

Velma Murphy Hill, a 21-year-old NAACP Youth Council Leader, recalled her emotions of the morning of August 28th, 1960, “I was saying to myself, ‘don’t be nervous, don’t throw up,’ because you’re the leader here and you gotta be cool.”<sup>1</sup> Hill’s worries were well warranted. Within a matter of hours, the coalition of young student activists she was leading would be surrounded by a violent white mob on the shores of Lake Michigan. Despite the violence, Hill’s group of activists, dubbed by the *Chicago Defender* as the “freedom waders,” participated in sit-in-like protests at Chicago’s Rainbow Beach repeatedly over the course of two years.<sup>2</sup> This paper will argue that the wade-ins at Rainbow Beach were a pivotal moment in the history of Chicago’s segregated swimming areas. First, Chicago’s deeply racist and violent tendencies in places of recreational swimming up until the wade-ins will be revealed. Secondly, the Rainbow Beach wade-ins and other civil rights actions in Chicago in the 1960s will be shown to contribute to the white flight phenomenon and the metamorphosis of segregationist tactics. Lastly, de facto segregation of Chicago’s beaches through permitting, beach badges, and environmental contaminants will be proven to exist up until the present.

Chicago’s dark history of preventing African Americans from using the city’s beaches is best exemplified by the race riot of 1919. On July 27, 1919, Eugene Williams, a seventeen-year-old African American teenager, accidentally drifted on a homemade raft into the waters of an informally segregated beach on 29th street.<sup>3</sup> In response, George Stauber, a twenty-five-year-old white man, threw a rock at Williams, striking him in the head. Williams fell off the raft and

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, August 22, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Steele, “Wading into Chicago's Segregated Past,” WBEZ Chicago (WBEZ Chicago, January 6, 2016), <https://www.wbez.org/stories/wading-into-chicagos-segregated-past/877ba2e1-5dc7-4c61-ae0e-6cc546bd2f92>.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew J Conovaloff, “Searching for Eugene Williams,” Chicago Magazine, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://www.chicagomag.com/city-life/August-2019/Searching-for-Eugene-Williams/>.

drowned to death.<sup>4</sup> Dan Callahan, a white patrolman, not only refused to arrest Stauber but also prevented an African American policeman from doing so.<sup>5</sup> William's death incited violence from both Whites and Blacks, leading to one of the deadliest riots in American history. Thirty-eight people were killed, and property damage was estimated in the millions.<sup>6</sup> African Americans, who made up just over five percent of Chicago's population, suffered two-thirds of the deaths and the overwhelming majority of the property damage.<sup>7</sup> African American residents in Chicago's "Black Belt," an area of the city which was the center of the African American community, found themselves in a similar situation to Eugene Williams, "struck down by riot violence with little awareness of what caused the attack."<sup>8</sup> While the race riot of 1919 is often highlighted as an important moment in Chicago's history, the city witnessed many other acts of racial violence associated with recreational swimming.

Chicago's beaches have repeatedly been the site of prejudice against African Americans. Numerous incidents of violence centered around Jackson Park Beach, located south of 57th Street. In 1925, a white mob chased a young Black couple off the beach, beating them with sticks. When the couple asked a policeman for assistance, he responded, "This beach is for white people only. Come on and get out of here and go to your own beach: that's where you belong."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan S. Coit, "'Our Changed Attitude': Armed Defense and the New Negro in the 1919 Chicago Race Riot," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 11, no. 2 (2012): pp. 225-256, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537781412000035>, 230.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Coit, "'Our Changed Attitude': Armed Defense and the New Negro in the 1919 Chicago Race Riot," 231.

<sup>9</sup> Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Univ Of Pennsylvania Pr, 2014), 28.

In response, the couple pointed out that African American beaches lacked bathhouses or showers and were overrun by rats.<sup>10</sup> Violence was not limited to adults or teenagers. In 1929, a white gang threw stones at a group of twenty-three African American Girl Scouts, driving them from Jackson Park Beach.<sup>11</sup> In 1931, a report declared that on South Side beaches, “groups of colored bathers have been insulted, molested, or threatened by bands of white hoodlums who resented their presence at the public recreation places.”<sup>12</sup> At Calumet Beach on Chicago’s South Side, African American picnickers faced violent mobs and were warned not to return to established all-white recreational areas.<sup>13</sup> In 1957, a mob of approximately six thousand White people threatened a group of Black families and chased them from the beach in what is known today as the Calumet riot.<sup>14</sup> These examples of violence show the breadth of resistance African Americans encountered on Chicago’s beaches before the Rainbow Beach Wade-Ins. Yet, discriminatory behavior inspired by recreational swimming was not only limited to the beaches of Lake Michigan.

Racial intimidation was a persistent issue at public swimming pools leading up to the Rainbow Beach wade-ins. By 1910, Chicago’s Park Board had not located any recreational swimming pools within Chicago's “Black Belt,” which stretched from 22nd Street to 51st

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> “Racial Conflict at the Beaches,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 5, 1929.

<sup>12</sup> Horace Roscoe Cayton and St Clair Drake, *Black Metropolis* (London: J. Cape, 1946), 104.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Lou Finley et al., *The Chicago Freedom Movement: Martin Luther King Jr. and Civil Rights Activism in the North* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 107.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Lou Finley et al., *The Chicago Freedom Movement: Martin Luther King Jr. and Civil Rights Activism in the North*, 293.

Street.<sup>15</sup> This lack forced African Americans to find relief from hot summer days in predominantly white neighborhoods, where public pools were prevalent.<sup>16</sup> In the 1910s, White swimmers sometimes abused Black people in an attempt to discourage them from using the pools.<sup>17</sup> A playground director told the Chicago Commission on Race Relations that he had frequently seen White boys “maliciously dunk Black boys under the water and hold them down until they were close to drowning.”<sup>18</sup> An officer at the Hardin Square recreational pool boasted that he could summon countless young men in the neighborhood to “procure arms and fight shoulder to shoulder with me if a Negro should say one word back.”<sup>19</sup> Beyond these isolated incidents, the absence of pools in predominantly Black neighborhoods would have long-lasting effects. On a hot, mid-July afternoon in 1966, several teenagers opened a fire hydrant on Chicago's West Side as they did not have easy access to a neighborhood pool.<sup>20</sup> The teenagers were met with “rocks, bottles, and bricks” from White passersby.<sup>21</sup> The hydrant incident ignited three days of intense rioting on Chicago's West Side.<sup>22</sup> The discriminatory culture of Chicago’s

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<sup>15</sup> Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters a Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Univ of North Carolina Pr, 2010), Chapter 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago; a Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot in 1919* (New York, Arno Press, 1968), 287.

<sup>19</sup> Wiltse, *Contested Waters a Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, Chapter 3.

<sup>20</sup> Wiltse, *Contested Waters a Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, Chapter 7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

swimming pools shows that African Americans' right to recreational swimming was not only challenged on beaches but was a more widespread issue within the city.

1960 marked the beginning of a new phase of the civil rights movement, one which challenged White segregationist policies directly. Direct activism, in less confrontational forms, had been used before 1960 in places of recreation in Chicago. For example, pioneering members of CORE carried out a major picket line campaign against Chicago's segregated White City Roller Rink in 1942.<sup>23</sup> However, the bolder sit-in movement was born in 1960 by four freshmen from Greensboro, North Carolina.<sup>24</sup> The college students were harassed, but media coverage of the event helped ultimately shift national opinion in favor of new civil rights legislation.<sup>25</sup> Groups such as SNCC helped propel the tactic across the nation to various areas, including beaches. In late April 1960, over one hundred African Americans, many of them children, attempted a wade-in of Biloxi Beach, Mississippi. The group was met by a White mob wielding "baseball bats, pipes, sticks, and chains," who viciously beat them."<sup>26</sup> Yet, the incident received media attention and caused outrage.<sup>27</sup> Later, in 1964, wade-ins were met with violence in St. Augustine, Florida, as White militants badly beat activists. Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, Martin Luther King Jr's advisor who joined the protest, later reported that "he feared more for his life

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<sup>23</sup> Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> "Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-In," Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-In (Educational Materials: African American Odyssey) (Library of Congress), accessed April 11, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/educate/lunch.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert Mason, *Beaches, Blood and Ballots: A Black Doctor's Civil Rights Struggle* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 68.

<sup>27</sup> Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, 163.

and those with him on that occasion than at any other time during the civil rights movement.”<sup>28</sup>

The publicity given to the St. Augustine campaign helped facilitate growing support and the eventual passage of the civil rights bill.<sup>29</sup>

The sit-in movement had a direct impact on Velma Murphy Hill in 1960. “I could feel the winds of change,” she said.<sup>30</sup> That summer, on a picket line in Chicago, Velma met a young activist who was being mentored by Bayard Rustin and A. Phillip Randolph.<sup>31</sup> His name was Norman Hill, and soon the two began to date. After hearing about an African American policeman who was run out of Rainbow Beach, the new couple began organizing a wade-in campaign. On August 28th, 1960, Norman and Velma, leading a group of thirty students, entered Rainbow Beach, one of the last remaining beaches segregated by custom.<sup>32</sup> Soon, a gang of White youths encircled the waders, hurling rocks and stones and screaming racial slurs. “We didn’t run, but we didn’t walk slow either,” Velma recalled.<sup>33</sup> One of the rocks struck Velma on the head, creating a wound that required over 17 stitches.<sup>34</sup> Norman helped to carry her off the

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<sup>28</sup> David R. Colburn, *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1991), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, 168.

<sup>30</sup> Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Nick Juravich, “Black Quotidian: August 29, 1960,” *Black Quotidian: Everyday History in African-American Newspapers*, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://blackquotidian.supdigital.org/bq/august-29-1960>.

beach and into a changing room. Eventually, an ambulance arrived, and she was taken to a local hospital.<sup>35</sup>

WEATHER  
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Showers Likely  
High in Low 80's  
Low Lower 60's

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# MOB INJURES TWO AT RAINBOW BEACH

(See Page 2)

## High Speed, Tree - 3 Dead

(See Page 2)



**Victims Of Rainbow Beach Mob**

MISS VELMA MURPHY, 21, left, and Howard Irvin, 23, right, were injured at Rainbow Beach, Sunday morning, by a rock-throwing white mob shortly after they, along with 28 other members of the Southside NAACP Youth Council, attempted to swim in the area. Both were hurt when struck by stones thrown by members of the jeering white gathering, as the 30 young adults were being escorted from the beach by policemen, according to reports. The pair was treated at Jackson Park hospital and released.

### 50 Hurt As Dixie Mobs Clash In Race Hate

(See Page 3)

Figure 1. “Mob Injures Two at Rainbow Beach” | Source: Chicago Defender

The next day the *Chicago Defender*, the first Black newspaper to have a circulation of over 100,000 and a mainstay of the Chicago civil rights movement, published a front-page story

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

about the wade-ins (Figure 1).<sup>3637</sup> The *Chicago Defender's* editors even went to the lengths to use a specially enlarged font for the headline, while the *Chicago Tribune* buried the story in its back pages.<sup>38</sup> The difference in coverage was emblematic of the mainstream media in Chicago failing to highlight resistance to the desegregation of recreational spaces. The *Chicago Tribune* had a long history dating back to the 19th century of it running racist editorials.<sup>39</sup> Yet, regardless of the inadequate coverage from the *Tribune*, the *Defender's* coverage helped spark a larger response from young activists in the Chicago area.<sup>40</sup> Stitches still healing in her head, Velma Murphy Hill continued leading the wade-ins into September.<sup>4142</sup> The summer of 1961 brought a new set of wade-ins to Rainbow Beach. During one wade-in, three hundred police and over fifty squad cars were required to keep the peace. Yet, the police stood up for the waders, arresting ten individuals for throwing bricks, bottles, and other projectiles at the young activists.<sup>43</sup> The conduct of the police in this instance was an important victory for the wade-in movement. Another victory occurred a week later when one of the white rioters was fined \$200 by a white judge.<sup>44</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup> "The Chicago Defender," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), accessed April 11, 2023, [https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news\\_bios/defender.html](https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/defender.html).

<sup>37</sup> "Cover Page," *Chicago Defender*, August 29, 1960.

<sup>38</sup> Nick Juravich, "Black Quotidian: August 29, 1960."

<sup>39</sup> Bruce McKittrick Cole, "The Chicago Press and the Know-Nothings 1850-1856" (dissertation, University of Chicago, n.d.).

<sup>40</sup> Nick Juravich, "Black Quotidian: August 29, 1960."

<sup>41</sup> Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview.

<sup>42</sup> Nick Juravich, "Black Quotidian: August 29, 1960."

<sup>43</sup> "Rioting Fades, Police Get Tough, Arrest 10 At Beach," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 10, 1961.

<sup>44</sup> "Blonde Rioter Draws \$200 Fine For Sand Kicking Act," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 13, 1961.



successes of the movement were encapsulated by the events of August 6, 1961, when the waders were met with no resistance for the first time since the wade-ins began.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike the ‘freedom waders,’ many civil rights actions in Chicago in the 1960s were not successes. Activists were drawn to Chicago due in part to its corrupt political machine led by Mayor Richard J. Daley.<sup>46</sup> Daley’s administration was known for not working equally for all residents, especially African Americans and other minorities.<sup>47</sup> Daley himself had belonged to an Irish gang that participated in the beating of Blacks in the 1919 riot.<sup>48</sup> In 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. brought his crusade to the windy city by joining the Chicago Freedom Movement, a coalition of 44 civil rights organizations working to improve living conditions for Blacks.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, King was unable to prevent violence on both sides. Just as Eugene Williams and Velma Murphy Hill had taken rocks to the head, King was met with the same fate. When King stepped out of a car in Marquette Park on Aug. 5, 1966, he was met with the faces of 700 angry Whites.<sup>50</sup> King and hundreds of demonstrators had scarcely set out on a march when he was struck by a rock. "The blow knocked King to one knee, and he thrust out an arm to break the

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<sup>45</sup> Nick Juravich, “Wade in the Water,” *Chicago Studies*, 2008, 101.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Allan Anderson, “The City That Worked: Machine Politics and Urban Liberalism in Chicago, 1945-1963” (dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land the Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (Paw Prints, 2008), 226.

<sup>49</sup> “Chicago Campaign,” The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, May 21, 2018, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/chicago-campaign>.

<sup>50</sup> Ron Grossman, “50 Years Ago: MLK’s March in Marquette Park Turned Violent, Exposed Hate,” Chicago Tribune, May 11, 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-mlk-king-marquette-park-1966-flashback-perspec-0731-md-20160726-story.html>.

fall," the *Chicago Tribune* reported.<sup>51</sup> "I've been in many demonstrations all across the South, but I can say that I have never seen — even in Mississippi and Alabama — mobs as hostile and as hate-filled as I've seen here in Chicago," King told reporters afterward.<sup>52</sup> Mayor Daley tried to end King's movement by agreeing to build public housing, but many of the promises were never fulfilled.<sup>53</sup> Tragically, immediately after the agreement was signed and King gave up his apartment in Lawndale, "the interracial nonviolent civil rights movement in Chicago disappeared."<sup>54</sup> Further, the SCLC's Operation Breadbasket, a project under the leadership of Jesse Jackson, failed to meet its goals of abolishing racist hiring practices by companies working in African American neighborhoods.<sup>55</sup>

Civil rights direct action protests in the 1960s contributed directly to White flight. Chicago's South Shore neighborhood, which was adjacent to Rainbow Beach and was primarily White in 1960, registered more membership cards to their local neighborhood commission the day after the first wade-in of 1961 than any other day of the year.<sup>56</sup> The sharp increase in memberships for a neighborhood organization known to oppose the wade-ins shows that the confrontational nature of the protests scared White residents. Over the course of the next year, when the South Shore Commission failed to prevent a more gradual integration of Rainbow

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> "Chicago Campaign," The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute.

<sup>54</sup> Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*, 240.

<sup>55</sup> "Operation Breadbasket," The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, June 5, 2018, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/operation-breadbasket>.

<sup>56</sup> Nick Juravich, "Wade in the Water," 97.

Beach, membership rates sharply dropped.<sup>57</sup> The membership drop was symbolic of the White flight which would occur in the neighborhood. In the 1960s, the neighborhood went from being 89.6 percent White in 1960 to 70 percent Black by 1970.<sup>58</sup> As of 2015, the South Shore was 93.5 percent Black.<sup>59</sup> In neighborhoods where direct action protests occurred, such as Englewood, where a battle was waged over subpar and segregated schools, racial profiles dramatically changed.<sup>60</sup> From 1960 to 1980, Englewood's White population plummeted from 51,583 to 818.<sup>61</sup> White flight began in the 1950s after the Brown V. Board decision and was caused by a complex set of factors.<sup>62</sup> These factors included but were not limited to the riots in response to Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, which caused over twelve thousand Army troopers to descend on Chicago, and a decline in manufacturing, which cost the city approximately 251,000 jobs between 1960 and 1970.<sup>63</sup> Yet, the examples of the South Shore and Englewood show that direct action helped accelerate the process. Wade-ins and other forms of protest brought the reality of integration to Whites' doorstep.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> William Voegeli, "The Truth about White Flight," City Journal, January 20, 2021, <https://www.city-journal.org/truth-about-white-flight-from-cities>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Katherine Skiba, "Feb. 19, 2016: Arrest Photo of Young Activist Bernie Sanders Emerges from Tribune Archives," Chicago Tribune, January 23, 2021, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-bernie-sanders-1963-chicago-arrest-20160219-story.html>.

<sup>61</sup> "White Flight, by the Numbers," NBC Chicago (NBC Chicago, May 6, 2013), <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-politics/white-flight-by-the-numbers/1951412/>.

<sup>62</sup> William Voegeli, "The Truth about White Flight."

<sup>63</sup> Gary Rivlin, "The Night Chicago Burned," Chicago Reader, August 20, 2021, <https://chicagoreader.com/news-politics/the-night-chicago-burned/>.

<sup>64</sup> "Employment and Unemployment - Chicago," United States Department of Labor, n.d., [https://www.bls.gov/regions/midwest/news-release/employmentandunemployment\\_chicago.html](https://www.bls.gov/regions/midwest/news-release/employmentandunemployment_chicago.html)

As many Whites fled inner Chicago for newly established suburbs, private beaches were established and became another way for Whites to resist integration.<sup>65</sup> Historian Kevin M. Kruse, in his book *White Flight*, showed the diverse areas of White resistance to desegregation in Atlanta from schools, parks, golf courses, housing developments, transportation networks, and many other elements.<sup>66</sup> Chicago's beaches are just another example of the many locations associated with White flight. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that the Whitest, wealthiest municipalities have the most restrictive public beach access policies today.<sup>67</sup> Further, their report found that places with large populations of people of color and working-class residents tend to have open access to public beaches, which on average, tend to be less clean.<sup>68</sup> Chicago's wealthy and overwhelmingly White North Shore: Lake Forest, Highland Park, Glencoe, Winnetka, Kenilworth, and Wilmette, populations increased due to white flight.<sup>69</sup> Today, each of these North Shore neighborhoods charge an astonishing \$125 or greater per day for a visit by a family of five or require proof of residency.<sup>70</sup> This stark segregation can be seen in a chart compiled from the US Census's American Community Survey, which shows the dramatic differences between South Shore beaches, which are almost exclusively public, and

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<sup>65</sup> Lucas Stephens and Samuel Kling, "The Right to the Shoreline: Race, Exclusion, and Public Beaches in Metropolitan Chicago," Chicago Council on Global Affairs (The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, September 22, 2020), <https://globalaffairs.org/research/report/right-shoreline-race-exclusion-and-public-beaches-metropolitan-chicago>.

<sup>66</sup> Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight* (S.I.: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>67</sup> Lucas Stephens and Samuel Kling, "The Right to the Shoreline: Race, Exclusion, and Public Beaches in Metropolitan Chicago."

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> United States Census Bureau, "Table 17. Illinois - Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1960 to 1990," accessed April 11, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/tab17.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

North Shore beaches, almost all of which have highly exclusionary policies (Figure 2). Beaches that are isolated from Chicago, such as Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, which is mainly White and middle-class, are free and open.<sup>71</sup> These open beaches are primarily defined by a lack of transit connections to Chicago, which prevents low-income groups from reaching the beaches.<sup>72</sup>

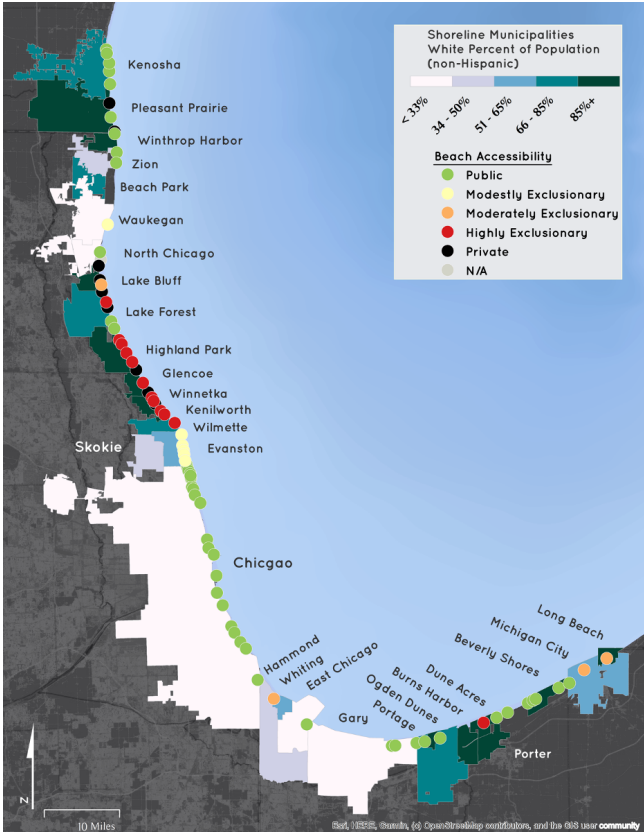


Figure 2. Municipal Beach Access Policies Map Analysis 2020 | Source: The Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Chicago’s beaches are not only segregated by expensive beach passes and residency requirements, but the city’s beaches are also further segregated by environmental contaminants. Chicago’s inner city public beaches often fail water quality tests. A review of bacteria data

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

collected found that inner city beaches had water pollution levels that put swimmers at risk of getting sick on more than 80 percent of the days on which testing was conducted.<sup>73</sup> The highest levels of bacteria were all recorded on the South Side and included South Shore Beach and 63rd Street Beach.<sup>74</sup> An analysis of water quality data showed that Rainbow Beach fails the strictest Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) water standards more than 20 percent of the time.<sup>75</sup> Rainbow Beach was listed as one of the five most polluted beaches in Chicago by *Curbed*.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, Chicago's cleanest and safest beaches to swim at are located primarily next to affluent and White North Shore neighborhoods.<sup>77</sup> In 2018, the South Shore had 34 days of fecal bacteria above EPA guidelines, while the North Shore's Foster Beach had a mere 6 days above guidelines.<sup>78</sup>

The continued de facto segregation of Chicago's beaches and the poor conditions of public beaches frequented by minorities is reflective of the state of racial conditions in Chicago as a whole. Chicago attracted slightly more than 500,000 of the approximately 7 million African Americans who left the South during the Great Migration.<sup>79</sup> When Ida Mae Gladney, a

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<sup>73</sup> "Study Finds High Levels of Fecal Bacterial at Chicago-Area Beaches," WTTW News, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://news.wttw.com/2019/07/23/study-finds-high-levels-fecal-bacterial-chicago-area-beaches>.

<sup>74</sup> "Study Finds High Levels of Fecal Bacteria at Chicago-Area Beaches," WTTW News.

<sup>75</sup> Tribune Graphics, "Map: Polluted Beaches in the Chicago Area," Chicago Tribune, May 21, 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/chi-map-polluted-beaches-20140717-htlstory.html>.

<sup>76</sup> AJ LaTrace, "The Five Dirtiest & Most Polluted Beaches in Chicago," *Curbed Chicago* (Curbed Chicago, July 16, 2014), <https://chicago.curbed.com/2014/7/16/10072522/the-five-dirtiest-beaches-in-chicago>.

<sup>77</sup> Monica Eng, "The Scoop on Poop at Chicago's Beaches," WBEZ Chicago (WBEZ Chicago, September 21, 2021), <https://www.wbez.org/stories/the-scoop-on-poop-at-chicagos-beaches/62122644-65d9-4fc4-b136-59825ffd45c4>.

<sup>78</sup> Monica Eng, "The Scoop on Poop at Chicago's Beaches," NPR (NPR, July 1, 2019), <https://www.npr.org/local/309/2019/07/01/737182779/the-scoop-on-poop-at-chicago-s-beaches>.

<sup>79</sup> Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*, 70.

sharecropper from Mississippi, described moving to Chicago in 1937, she exclaimed, “It looked like heaven to me.”<sup>80</sup> Yet, the optimistic vision which Gladney described never panned out the way civil rights leaders intended. Tens of thousands of Black residents have left South and West side neighborhoods in recent years in what has been referred to as a “reverse migration.”<sup>81</sup> According to census data, Chicago’s Black population was lowered by about 10% between 2010 and 2020.<sup>82</sup> Chicago’s Black population dropped to a mere 787,551 in 2020, its lowest number since the mid-1950s.<sup>83</sup> While gentrification is partly to blame, the exodus is largely due to the city of Chicago neglecting African American communities. Neighborhoods such as Englewood, which experienced the highest number of homicides, have also had the largest outflow of Black residents.<sup>84</sup> African Americans in Chicago continue to face forms of segregation at beaches, schools, buildings, parks, utilities, police precincts, and many other areas.<sup>85</sup>

The kinds of attacks which resulted in rocks being thrown at Eugene Williams, Velma Murphy Hill, and Martin Luther King Jr. may be rare occurrences today, but segregation is still alive and well in Chicago. Segregation of Chicago's beaches morphed in the twentieth century.

The first sixty years of the century were defined by overt violence in places of recreational

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<sup>80</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (London: Penguin Random House, 2020), 228.

<sup>81</sup> Charmaine Runes and Jacqueline Serrato, “Mapping Chicago's Racial Segregation,” *South Side Weekly*, February 27, 2022, <https://southsideweekly.com/mapping-chicagos-racial-segregation/>.

<sup>82</sup> William Lee, “As the Black Population Continues to Drop in Chicago and Illinois, Few Regret Their Move: ‘I Have Peace,’” *Chicago Tribune*, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-chicago-black-residents-exodus-census-20211122-uphhe7bakngtjoh45uhnqjepwy-story.html>.

<sup>83</sup> Juan Perez Jr. et al., “Black People Are Leaving Chicago En Masse. It's Changing the City's Power Politics.,” *POLITICO*, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/12/07/chicago-black-population-decline-523563>.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

swimming. Yet, the victories of the Rainbow Beach wade-ins marked a significant change for segregationists. White flight, which was escalated by sit-in-like demonstrations, created a new form of segregated beaches: ones that continue today and rely on exorbitant beach passes, town permit regulations, and environmental contaminants. However, while segregation persists, violent White supremacist incidents have been radically curtailed since the 1960s. This change can be attested to the Freedom Waders and the countless grassroots civil rights groups which challenged segregation. In the future, the Freedom Waders' bravery can act as a beacon for activists to draw their own lines in the sand.





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