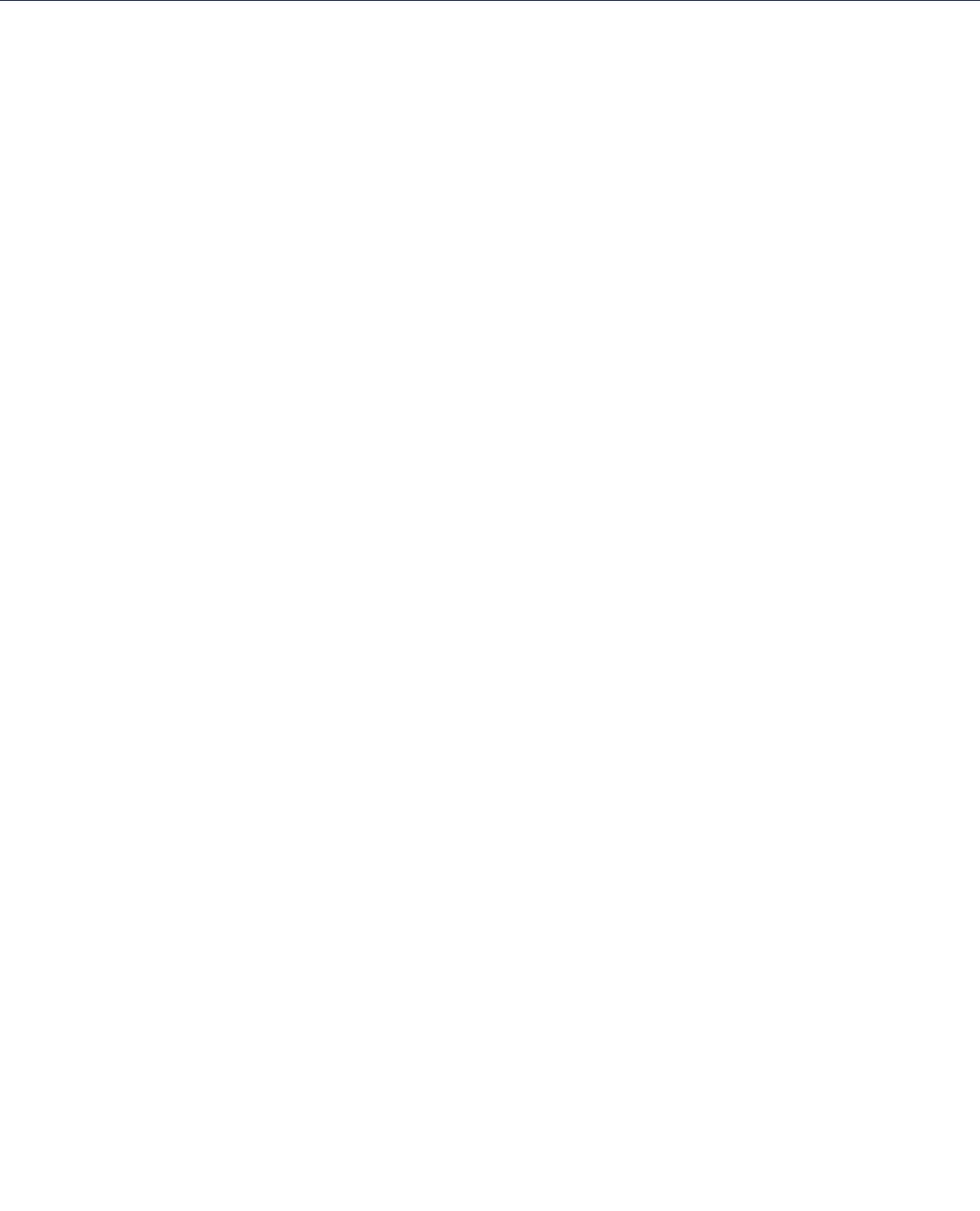
The conference presenters urged that it is time to move on from the narrative of Chicago as a “city of gangs.” Chicago has always been a “city of neighborhoods,” and the violence that has resulted from the fragmentation of traditional gangs into new horizontal gangs and cliques should be addressed within a comprehensive neighborhood policy. The decline of the traditional leadership and structure of African American gangs presents Chicago with an unprecedented opportunity to redirect youth away from gangs and into jobs and movements for social justice.

Data from the conference presentations show that Chicago’s high levels of violence are persisting, suggesting that current approaches need to be readjusted. Homicide levels and trends in Chicago are more similar to Rust Belt cities like Cleveland and Milwaukee than to “global cities” such as New York City or Los Angeles. The homicide rate is strongly correlated with race and concentrated poverty, with 75% of all homicides in Chicago taking place between African Americans, despite the fact that the city’s population comprises a relatively equal number of Blacks, Latinos, and whites. Long-term approaches to Chicago’s persistent homicide problem must address the city’s deep-seated issues of racism, disinvestment, and concentrated poverty, as well as the more recent issue of the changing nature of gangs.

The conference presenters call for a new anti-violence policy that de-emphasizes gangs and instead emphasizes conflict resolution among youth in a context of significantly increased employment and neighborhood economic development. While drug- and gang-related violence still plagues our city, the conference found that much violence today is the product of interpersonal disputes and retaliation, unrelated to traditional gang rivalries or drug markets. The fracturing of traditional vertically organized gangs into horizontally organized cliques is most pronounced among South Side African American gangs, which were affected the most both by the demolition of Chicago Housing Authority projects and subsequent diffusion of residents and by the displacement of young, African American men from Chicago public high schools via Chicago Public Schools’ Renaissance 2010 plan.

All gangs are not alike. There are significant differences between West Side and South Side African American gangs. In addition, Hispanic gangs were not as affected by the diffusion of CHA residents, and as a result, they have not fractured in the same way. For a more effective approach to violence in Chicago, outdated assumptions about the connections of gangs and violence need to be readjusted to consider the changing structure, dynamics, and activities of gangs, the nature of the precipitating triggers that give rise to that violence, and differences in gang structures. Anti-violence policies need to differentiate between identity- and drug-related violence, as well as between the expressive violence of neighborhood youth versus the instrumental violence of organized crime.

Persistent disinvestment and concentrated poverty amounts to an assault on the dignity and self-worth of black youth and is correlated with violence. Intervention and prevention programs need to counter codes of hypermasculinity with vehicles to restore dignity and self-worth, teach healing and conflict resolution (restorative justice), while advocating and advancing strategies for economic and educational opportunities. The most effective of these strategies requires the involvement of young men – and women – themselves in readjusting the narrative and rebuilding their communities, thus leading to questions of how to rebuild community and neighborhoods.



Introduction

On April 27, 2018, the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago convened the region's top researchers on gangs – along with approximately 50 street-level experts, service providers, journalists who have covered Chicago's epidemic of violence, and others with expertise in the field – to address unanswered questions about gangs and violence in Chicago. This unique working conference consisted of a single day of presentations and conversations on the current state of gangs, framed by an overview of homicide trends in Rust Belt and other major U.S. cities. The conference concluded with proposals to address Chicago's situation of fragmented gangs and persistently high rates of homicide.

The conference was anchored by four scholars, all with a long history of research with Chicago gangs. John Hagedorn, of Great Cities Institute (GCI), was joined by Roberto Aspholm (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville); Andrew Papachristos (Northwestern University); and Lance Williams (Northeastern Illinois University). Former gang members and gang intervention workers from Austin, North and South Lawndale, East Garfield Park, Woodlawn, Englewood, and other communities added their local expertise to the research. A small number of local journalists who are familiar with Chicago's violence problem also attended, as did a handful of representatives from local philanthropic foundations.

The conference formally addressed the following questions:

1. How have gangs changed in the 21st century and why?
2. How have the fracturing of gangs and other changes in gang structure affect today's patterns of violence?
3. How do gang structures and motives for violence differ by neighborhood?
4. What do these changes mean for public policy and violence intervention?

Conference Conclusions¹

1. Gangs have been changing, but violence prevention and intervention strategies have not.

- Many African American gangs today are horizontally organized, neighborhood-based “cliques” that have little or no formal leadership structure; as a result, violence is more spontaneous and tends to be initiated by individuals, rather than ordered by gang leaders or hierarchies.
- Youth in neighborhood cliques often coexist with others from different, even rival, gang backgrounds. These cliques are often named after a slain clique member, or “homeboy,” or after rap lyrics and are not affiliated with traditional gang structures and identities.
- The new horizontal cliques are not “factions” of traditional gangs, as the Chicago Crime Commission² (2018 *Gang Book*, p. 194) argues; they are entirely new and unique formations—rarely do such cliques have any formal relationships or connections among each other.
- The old People and Folks coalitions are almost completely defunct on the streets, and these traditional alliances have often been replaced by affiliation to “families” of rappers.
- Interrupting the cycle of violence in horizontal relations-based cliques calls for methods and strategies of prevention and intervention different from those used to counter organized violence related to drug markets.
- Law enforcement strategies based on conspiracy-related prosecutions of gang leaders and members are out of date and counterproductive to horizontal cliques and how they operate.

¹ There were no formal votes on any of these conclusions, but these statements reiterate salient points made by researchers and/or participants at the conference.

² The Chicago Crime Commission is a nonprofit organization, that “since 1919... has represented the Chicago business community's efforts to reduce crime and support law enforcement” (from their website).

2. The CHA's Plan for Transformation, which resulted in the demolition of CHA housing projects, is a principal reason for the fracturing of African American gangs.

- In the 1990s and early 2000s, thousands of youth from demolished CHA projects, which were known for affiliations with various traditional gangs and gang structure, diffused into surrounding neighborhoods. The entry of so many young people from different gangs into neighborhoods played a key role in transforming the traditionally vertical gang hierarchy into horizontal, autonomous peer groups.
- Latino gangs have not fractured like African American gangs have, largely because they were not affected by this diffusion of CHA residents.³
- Fracturing of African American gangs has taken place differently across neighborhoods, particularly on the West Side and South Side.
- Drug-related violence is still a serious problem and appears to be more prevalent on the West Side than the South Side.
- Other reasons for the fracturing of African American gangs include the isolation of gang leaders in “supermax” prisons (hindering their communication with outside gang members), the reduced profitability of street drug market due to changes in demand especially for crack cocaine, and rank-and-file gang members’ exhaustion after the city’s gang wars of the 1990s.

3. High levels of homicide are persisting in Chicago as in other Rust Belt cities, particularly in areas of concentrated African American poverty.

- The homicide rate in Chicago in 2017 was near the city’s average homicide rate over the past 50 years of 23–24 per 100,000 residents.
- Chicago’s homicide trends are comparable to those of Rust Belt cities like Cleveland and Milwaukee⁴ and much higher than those of “global cities” like New York City and Los Angeles.
- The homicide rate for 2018 exceeded the 2015 homicide rate and is higher than the city’s homicide rate from 2004 to 2014, the period during which many traditional gangs were transforming into cliques.
- Homicides in the city continue to take place overwhelmingly in areas of concentrated African American poverty.
- Although the population of African Americans, Latinos, and whites in Chicago is relatively equal, consistently more than 75% of homicide victims have been African American.

4. Anti-violence policy needs to de-emphasize gangs and instead emphasize mediation of interpersonal conflict and conflict resolution among youth, as well as neighborhood economic development.

- Although drug-market violence continues, it is a mistake to assume that most violence today is drug related.
- Interventions that focus on gang leaders to control members in many cases are outdated and ineffective.
- Instead of focusing on tactics to uproot what are in many cases nonexistent gang structures, intervention programs need to promote a “cultural switch” to community-oriented values in order to address existing codes of “hypermasculinity” and combat violent retaliation.
- Codes of hypermasculinity involve hypersensitivity to insult, which itself results from the ongoing, institutionalized assault—stemming largely from household and neighborhood socioeconomic conditions in areas where homicide rates are highest—on an individual’s sense of dignity and self-worth.
- Community-based programs and interventions around mediating interpersonal conflict need to take place in the context of substantial economic development.
- Drill rap can be related to violence, but in some cases it can also serve as a replacement to violence. Because of this, it may be a promising intervention/prevention strategy.

³ The primary focus of the conference was on the characteristics of African American gangs with some comparisons to Latino gangs while acknowledging that a more detailed analysis of Latino gangs would require another conference.

⁴ Detroit’s homicide rate is approximately three times that of Chicago

- Mexican drug cartels and the Chicago Outfit (organized crime) continue to be a source of drug-related violence, but they should not be conflated with low-level drug dealing.
- Youth view the Chicago Police Department as more of a problem than a solution, which contributes to the widespread belief that they youth feel the need to redress the violence they experience via violence.

This remainder of this report is divided into four sections that summarize the main points made by researchers and other conference participants:

1. Chicago’s Persistently High Levels of Homicide in Communities of Concentrated Poverty
2. The Radical Transformation of African American Gangs in the 21st Century
3. Changing the Narrative of Gang Violence: A New Policy
4. Summary and Unanswered Questions

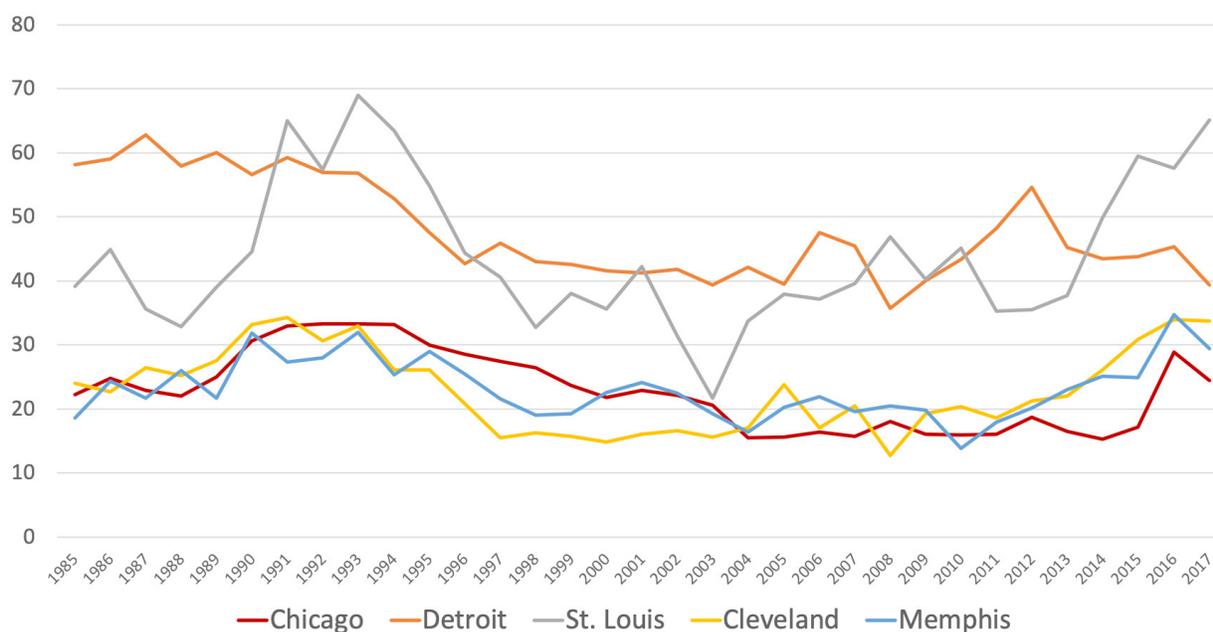
Conference Report

1. Chicago’s Persistently High Levels of Homicide in Communities of Concentrated Poverty

a. The “bad news” on homicide.

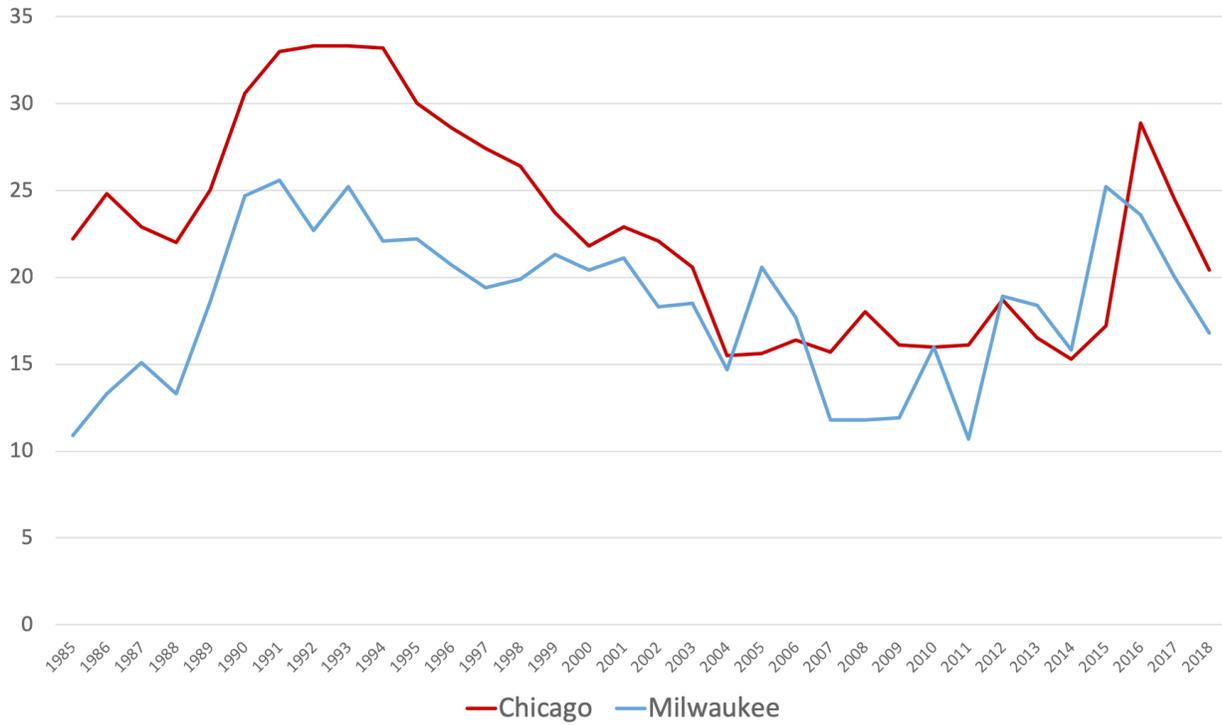
John Hagedorn presented the discouraging news that homicide in Chicago followed a pattern of high-homicide Rust Belt cities with large concentrations of poor African Americans (Figure 1). In fact, Chicago’s homicide trend over recent decades is closely tracked by its Rust Belt cousin to the north, Milwaukee (Figure 2). The “Rust Belt” refers to those cities in the northeastern and midwestern U.S. that experienced deindustrialization followed by widespread urban abandonment. As a result, the ladder of mobility was pulled out from under large numbers of African Americans who had migrated north in the postwar decades for “good” industrial jobs. This Rust Belt pattern differs from global cities, like New York City and Los Angeles (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Chicago’s Homicide Trend since 1985 as Compared to Other Rust Belt Cities



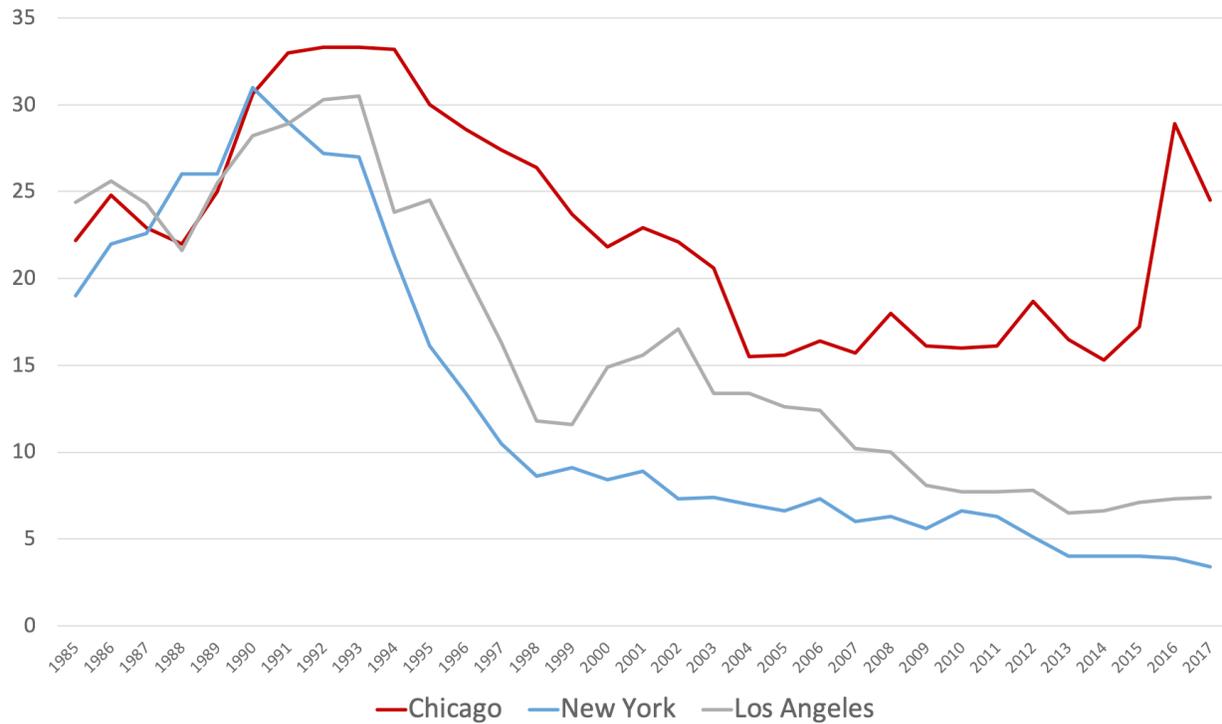
Source: Uniform Crime Reporting data compiled by John Hagedorn.

Figure 2. Chicago's Homicide Trend since 1985 as Compared to Milwaukee



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting data compiled by John Hagedorn, and for 2018, Press Reports.

Figure 3. Chicago's Homicide Trend as Compared to New York and Los Angeles



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting data compiled by John Hagedorn.

Even though Chicago is transforming to an information economy, a substantial portion of its African American population continues to live in what William Julius Wilson called “concentrated poverty” and what Teresa Córdova and Matthew Wilson document as conditions of “chronic and concentrated joblessness,” particularly among 20-24 year old males (2017). As an illustration, these distressed areas of concentrated poverty and joblessness in Chicago and other Rust Belt cities contain a much higher percentage of the city population than do similar areas in New York or Los Angeles, which also have lower homicide rates (Table 1).

Table 1. Ten Cities with the Greatest Number of People in Distressed Zip Codes

City	Pop. in Distressed Zips	% of Pop. in Distressed Zips	Ratio of City Distressed Pop. Share to Total Pop. Share
New York, NY	1,328,870	15.9%	0.85
Chicago, IL	1,064,510	39.2%	2.09
Houston, TX	712,140	32.8%	1.75
Detroit, MI	688,080	98.9%	5.28
Philadelphia, PA	669,990	43.3%	2.31
Los Angeles, CA	661,170	17.1%	0.91
Phoenix, AZ	456,310	30.6%	1.63
Memphis, TN	437,090	66.6%	3.55
San Antonio, TX	403,640	29.1%	1.56
Baltimore, MD	344,080	55.3%	2.95

Source: Economic Innovation Group, <https://eig.org/dci>.

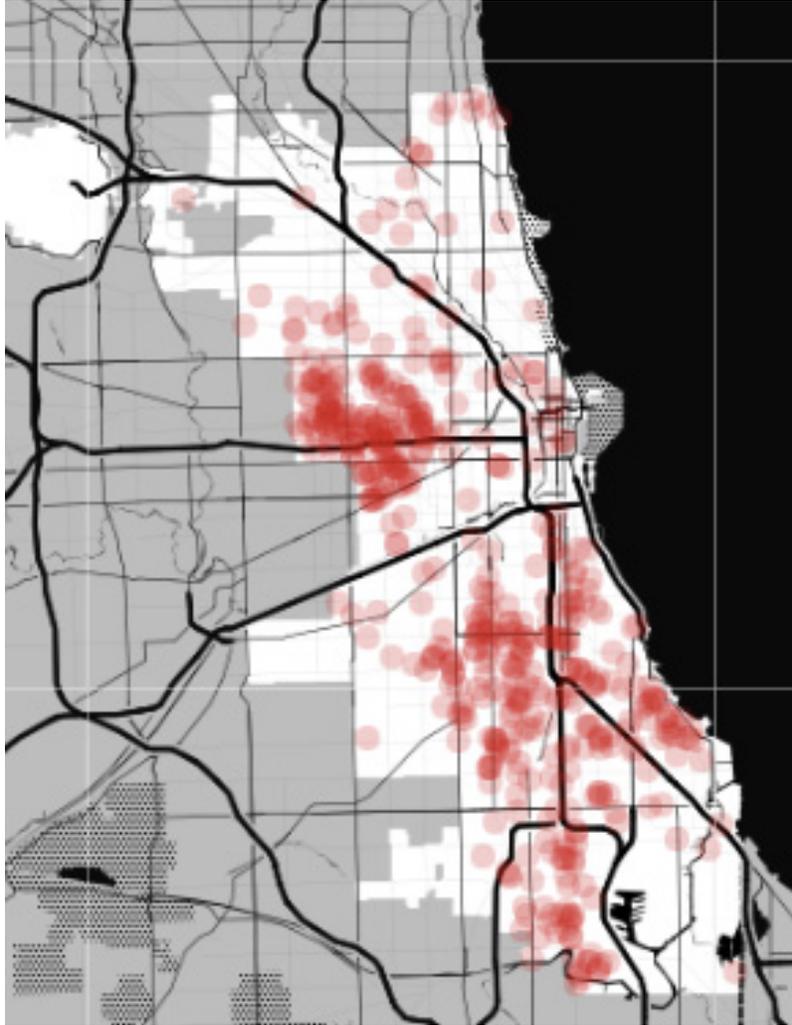
The fact that such a large percentage of the mainly African American poor in distressed areas face desperation at the prospect of a jobless future is reflected in Chicago’s persistently high homicide rates and is roughly comparable to the same kinds of distress experienced in other Rust Belt cities when revitalization does not extend to those neighborhoods most severely hit by deindustrialization.

b. Race and concentrated poverty, more than gangs, most strongly correlate with homicide.

Hagedorn, citing the Chicago Historical Homicide Project and University of Chicago Chicago Crime Lab data, pointed out that Chicago’s 2015 homicide rate among African Americans of 47 per 100,000 was nearly identical to the city’s homicide rate among African Americans in 1930, when it was 46 per 100,000. This supports the notion that racial oppression—manifested in high unemployment, inferior education, crumbling infrastructure, and police misconduct—are more important factors to address in minimizing homicide than are gangs themselves.

Over the past few years, more than 75% of Chicago homicides have African American victims and offenders, despite the fact that the city’s Black and Latino populations are roughly numerically equivalent. In addition, there is likely an equal number of black and Latino gang members in Chicago. Both of these facts cast doubt on the narrative that homicide is a mainly a “gang” problem.

Figure 4. Homicide in Areas of Concentrated Poverty Among African Americans



Source: "Crime in Chicago: Tracking Homicide Victims," Chicago Tribune, November 1, 2018.

c. Homicide in 2018 remained at levels higher than 2004-2014 levels.

In the years 2004-2014, when homicide rates were relatively low for the period since 1965 CHA and CPS implemented programs that led to the fracturing of traditional African American gangs. During the same period, these gangs were reorganizing as more horizontal, neighborhood peer groups. The increased violence since 2015 appears to have many different sources, but also reflects different causes than the 1990s gang wars. The conference's main conclusion was that, because of these differences, new tactics are needed today.

At the conference, Hagedorn presented homicide data from the first three months of 2018, arguing that high homicide rates were persisting, not beginning a substantial decline. Chicago Police Department reported data for 2018 support this analysis (Figure 5). Chicago's 2017 homicide rate of 24.5 per 100,000 was slightly above the average rate of the past 50 years of 23.01 per 100,000 and 2018's rate of 20.4 slightly below. Homicides in 2018 have declined from 2017 but were substantially up over 2014 and running higher even of the buildup in 2015 and subsequent spike in 2016.

Figure 5. Homicide Rate in Chicago

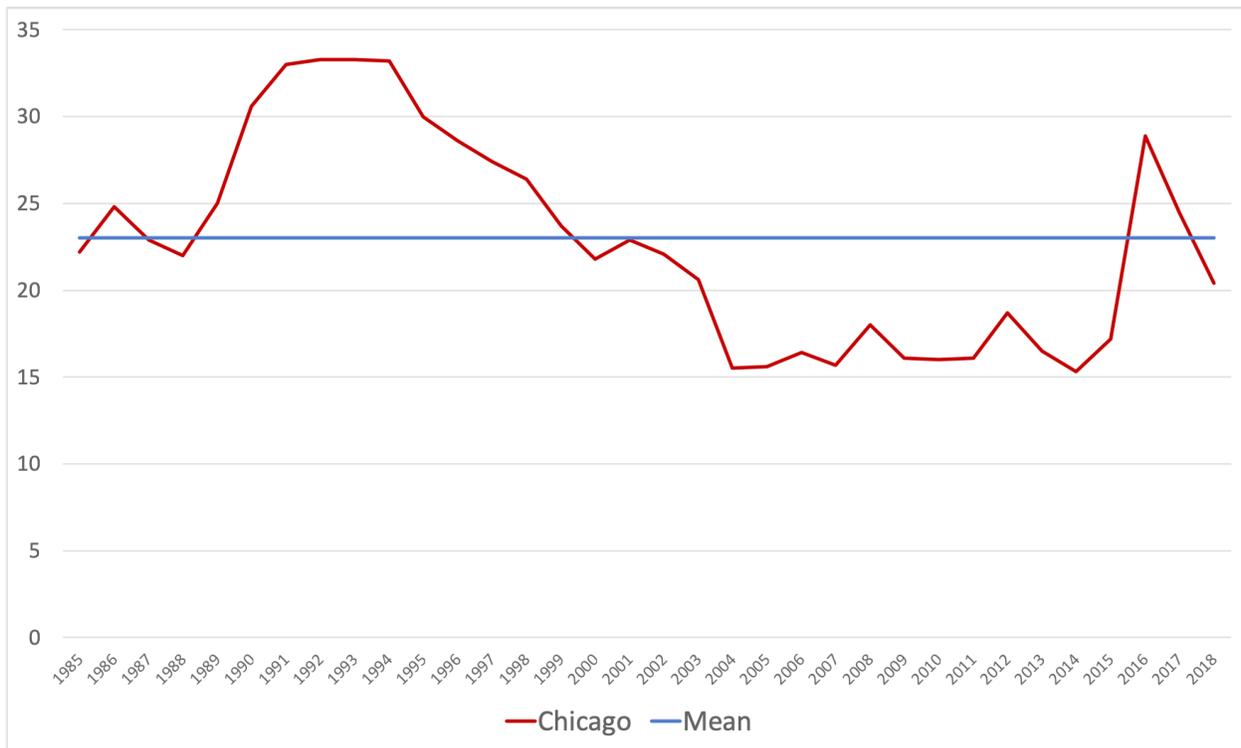


Table 2. Total Chicago Homicides 2014-2018

Year	Total Number of Homicides
2014	415
2015	473
2016	784
2017	633
2018	557

Source: Uniform Crime Reporting data compiled by John Hagedorn. 2017 data from “Crime in Chicago: Tracking Homicide Victims,” Chicago Tribune. 2018 data from Chicago Police Department

2. The Radical Transformation of African American Gangs in the 21st Century

a. The structures, dynamics, and activities of gang organization have changed dramatically over the past 20 years, as gangs have splintered into smaller neighborhood-based cliques. Violence today thus differs from the 1990s, when it was largely the consequence of following the orders of hierarchical gang leaders and competition over drug markets.

In his presentation at the conference, Rob Aspholm argued that African American gangs today are vastly different from their 20th-century counterparts. Many new horizontal gangs, or “cliques,” Aspholm found, have strong neighborhood loyalty and are often named after a slain clique member, or “homeboy.” In addition, these cliques are often composed of members from many different, and often rival, traditional gangs, like the Black Disciples, Gangster Disciples, Mickey Cobras, and Black P. Stones. In an interview, a gang member told Aspholm: “A clique is a group of people who don’t represent the same organization, but they form an organization. Do that sound better? Yup, that’s a clique. You a Gangster, I’m a Stone, he BD. We all together.”

These new cliques have eschewed the traditional vertical command structures and formal rules. Violence is typically initiated by individuals and not commanded by gang leaders as it was in the past. “The regulation and predictability of gang violence went from relatively high levels to very low levels,” Aspholm argued. The new gangs have developed new territorial enemies and the old rivalries have been rendered largely meaningless. The new horizontal gangs display a culture of autonomy, Aspholm said, and do not reflect the 1990s gang culture of obedience to hierarchical leaders.

Table 3. Two Gang Paradigms: Street Organizations and Cliques

Characteristic of Violence	Street Organization/Gang Nation	Neighborhood Gang/ Clique
Scope of gang wars	Cross-neighborhood	Local
Basis for gang wars	Control of drug markets, power, gang ideologies	Interpersonal conflicts and vendettas
Basis for alliances	Gang affiliation	Personal relationships, common enemies
Meaning of violence	Instrumental, ideological	Expressive–vengeance, identity, meaning-making
Violence controlled by	Gang leadership	Individual gang members
Regulation/predictability of violence	Relatively high	Very low

Source: Rob Aspholm, “Gang Fracturing on Chicago’s South Side”

b. The CHA’s Plan for Transformation was a principal cause of the fracturing of African American gangs.

Aspholm pointed out there are many contributors to this fracturing of gangs, including the end of the crack epidemic and reduced profitability of open-air drug markets, correctional policies that isolated gang leaders in supermax prisons, and the exhaustion of rank-and-file gang members with the gang wars of the 1990s. These factors had various effects, including decimating streams of revenue, weakening leadership hierarchies, and creating disillusionment among gang soldiers. But perhaps the main cause of the gang fracturing was the demolition of CHA projects and the resulting diffusion of thousands of youth into nearby neighborhoods, often with their own existing gang affiliations. In combination with the aforementioned contributors, the CHA demolitions drove the abandonment of traditional gang hierarchies and fault lines by young gang members, who transformed the dynamics of gang organization on the South Side from vertical, hierarchical gangs into horizontal, autonomous peer groups. The demolished projects were largely on the near and mid-South Side, and as a result these neighborhoods were most affected.

The diffusion of youth also altered the composition of newly formed gangs, in which personal relationships largely supplanted traditional gang affiliations as the basis for these new forms of gang organization. Importantly, there was a “declining capacity of the new cliques to mediate internal and neighborhood conflicts,” according to Aspholm. On the West Side, the CHA demolitions had less of an effect. Another difference is that drug markets appear to be more crucial to West Side gangs than South Side ones. This may be partly the result of proximity to profits from suburban customers on the I-290 corridor.

Notably, Latino gangs were little affected by diffusion of the CHA’s residents. The demolished projects had resident populations greater than 90% African American, and most displaced residents moved to other Black neighborhoods.

Table 4. CHA Project Demolition and Resident Displacement

CHA Property	Year Demolished	Gangs	Units and Displaced Residents
Lake Park Properties	1991 (except 3983 S. Lake Park Ave.)	P. Stone, GD	757 3,000
Ida B. Wells Homes	2000-2011	P. Stone, BD	1,662 6,000
Harold L. Ickes Homes	2009-2010	GD	738 3,000
Clarence Darrow Homes	1996-2000	GD	480 2,000
Madden Park Homes	1999-2005	GD, P. Stone, BD	450 2,000
Prairie Courts	2000-2001	GD, BD	328 1,500
Robert Taylor Homes	1998-2007	GD, MC, BD	4,415 30,000
Stateway Gardens	2000-2007	BD, GD	1,644 8,000
Total			10,474 55,500

Source: CHA units and displacement data estimates compiled by John Hagedorn.

Demolition data from the website Chicago Gang History, <https://chicagoganghistory.com/chicago-housing-projects/>.

Note: GD = Gangster Disciples, BD = Black Disciples, P. Stone = Black P. Stones, and MC = Mickey Cobras.

Lance Williams reported on Black P. Stone (BPSN) sets in the Auburn Gresham area that had reconstituted as territorial peer groups but continued with a traditional P. Stone identity. Williams has been studying the P. Stones for decades, charting their transformation from locally based peer groups in Woodlawn in the 1960s to the centralized El Rukn organization in the 1980s, and back to local peer groups in the 2000s. Today, on the South Side, it is common for gangs to be a mixture of traditional gangs. For example, today one gang is a “composite” (mixture) of guys who self identify with being members of traditional gangs like the Stones, BDs and GDs. While “composite/mixture” gangs are common today, not all gangs are “composites” of different gangs, some still self-identify with being traditional gangs like the BPSNs of Auburn Gresham.

Auburn Gresham and some other areas, where BPSN sets (branches) are dominant such as New City and South Shore, appear to have been less affected by displacement of youth from CHA projects and there was less disruption by incoming youth from different gangs. Even so, these gangs also represent a trend toward autonomy and away from the traditional gang structure. Today, Williams said, “absolute leaders” no longer control the various sets. Although the BPSN sets of Auburn Gresham still self-identify with being in alignment with the traditional structure of BPSN, the way they have been operating over the past 20yrs or so has been moving closer towards autonomy and are not controlled by an ‘absolute leader’ at the organizational level. In other words, they are BPSN in name only. More and more they are beginning not to recognize any leadership beyond their set.

c. Chicago Public Schools' Renaissance 2010 contributed to the increase in violence.

In the midst of the turmoil brought on by gentrification and housing policy, Chicago Public Schools implemented Renaissance 2010, a policy that, similar to CHA's Plan for Transformation, seemingly had a devastating effect on the landscape of violence in the Black community. The policy called for the closing of 80 existing schools, some of which were then re-opened as one of at least 100 newly created charter schools. These former neighborhood schools now required special admissions including higher standardized test scores that a large number of neighborhood students could not meet. This forced large numbers of area youth into high schools that were little more than dumping grounds for kids who could not qualify to go to schools close to their homes. The result was that youth were forced to travel outside of their "hoods," crossing multiple gang turfs to get back and forth to unfamiliar schools where they often encountered pre-existing animosities. If students were not from the neighborhood where their school was, they were often considered a potential target for violence.

According to CPS, the purpose of the policy was to establish an increased number of high-quality education options across Chicago, and Renaissance 2010 transformed a number of dysfunctional schools into smaller, more manageable schools. However, a by-product of the policy was that it contributed to high dropout rates. Of course, as the dropout rates increased, so did the hopelessness, violence, and crime in communities like Auburn Gresham. As more and more youth became increasingly marginalized, they began to project their frustrations on to one another and other young people who were not gang affiliated. They particularly directed their frustrations toward youth coming from outside of their communities to attend schools they themselves were being denied access to. Youth violence began to skyrocket in school communities in Chicago.

Calumet High School in Auburn Gresham, the high school that members of 8-Tray Stones attended, was one of them. In 2007, Calumet, which had once served 1,500 students, was converted into a new high school called Calumet Perspective Charter School, which served fewer than 700 students. And most of those 700 students who enrolled in the new charter school were not from the neighborhoods surrounding the school. In the case of 8-Tray, one Auburn Gresham's long-standing Black P. Stones sets, the Stones were forced out of Calumet High School (mentioned above as being in Auburn Gresham). Most were sent 4 miles west to Hirsch High School in the neighboring community of Greater Grand Crossing. To get to Hirsch, the 8-Tray Stones, or "Moes," had to take the 79th Street bus east through several Disciples sets to get to school. Moreover, the bus stops near Hirsch were right in the heart of one of the most active Gangster Disciples sets in the city. Because of that, going to school every day was literally a journey through a war zone. Clearly understanding this treacherous path, the most active Moes never even reported to school. Others started off going; however, their attendance quickly became sporadic, and within a few months, they stopped going altogether because it was too risky.

Figure 5. Long-Standing P. Stone Sets in Auburn-Gresham



Source: Lance Williams Presentation

d. The old People and Folks alliances have disappeared from the streets.

The People and Folks alliances have largely disappeared on the streets, replaced by allegiances to different drill rap performers (e.g. Chief Keef) and their allies, such as “Only the Family,” which is Lil Durk’s record label and products and primarily a loose-knit alliance among a few mid-South Side gangs primarily associated with the Black Disciples. Local gangs are often named after slain members, like “O-Block,” named after 20-year old Odee Perry, who was gunned down in 2011. Others, like SUWU, are named for rap lyrics, in this case a refrain in a song by Lil Wayne. Violence is exacerbated by social media and drill rap fuels neighborhood clique violence. Some conferees, however, pointed out that “drill rap” was often a performance done *in place of actual violence* and that hip-hop can be part of an effective anti-violence strategy. For example, rap music’s origins in Afrika Bambaataa’s replacement of violence with performance in the South Bronx in the 1970s. Today, as the noted Chicago female rapper Katie got Bandz rapped, “They’re making beats not takin’ it to the streets.”

The Chicago Crime Commission’s 2018 *Gang Book* and the Chicago Police Department continue to identify gangs by “People” or “Folks,” which no longer forms a basis for alliances or neighborhood conflict. The CCC’s and CPD’s analysis of new gangs as “factions” of traditional gangs misses how dramatic the change is and, most important, misunderstands strategies to address violence. The CCC’s proposed solution, conspiracy indictments of entire cliques, assumes viooent acts are planned, not spontaneous. Conferees argued that, unlike in the 1990s, today the most important units of analyses are interpersonal relations and group processes, not planned acts or obedience to gang leader orders.

e. Outdated misconceptions of gang structures and how they function is a factor in low homicide clearance rates

In the 1990s, Chicago’s homicide clearance rates were greater than 60%, consistent with clearance rates of other large cities. The high clearance rate occurred during a time of more straightforward and easily identified motives for violence between long-standing gang rivalries and competition over control of drug markets. The low homicide clearance rates of the past decade relative to other comparable cities are related to many problems, including neighborhood distrust, fear of retaliation, and police misconduct. It is also likely that they reflect the lack of understanding of the radical transformation of gangs in Chicago and the causes of violence. This misconception about the on-the-ground reality of changing gang structure is possibly impeding homicide investigations.

Figure 6. 50 Largest U.S. Cities Ranked by Arrest Rates, Showing Chicago Ranked Last



Source: "Unsolved Homicide Database," Washington Post, July 24, 2018.

3. Readjusting the Gang Violence Narrative: A New Policy

a. The conference proposed a readjustment to the media and law enforcement narrative on street gangs and homicides in Chicago. Policy should no longer focus solely on gangs and drugs but also promote policies and programs on mediating interpersonal conflict accompanied by substantial economic development in distressed communities.

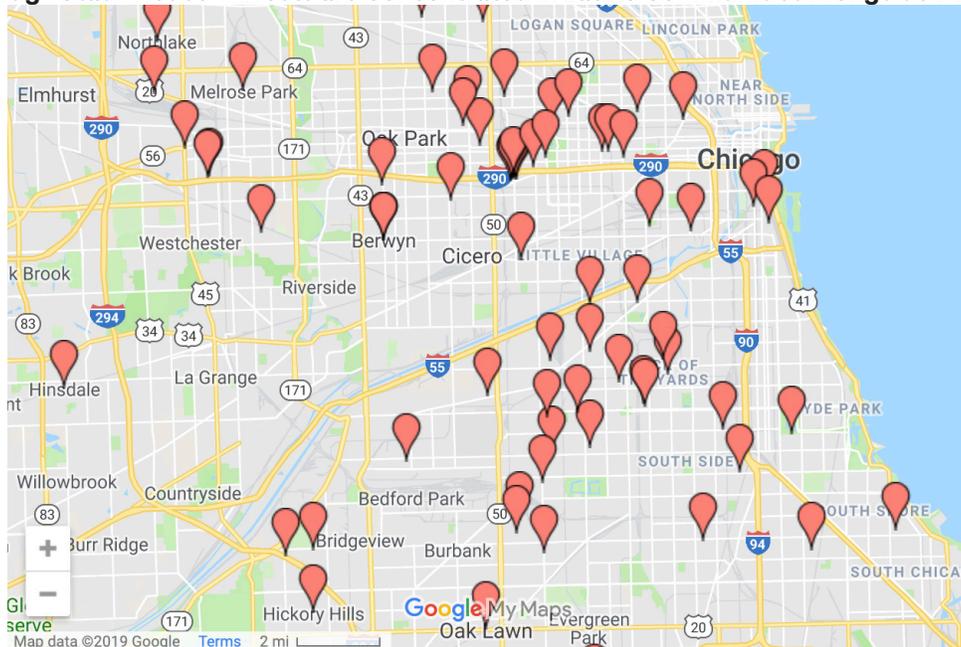
There was a consensus that while drug-related violence was still a major problem for some African American gangs, interpersonal conflict was the more prevalent reason for violence. The conferees rejected a simplistic media and law enforcement notion of causal links between traditional gang rivalries and spikes in homicide rates. "It's not the gang, it's the block, and they clash over nothing" said one West Side participant. Rather than relying on the CPD "gang data base" to identify leaders, Andrew Papachristos proposed the use of network analysis to chart actual chains of violence for community groups to practice prevention and early intervention. "Network science," he said, "is about the relationships that people have. It looks for a structure, rather than assuming a structure."

The “Historical Conspiracy Strategy” advocated by the Chicago Crime Commission (2018 *Gang Book*) is based on one-dimensional 20th century notions of structured gangs and does not reflect the realities of gang life in 2019 Chicago. It contends on page 194 “Every act committed by a gang member in furtherance of the gang or faction, whether the act is a crime or not, is an explicit act of the conspiracy.” Many gangs today are no longer vertically organized and celebrate their autonomy from traditional gangs. Rob Aspholm pointed out violence is often spontaneous and retaliatory decisions are made through individual anger and emotions, not following orders or a collective decision. Law enforcement strategies based on “cutting off the head so the snake will die” are out of date and counterproductive to horizontal gang structures. Perhaps the most important conclusion of the conference was that *the demise of traditional gang leaders and loyalties presents Chicago with unprecedented opportunities to redirect youth into pro-social activities.*

b. Violence has many causes and varies within and between neighborhoods.

Drug-market violence remains a major problem. Open-air drug markets are concentrated on the West Side along the I-290 corridor. Unlike the South Side, West Side violence is much more likely to be related to control over drug markets. Mexican cartels along with the Outfit (Chicago’s mafia) dominate wholesale drug distribution, with Hispanic gangs as local distributors and African American gangs, especially those on the West Side, as retailers. It must be noted that homicide rates in Hispanic neighborhoods, despite their preponderance of drug stash houses, is low relative to the city’s Black communities.

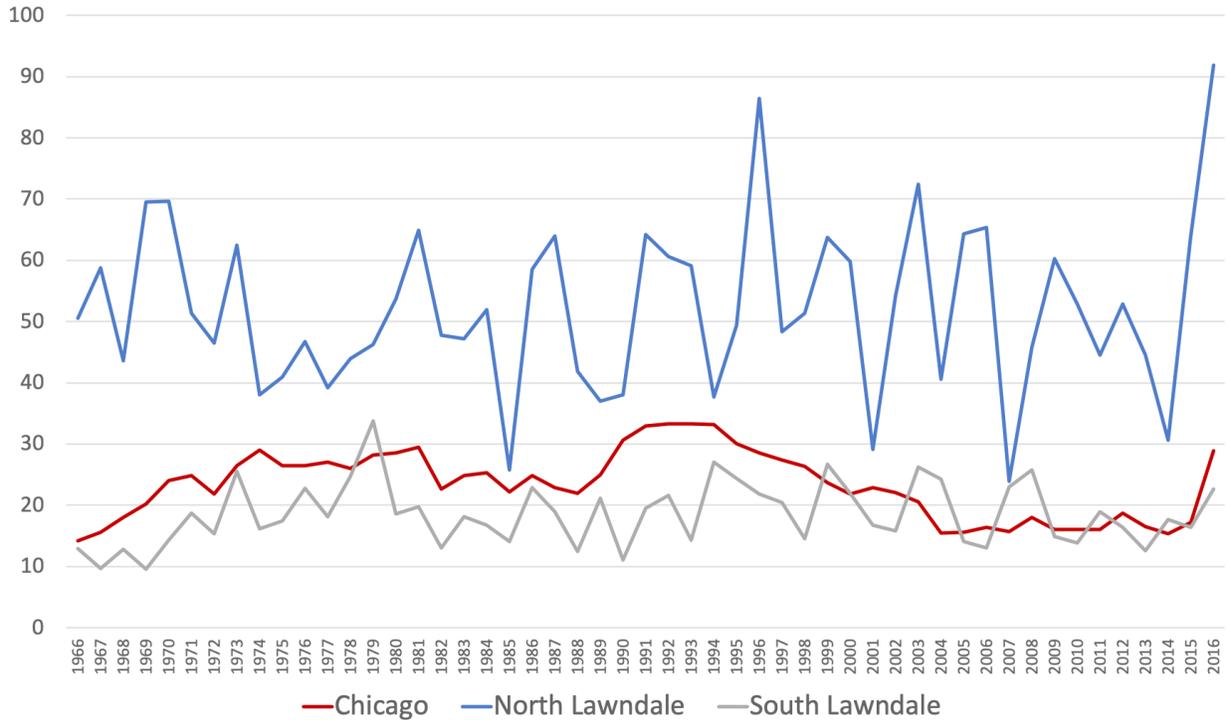
Figure 7. Drug “Stash House” Arrests are Concentrated in Latino Communities Alongside I-290 and I-55



Source: WBEZ. Dec 10, 2013. “Chicago’s Southwest Side, southwest suburbs home to major drug warehousing.”

This means claims that homicide is mainly a function of drug wars fails to account for the fact that Mexican cartel-dominated drug chains produce relatively low rates of violence among Latinos. Public safety policy appears to be stuck in the 1990s, when the traditional gangs of all races controlled drug supplies and went to war with one another for domination and profit. The causes of violence today, conferees said, are much more diverse. Researchers and participants both argued that in poor African American communities, particularly on the South Side, interpersonal violence is more prevalent than conflicts over drug markets.

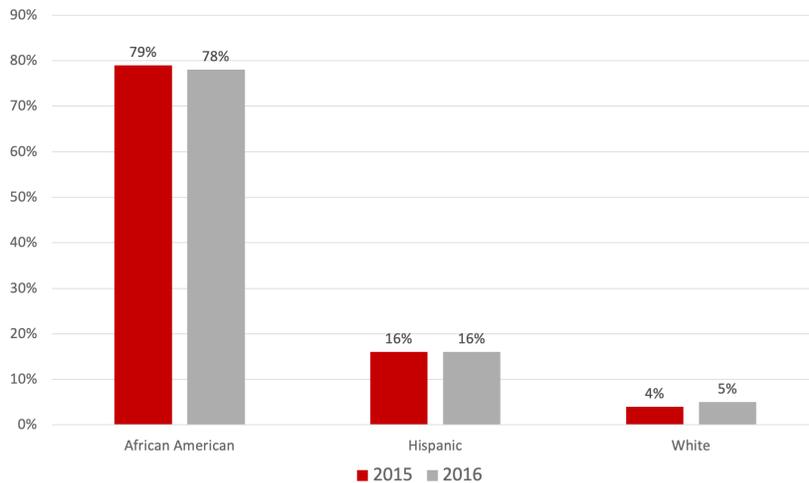
Figure 8. Homicide Rates in African American North Lawndale Consistently Higher than in Mexican Little Village (South Lawndale)



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting data compiled by Hagedorn. 2017 data from Chicago Tribune: Crime in Chicago: Tracking Homicide Victims

The CPD and Chicago Crime Commission tend to treat all gangs as alike. The conference concluded that Latino gangs have not fractured like African American gangs and data was presented that overall rates of violence among Latinos are much lower. There also are significant differences in how African American gangs have fractured and how they are presently organized. The CPD and CCC analysis fails to explicate different intervention strategies for gangs who are mainly drug-selling cliques vs. those who are mainly about personal relationships and neighborhood identity.

Figure 9. Homicide Disparity Between African Americans, Latinos, and Whites



Source: Chicago Crime Lab Gun Violence in Chicago, 2016

Conferees pointed out that organized crime, including the Outfit as well as Mexican cartels were a continuing problem and a source of violence. Police corruption and brutality also contribute to violence. One former gang member asked, “Who brings the drugs into the City of Chicago?” Guns, drugs, and human trafficking are multi-billion dollar businesses and, according to at least one conference participant, are sometimes facilitated by politicians and police. The gang and drug problem, it was agreed, “has another level.”

c. While individuals who are victims/perpetrators of gun violence may also be affiliated with gangs, for members of the new horizontal gangs it is not their involvement in gangs per se that is the reason for or cause of violence.

Lance Williams, Rob Aspholm, and street-level experts stressed the interpersonal roots of much of what is labeled “gang violence.” Gun violence in Chicago, particularly on the South Side, is more likely a result of personal offenses that escalate into long-term vendettas. Violence thus requires acts of vengeance to establish, restore, or maintain positions and feelings of respect and dignity. Although drugs may be a cause of conflict, Williams said, violence mainly “is not about gangs, it’s about personal beefs.” Unhealthy group dynamics and hypersensitivity to taking offense feed into cycles of retaliation.

These cycles of retaliation, the conferees reported, were the cause of much violence. This violence differs from the gang wars of the 1990s, when violence occurred across the city as gang leaders called “hits” for control of drug markets in decades-long rivalries among traditional gangs. Violence today is often the result of individual reactions to a shooting—this might be the loss of a loved one but also as an affront to neighborhood identity. Group dynamics reinforce feelings of harm and the need to respond. One former gang member said: “It’s about having that person’s back. If a gang member gets into a fight, you are going to have their back, no matter what. It’s also about how people understand their situation.” Many participants stressed that these “I have your back” reactions are personal and tied to neighborhood loyalties and friendships, not gang leader directed. Interventions that focus on gang leaders to control members are outdated and ineffective. Another participant pointed out, that “violence has always been validated and accepted in communities. Some people are seen as heroes because they kill people. There’s a mentality that people have. We need to stop validating violence.”

Given low homicide clearance rates, a legacy of police abuse and violence, and persistent mistrust of and cynicism toward the police, youth often see CPD as more a part of the problem than a probable solution. As a result, youth believe that they have to take “justice” into their own hands. The basic problem in these situations is not gangs, but the need to solve problems of violence in ways that do not produce more violence. The conferees also believed the Chicago police needed substantial reform before they could play a more positive role.

d. Needed: A strategy to confront hyper-masculinity.

One consequence of persistent violence and retaliation is the formation of identities, values, and behaviors that can be characterized as “hypermasculine.” Lance Williams pointed out: “Black males don’t look each other in the eye. If you stare for too long, then it’s thought to be a threat meaning: ‘Who you looking at?’ The solution is changing cultural identity and belief systems.” A counternarrative is required to replace the values and codes of hypermasculinity that requires young Black men to defend their sense of dignity in ways that lead to retaliatory violence.

The inability to solve problems peacefully was related to what was called “hypermasculinity.” Representatives of Lost Boys, a violence prevention organization, pointed out that boys and girls in gangs were part of the fabric of the community and needed to be given healthy options. “Focus on the trauma” was their stirring message. The most important unit of treatment is the community, not prison. Williams argued that a cultural approach was best suited for intervention, not a gang-based program. He called for a “cultural switch” to replace the violence that

is engendered by current conditions of joblessness and racism. If it is mainly a gang problem, there is one set of solutions, but “if it’s a cultural problem, then there are different interventions.” Today’s violence, he said, was mainly “a cultural problem and an identity crisis” primarily precipitated by a socio-economic context with limited options and opportunities.

The most effective intervention strategies will require the involvement of the men – and women – themselves in readjusting the narrative and in rebuilding their communities. Gang structures are no longer serious barriers to pull youth into social movements and advocating policies to rebuild community and neighborhoods. This is the principal change from the decades of domination of neighborhoods by traditional gangs.

e. Roots of hypersensitivity and hypermasculine reactions.

Much of the hypersensitivity to insult is a result of ongoing, institutionalized assaults on the sense of dignity and self-worth that stem largely from household and neighborhood socioeconomic conditions in areas where homicide rates are highest. These conditions include chronic and concentrated joblessness, forced segregation, brutal and racist treatment by police, inadequate access to goods and services, and underfunded and/or inadequate neighborhood schools. Drug addiction, domestic abuse, and other physical and mental health issues both mask and exacerbate feelings of hopelessness and despair.

Summary and Unanswered Questions

Given the fracturing and fundamental transformation of African American gangs in Chicago, policies and practices towards them must also change. *The violence that has resulted from the fragmentation of traditional gangs into new horizontal gangs and cliques should be addressed within a comprehensive neighborhood policy that directly confronts the disinvestment and concentrated poverty. The decline of the traditional leadership and structure of African American gangs presents Chicago with an unprecedented opportunity to redirect youth away from gangs and into jobs and movements for social justice.*

The nature of gang violence in Chicago has been changing, but policies and practices toward it have not. While drug-related violence remains, high levels of violence in many neighborhoods in Chicago are related to interpersonal conflicts, and only secondarily to gangs or drugs. Intervention strategies towards gangs must differentiate between those that are mainly drug selling cliques versus those that are primarily relational. In African American communities, particularly on the South Side, traditional gangs have little influence and targeting gang leaders as a reform strategy makes little sense.

The conference experts propose a “readjustment” to the narrative on gangs, drugs, and violence to a focus on community redevelopment; strategies to restore self-worth address expressions of hypermasculinity while and assaults (from multiple directions) on dignity and teaching peaceful means of young men to settle conflict, including approaches of restorative justice. Rather than a one-sided prosecution of gang leaders as causal agents, community organizations should be funded to intervene preventively in networks of violence.

This means a three-pronged strategy of economic development of communities, human development of the people in those communities, and a “cultural switch” of working with young men on methods to interrupt the cycle of violence. It implies that involvement in social movements or community activism, e.g. Black Lives Matter or arts-based activism, can replace nihilistic violence toward other young black men. Social enterprise and entrepreneurship programs build on the resourcefulness and creativity of young people and provides economic opportunities.

Increased resources need to flow into housing, health, and education rather than to the hiring of more police officers. The push by the Trump administration to restore “stop and frisk” policies would increase hostility and violence, not stem it. Current efforts to reform the Chicago Police Department must include reforming their outdated assumptions about how gangs function. Police are seen by many youth as more of a problem than a solution and contribute to decision by youth to take justice into their own hands.

One issue that needs more research is the understanding of differences between West Side and South Side gangs and how they relate to violence. Drug arrests are much higher on the West Side, and West Side activists reported that drug deals were at the root of much homicide. On the South Side, retaliation in ongoing gang disputes represents the principle motive for much of today’s violence and that once-lucrative open-air drug markets that served as a principal source of gang conflict in previous decades had largely dissipated, minimizing drug-related violence. In some South Side areas, disputes over drug markets continued to fuel violence. Differences between the trajectories of African American and Latino gangs were only touched on. Latino gangs were not affected by the demolitions of CHA housing projects and have remained more intact than African American gangs. However, there is some evidence Latino gangs recently are experiencing some of the same tendencies toward fracturing. The conference attendees also did not discuss gangs in prison that maintain old alliances. There is also some evidence that this is changing to more race-based alliances, as in California prisons, but no research exists on this at all. The conference also only touched on the role of women in gangs and violence, and much more research is needed on this topic. Nonetheless, the findings in this report provide an important shift for how gangs in Chicago are viewed by policy makers, law enforcement, and others.

It is time to move on from the narrative of Chicago as a “city of gangs.” Chicago has always been a city of neighborhoods, and the new horizontal cliques should be addressed in tandem with comprehensive neighborhood redevelopment policies. It cannot be stressed enough that the demise of traditional gang structures presents Chicago with an unprecedented opportunity to win youth from gangs and decrease violence. The report has presented research to reframe the narrative on gangs and violence. What is needed now is the political will to rebuild our neighborhoods and provide both increased safety and hope to neighborhoods of concentrated African American poverty.

Selected References

- Aspholm, Roberto R, 2019. *View from the Streets: Gangs, History, and Resistance on the South Side of Chicago*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bienen, Leigh B. and Brandon Rottinghaus. 2002. "Learning from the Past, Living in the Present: Understanding Homicide in Chicago, 1870-1930." *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 92(2):437-554.
- Chicago Tribune: Crime in Chicago: Tracking Homicide Victims. 2017, 2018
- Córdova, Teresa and Matthew D. Wilson. 2017. *Abandoned in Their Neighborhoods: Youth Joblessness Amidst the Fight of Industry and Opportunity*. Produced for: Alternative Schools Network. Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago Great Cities Institute.
- Crime Lab, University of Chicago. 2017. "Gun Violence in Chicago, 2016." Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Hagedorn, John M. 2015. *The in\$ane Chicago Way: The Daring Plan by Chicago Gangs to Create a Spanish Mafia*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Hagedorn, John M. 2013 "Gang Violence and School Closings." Report for Swan vs. Chicago Board of Education. July 2013. Chicago. US District Court for Northern Illinois.
- Hagedorn, John M. and Brigid Rauch 2007. "Housing Gangs and Homicide: What We Can Learn from Chicago." *Urban Affairs Review* 42 (4): 43-56.
- Moore, Natalie, Lance Williams. 2010. *The Almighty Black P. Stone Nation*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books.
- Papachristos, Andre and Wildeman 2013. "Network Exposure and Homicide Victimization in an African American Community." *American Journal of Public Health* (November).
- Uniform Crime Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Various Years

Author Bios

John Hagedorn, Ph.D. is a James J. Stukel Fellow with the Great Cities Institute and Professor of Criminology, Law, and Justice (retired) at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Hagedorn's first book, *People & Folks, Gangs, Crime, and the Underclass in a Rustbelt City*, argued for more jobs than jails and applied William Julius Wilson's underclass theory to gangs. He was the architect of a neighborhood-based, family centered social service reform in Milwaukee that became the subject of his dissertation, published as *Forsaking Our Children*. He was editor (with Meda Chesney-Lind), of *Female Gangs in America: Essays on Girls, Gangs, and Gender*, the only edited volume ever published in the U.S. on female gangs. His interest in Chicago gangs led him to become immersed in the history of the Vice Lords and the importance of race. His global travels further informed his understanding of gangs, which led him to edit the volume *Gangs in the Global City* based on an international conference at the Great Cities Institute. He was Principal Investigator of a Harry F. Guggenheim study at the Great Cities Institute of why Chicago's homicide rate did not decline like New York City's. He argued in 2007 that the decision to not invest in public housing but demolish it was a major correlate of high rates of violence. In *A World of Gangs*, he applied Manuel Castells' work in analyzing gangs, arguing that understanding the cultural struggle for identity was crucial in working with gangs. His most recent book, *The In\$ane Chicago Way*, looks historically at gangs, organized crime, and corruption in Chicago.

Roberto Aspholm, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Aspholm's research interests involve examining the dynamics of street gangs, urban violence, and violence reduction qualitatively at the street level. His previous research with gang members in Chicago, for example, explored the shattering and reorganization of the historic black street gangs on the city's South Side, how that dynamic reshaped the nature of violence in the city, and how these realities might inform efforts to address this violence. He has recently been awarded a STEP grant to research street gangs and violence in the St. Louis Area. With this STEP project, along with the Community-Based Crime Reduction project in East St. Louis, the murder capital of the United States, Aspholm will be looking at the nature of gangs and violence in the greater St. Louis area and exploring how that knowledge can be translated into effective community practice and violence prevention. Aspholm completed his doctoral dissertation in 2016 at the University of Illinois at Chicago titled, *"This Ain't the Nineties": Chicago's Black Street Gangs in the Twenty-First Century*, and is author of the forthcoming book *View from the Streets: Gangs, History, and Resistance on the South Side of Chicago*, which will be published by Columbia University Press in the fall of 2019.

Teresa Córdova, Ph.D. is the Director of the Great Cities Institute (GCI) at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is also Professor of Urban Planning and Policy in the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs (CUPPA) and publishes in the fields of Community Development and Latino Studies. In her ongoing work as Director of UIC's Great Cities Institute, Córdova and GCI researcher, Matthew D. Wilson, have produced several reports on joblessness among teens and young adults in Chicago. The reports have drawn attention to the dramatic numbers of jobless young people in the region, most dramatically, Black men between the ages of 20-24, nearly half of whom are out of school and out of work. The research points to the *chronic and concentrated* nature of joblessness in the context of the flight of industry and opportunity from Chicago's neighborhoods and directly connects areas with high rates of gun violence to areas with entrenched joblessness. Through ongoing research and strategic partnerships, Great Cities Institute continues to address this issue by working on pathways for employment for teens and young adults in areas of manufacturing and small business development with a focus on industrial policy, succession planning, skills development, small business incubators and worker cooperatives. Dr. Córdova served on the transition committee for Governor J.B. Pritzker on Job Creation and Economic Opportunity.

Andrew V. Papachristos, Ph.D. is a Professor of Sociology and Faculty Fellow at the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University. Papachristos aims to understand how the connected nature of cities—how their citizens, neighborhoods, and institutions are tied to one another—affect what we feel, think, and do. His main research applies network science to the study of gun violence, police misconduct, illegal gun markets, Al Capone, street gangs, and neighborhood inequality. He is also in the process of completing a manuscript on the evolution of black street gangs and politics in Chicago from the 1950s to the early-2000s. Papachristos also conducts policy related research, including the evaluation of gun violence prevention programs in more than a dozen U.S. cities. An author of more than 50 articles, Papachristos' work has appeared in journals such as JAMA, The American Sociological Review, Criminology, The American Journal of Public Health, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Chicago Tribune, among other outlets.

Lance Williams, Ph.D. is a Professor of Urban Community Studies at the historic Jacob H. Carruthers Center for Urban Studies at Northeastern Illinois University. He served as the National Coordinator of the African American Male Initiative for the President's Roundtable. His first book, *Culture and Perceptions of Violence Related Behaviors Among Adolescents*, set forth a cultural model for retooling young, African American males against violence-related behaviors. He is co-author (with Natalie Y. Moore) of *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation: The Rise, Fall, and Resurgence of an American Gang*. Lance's forthcoming book offers a panorama of the roles urban renewal, segregation and the Black Power Movement played in the formation and evolution of the Black Disciples street organization. Lance served as the Founding Board Chair of the Lupe Fiasco Foundation; principal investigator of CeaseFire, an anti-violence initiative in Chicago; a board member of the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois program; and a member of the executive committee of the Governor's Statewide Community Safety and Reentry Working Group.



