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REVOLUTIONS

*I can conceive of no Negro native to this country
who has not, by the age of puberty, been irreparably scarred
by the conditions of his life. . . .
The wonder is not that so many are ruined
but that so many survive.*

—JAMES BALDWIN, *Notes of a Native Son*

CHICAGO, 1966

IDA MAE BRANDON GLADNEY

ONE DAY IN 1966, something hopeful called to Ida Mae, who was now fifty-three and a grandmother. She scuttled past the dime stores and beauty shops on Sixty-third Street with Eleanor's little children, Karen and Kevin, in tow. They were rushing in the direction of a quavering voice on a loudspeaker. Up ahead, she could see a crowd of onlookers, the faithful and the curious, packed in the street and on the sidewalks near Halsted and sober-faced police officers circling the crowd on horseback.

She arrived late and out of breath. Years later, all she would remember was the voice saying something about "little white children and little colored children," or so she thought, and all the people, hordes of them, straining to hear but tense from the police scrutiny and the vaguely dangerous nature of the moment.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was there in person and speaking before them. It was one of his rare appearances in Ida Mae's neighborhood during his first major attempt to bring the civil rights movement to the

North. Ida Mae almost missed it. She arrived too late to get anywhere near the podium. Neither she nor Karen or Kevin could see over the crowd that had gathered long before them.

"They had him way up on something high," she said decades later. "And you could hear his voice talking through those horns."

Ida Mae wanted to move closer to see him. That was what she had come for, after all. "I never did get close enough," she said. "I didn't want to push through the crowd. Everybody was so touchy. And I had kids, you see, and I just couldn't pull them up in there. I never did get to see him good."

Ida Mae was taken in by the sheer presence of the man, who by then had already won the Nobel Peace Prize, led the March on Washington, witnessed the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and overseen his epic battles against Jim Crow in places like Selma and Montgomery.

But Chicago was a turning point for King. His movement was aging, its actions drawing greater skepticism and its successes leaving him with fewer obvious dragons to slay. It was a campaign looking for a cause. The inroads into southern segregation gave King a greater awareness of the unresolved tensions in the North in the wake of the Great Migration.

"Negroes have continued to flee from behind the Cotton Curtain," King told a crowd at Buckingham Fountain near the Loop, testing out a new theme in virgin territory. "But now they find that after years of indifference and exploitation, Chicago has not turned out to be the New Jerusalem."

Yet the very thing that made black life hard in the North, the very nature of northern hostility—unwritten, mercurial, opaque, and eminently deniable—made it hard for King to nail down an obvious right-versus-wrong cause to protest.

Blacks in the North could already vote and sit at a lunch counter or anywhere they wanted on an elevated train. Yet they were hemmed in and isolated into two overcrowded sections of the city—the South Side and the West Side—restricted in the jobs they could hold and the mortgages they could get, their children attending segregated and inferior schools, not by edict as in the South but by circumstance in the North, with the results pretty much the same. The unequal living conditions produced the expected unequal results: blacks working long hours for overpriced flats, their children left unsupervised and open to gangs, the resulting rise in crime and drugs, with few people able to get out and the problems so complex as to make it impossible to identify a single cause or solution.

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King was running headlong into what the sociologist Gunnar Myrdal called the Northern Paradox. In the North, Myrdal wrote, "almost everybody is against discrimination in general, but, at the same time, almost everybody practices discrimination in his own personal affairs"—that is, by not allowing blacks into unions or clubhouses, certain jobs, and white neighborhoods, indeed, avoiding social interaction overall.

"It is the culmination of all these personal discriminations," he continued, "which creates the color bar in the North, and, for the Negro, causes unusually severe unemployment, crowded housing conditions, crime and vice. About this social process, the ordinary white Northerner keeps sublimely ignorant and unconcerned."

Thus any civil rights campaign in the North would not be an attack on outrageous laws that, with enough grit and fortitude, could be overturned with the stroke of a pen. Instead, King would be fighting the ill-defined fear and antipathy that made northern whites flee at the sight of a black neighbor, turn away blacks at realty offices, or not hire them if they chose. The "enemy" was a feeling, a general unease that led to the flight of white people and businesses and sucked the resources out of the ghettos the migrants were quarantined into. No laws could make frightened white northerners care about blacks enough to permit them full access to the system they dominated.

"So long as this city is dominated by whites, whether because of their numbers without force or by their force if they were in the minority," the *Chicago Tribune* once wrote, "there will be limitations placed on the black people."

Still, despite the odds, King was compelled to go north—was called to it, he said—as had a good portion of his people in the still-unfolding Migration. He had made the journey himself when he went to Boston University for graduate school and while there met his wife, Coretta, another southerner. King's campaign in the North was "in one sense simply reacting to a major shift in the epicenter of black America," the historian James R. Ralph wrote. "It was following the great demographic flow of black Americans from the rural South to the urban North."

King actually moved into an apartment in the most hardscrabble section of town, the West Side neighborhood of North Lawndale, where the poorest and most recent arrivals from the South had shakily established themselves. He had a chesslike series of encounters with Mayor Richard J. Daley, the mayor-boss of Chicago, who managed to outwit the civil rights leader at nearly every turn. For one thing, Daley knew

not to make the same mistakes as his southern counterparts. He met with King, appearing cooperative rather than ignoring him or having him thrown into jail. He vowed to protect the marchers with a heavy police presence that sometimes outnumbered the marchers. It worked so well that the protesters rarely had the chance to contrast their peaceable courage against foaming-at-the-mouth supremacists because Daley's police force didn't let any white mob get near them, which kept the protests off the news and kept the movement from gaining traction, just as Daley had hoped.

That is until, after months of buildup, King went to march against housing segregation in a neighborhood called Marquette Park on the city's southwest side. This was a working-class neighborhood of Poles, Lithuanians, Germans, and Italians who had not long since gotten their starter bungalows and were standing their ground against the very thought of colored people moving in.

It was August 5, 1966. A fist-shaking crowd of some four thousand residents had gathered in advance. Upon his arrival, they cursed King with epithets from a knoll overlooking the march. Many people in the crowd waved Confederate flags. Some wore Nazi-like helmets. One placard read KING WOULD LOOK GOOD WITH A KNIFE IN HIS BACK.

The march had barely begun when a heckler hurled a rock as big as a fist at King, striking him in the head, just above the right ear. He fell to his knees, and, as he tried to get up, the crowd pelted the demonstrators with bottles, eggs, firecrackers, and more rocks. Some in the crowd turned and smashed rocks into cars and buses that passed with colored people in them. Some twelve hundred police officers and two hundred plainclothesmen had gathered in anticipation of trouble, but this was one of the rare occasions that they were outnumbered by white residents primed for confrontation.

As the eight hundred King supporters tried to carry on the march, they passed men, women, and children on their front stoops, who called the marchers "cannibals," "savages," and worse. A column of three hundred jeering white teenagers sat in the middle of the street to block the marchers' path. The police dispersed the youths with nightsticks waving, and the march was able to resume. But the teenagers repositioned themselves half a block down and sat in the street again. It took a second charge from the police to break up the young hecklers.

When the march wound down, the mob chased the buses carrying King's people away. Rising in agitation that lasted for hours, the mob smashed an effigy of King, overturned a car on Marquette Road, stoned

other cars, and fought police trying to clear the place out, requiring reinforcements to beat the mob back with clubs and shots fired into the air. In the end, some thirty people were injured and forty were arrested.

Some of King's aides had warned him not to go to Chicago. He said he had to. "I have to do this," he said as he tried to steady himself after the stoning, "to expose myself—to bring this hate into the open."

He had marched in the deepest corners of Alabama but was unprepared for what he was in for in Chicago. "I have seen many demonstrations in the South," he said that violent day in the Promised Land. "But I have never seen anything so hostile and so hateful as I've seen here today."

Ida Mae watched it on the news that night and worried for the man she so badly had wanted to see. She expected this in Mississippi, not in the North. "No," she would say decades afterward, "some places I just trusted more than others."

NEW YORK, PENNSYLVANIA STATION, MID-1960S
GEORGE SWANSON STARLING

THE WORLD WAS CHANGING, and George, without trying, was on the front lines. In the South, the trains had been segregated for as long as most people had been alive. Now he was in the uncomfortable position of enforcing new laws that were just now filtering into everyday practice.

There he was, scanning the crowds on the railroad platform as the southbound Silver Comet stretched down the track, belching and ready to board. The train would pull out of the station at 12:45 en route to Birmingham with some twenty-eight stops in between. Passengers packed the railway platform, suitcases, hatboxes, overnights, trunks, briefcases, and Gimbel's shopping bags at their feet.

George went about his job of getting their luggage and helping them to their seats, but this time, he looked the passengers over in a way he never did before. He looked to see if they were in prim Sunday clothes or loud juke-joint get-ups, if the people seeing them off were self-

CHICAGO, SPRING 1967
IDA MAE BRANDON GLADNEY

IT HAD BEEN CLOSE TO THIRTY YEARS since Ida Mae and her family had come up north. The children were grown now. And by the late 1950s, the first generation born in the North had arrived. Eleanor, who had come north in Ida Mae's belly, had gotten married right out of high school and had two kids. James and his wife, Mary Ann, soon followed with four kids of their own. Ida Mae held the babies close and prayed for the first members of the family born free in the Promised Land.

There were different branches now, and they were getting by, but still renting and not settled in a place of their own. From flat to flat, in and around the straining borders of the South Side, Ida Mae and her family had moved more in Chicago than they had when they were sharecroppers in Mississippi, as they had never moved in Mississippi like some of the people they knew because they had always stayed with their one planter, Mr. Edd.

They had lived at Twenty-first and State, Thirty-third and State, Forty-fifth and St. Lawrence, and were now in the 700 block of West Sixty-sixth Place. They had been all over the South Side.

They felt they had been in Chicago long enough without owning something. George had been at Campbell Soup for years. Ida Mae was working as a nurse's aide at Walther Memorial Hospital. Velma was teaching, James was driving a bus for the Chicago Transit Authority. Eleanor was a ticket agent for the elevated train. So together, they had enough to put something down on some property.

Not unlike many immigrant families, they wanted to stay together and wanted a place big enough for all of them. Their search led them to a beige brick three-flat in a long-contested but, they believed, newly opened-up neighborhood called South Shore on the southern tip of the black belt. It was a few blocks west of Lake Michigan. The street was lined with oak trees along the sidewalk and brick bungalows and multi-flats with little patches of yard in front.

They went to see the place at night.

An Italian car salesman and his family lived there. It had room enough for James and his family on the first floor, Ida Mae and her husband on the second, Eleanor and her kids on the third, or if necessary, a tenant to help with the house payments. Ida Mae and her family didn't

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have enough furniture to fill the flat. They wanted the place and everything in it: the plastic-covered upholstery, the marble-topped coffee table, the lamps, the dining room table, the breakfront and buffet, and the baby blue draperies over the front windows.

The Italian car salesman said he liked them and wanted them to have it. The family paid thirty thousand dollars and moved in without incident. There was the little matter of a bullet hole in one of the windows in the front room, but Ida Mae didn't let it bother her as it appeared the shot had been fired sometime before they moved in. Thirty years after they arrived in the New World with little more than their kids and the clothes on their backs, Ida Mae and her husband were finally homeowners in Chicago.

"It was beautiful," Ida Mae said years later. "Trees everywhere, all up and down the block."

Weeks passed. Ida Mae went to work one morning and came back that evening on the streetcar over on Exchange. She walked down Colfax in the neighborhood of brick apartment buildings, barbershop storefronts, and frame bungalows along a route that she was just beginning to learn.

It was then that she noticed something missing across the street from her three-flat. A house had vanished. The people across from her had moved it, or so it appeared. There was now a small crater in the earth where, just that morning, a house used to be.

It was a wonderment to Ida Mae and to James and Eleanor and the grandkids. Why would their nice white neighbors move their house clear off the street? Where did they go? What did this mean?

They would never see them again to get the answers. They would never fully know for sure what had happened or why. It would become part of their family lore, one of the things they would tell over and over again, shaking their heads and hunching their shoulders as they looked out their second-floor window at the sociology unfolding beneath them.

As it was, too much was happening anyway. Within weeks of the disappearing house, moving vans clogged Colfax Street. More people were vanishing, but those people left their houses behind. They took their sofas and upright pianos and were gone.

"Lord, they move quick," Ida Mae said years later. "And then blacks started moving in. Oh, Lord."

The whites left so fast Ida Mae didn't get a chance to know any of them or their kids or what they did for a living or if they liked watching

The Ed Sullivan Show like she did Sunday nights. They didn't stick around long enough to explain. But some of the whites who left the South Side in a panic would talk about it years later and, to tell the truth, never got over the loss of their old neighborhoods.

"It happened slowly, and then all of a sudden, *boom*," said a white homemaker who fled Ida Mae's neighborhood around that time and was quoted by the writer Louis Rosen, who had been a teenager when his parents fled South Shore, in the book *South Side*. "Everyone was gone. Everything changed. Before you know it, this one, that one. And then you heard, 'So-and-so's moving.' People didn't want to be the last."

A white father told Rosen, "I fought the good fight. I couldn't stay there with my three kids—my oldest was only fourteen at the time. I made a judgment. I did the best I could."

"It was like sitting around with a big group," said a white husband. "Okay, guys, in the next year, we're all going."

"It was who found a house first," the wife chimed in.

"Exactly. And we all went," the husband said.

To the colored people left behind, none of it made any sense. "It was like having a tooth pulled for no reason," said a black resident who moved his family in, only to watch the white neighbors empty out.

By the end of the year, the 7500 block of Colfax and much of the rest of South Shore went from all white to nearly totally black, which in itself might have been a neutral development, except that many houses changed hands so rapidly it was unclear whether the new people could afford the mortgages, and the rest were abandoned to renters with no investment or incentive to keep the places up. The turnover was sudden and complete and so destabilizing that it even extended to the stores on Seventy-fifth Street, to the neighborhood schools and to the street-sweeping and police patrols that could have kept up the quality of life. It was as if the city lost interest when the white people left.

The ice cream parlor closed. The five-and-dime shut down. The Walgreens on the corner became a liquor store. Karen and Kevin enrolled in Bradwell Elementary School and remember being, along with two other kids, the only black children in the entire school in 1968. By the time they graduated four years later, the racial composition had completely reversed: only four white children were left. South Shore would become as solidly black as the North Shore was solidly white. Ida

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Mae's neighborhood never had a chance to catch up with all the upheaval and was never the same again.

South Shore was one of the last white strongholds on the South Side, the completion of a cycle that had begun when the migrants first arrived and started looking for a way out of the tenements. There were fifty-eight bombings of houses that blacks moved into or were about to move into between 1917 and 1921 alone, bombings having become one of the preferred methods of intimidation in the North. In neighborhood after neighborhood, with the arrival of black residents the response during the Migration years was swift and predictable.

It happened to ordinary people like Ida Mae and to celebrities like Mahalia Jackson, the leading gospel singer of her day. When she began looking for a house in a well-to-do section of the South Side, people held meetings up and down the block. A Catholic priest rallied his parishioners and told them not to sell to her.

"You'd have thought the atomic bomb was coming instead of me," the singer said.

She got calls in the middle of the night, warning her, "You move into that house, and we'll blow it up with dynamite. You're going to need more than your gospel songs and prayers to save you."

She bought the house. It was a sprawling red brick ranch and the house of her dreams, coming as she had from the back country of Louisiana. A doctor had broken ranks and sold it to her. As soon as she moved in, the neighbors shot rifle bullets through her windows. The police were posted outside her house for close to a year.

"One by one," she said, "they sold their houses and moved away. As fast as a house came on the market a colored family would buy it."

Even Hyde Park, an island of sophistication just north of Ida Mae's working-class neighborhood of South Shore, succumbed to the same fears and raw emotion that overtook the rest of the city's South Side.

"Shall we sacrifice our property for a third of its value and run like rats from a burning ship," said a handbill circulated among white residents trying to keep blacks on the other side of State Street, "or shall we put up a united front to keep Hyde Park desirable for ourselves?"

Oddly enough, Hyde Park was one of the very few places where the alarmist rhetoric did not completely take. It was home to the venerable University of Chicago, which had its own interest in maintaining stability, and the neighborhood was blessed with some of the finest residential architecture in the city, giving many whites compelling and overriding reasons to stay. The neighborhood was one of the most expensive on the

South Side, so blacks who moved there had to have the means just to get in. Thus Hyde Park actually became a rare island of integration despite the initial hostilities.

Still, it was surrounded by all-black neighborhoods in a deeply divided city. Entire communities like the suburb of Cicero remained completely off-limits to blacks, and whites would avoid so much as driving through whole sections of the south and west sides for the remainder of the century.

By the time the Migration reached its conclusion, sociologists would have a name for that kind of hard-core racial division. They would call it hypersegregation, a kind of separation of the races that was so total and complete that blacks and whites rarely intersected outside of work. The top ten cities that would earn that designation after the 1980 census (the last census after the close of the Great Migration, which statistically ended in the 1970s) were, in order of severity of racial isolation from most segregated to least: (1) Chicago, (2) Detroit, (3) Cleveland, (4) Milwaukee, (5) Newark, (6) Gary, Indiana, (7) Philadelphia, (8) Los Angeles, (9) Baltimore, and (10) St. Louis—all of them receiving stations of the Great Migration.

NEW YORK, LATE SUMMER 1967

GEORGE SWANSON STARLING

THERE CAME A TIME in the lives of many migrants' children when the parents sent them south for the summer to protect them from the uncaring streets of the Promised Land or to learn the culture of their family of origin or of the Old Country itself. It was a ritual practiced more or less by most families to ensure that their children knew where they came from.

George and Inez Starling sent their daughter, Sonya, down to Eustis when she was thirteen. What happened there was the last thing they expected: she got pregnant.

"It almost killed my wife," George said.

It was devastating after all they had been through and was the begin-

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Robert could get to the track he so loved. Every so often one can see, settled along a curb of the cemetery road, a crumpled copy of the *Daily Racing Form* blown over from the track, and, if listening closely, hear the clomping roar of a horse race in progress over at Hollywood Park, Beloved California.

CHICAGO, AUGUST 1997

IDA MAE BRANDON GLADNEY

THE TRANSFORMATION of the South Shore section of Chicago from an all-white neighborhood to a near totally black one was complete by the time the Great Migration ended in the mid-1970s. But there was a less visible change that made life more difficult still for people like Ida Mae.

Had a study, like the 1968 Kerner Report on the state of race in America, been conducted of Ida Mae's adopted neighborhood, it might have concluded that there were, in fact, two neighborhoods—one, hard-working and striving to be middle class, the other, transient, jobless, and underclass; one, owners of property, the other, tenants and squatters; one, churchgoing and law-abiding, the other, drug-dealing and criminal—both coexisting on the same streets, one at odds with the other.

Ida Mae lived in the former world but had to negotiate the latter. The transformation had been so rapid that the city had not had a chance to catch up with it. Politicians came and went, but the problems were bigger than one local official could solve. The problems were social, economic, geographic, perhaps even moral. A succession of mayors had appeased or looked away from the troubles of South Shore, it was but one of some fifty identifiable neighborhoods in the city and not anywhere close to the worst. In fact, it had had a storied past as the home of the South Shore Country Club, a columned and grand clubhouse with its own golf course and riding stables that in its heyday had drawn celebrities like Jean Harlow and Amelia Earhart. By the time the neighborhood turned black in the mid-1970s, its membership had dwindled, and it was taken over by the Chicago Park District.

Mayors Richard J. Daley, Michael Bilandic, and Jane Byrne all relied

on the votes of solidly Democratic South Shore to be elected, but life grew no better for Ida Mae. Ida Mae and other black residents had the highest hopes that their concerns might be heard when Harold Washington was elected mayor in 1983, but his election was so fraught with racial tension and his tenure so embattled that they could not look to him for much more than historic symbolism, which had a certain value but did not make their streets safer. Then Washington died unexpectedly at the start of his second term.

Thus the stalwart property owners of South Shore learned to rely on themselves to monitor the crime and mayhem around them. They formed block clubs and neighborhood watch groups, and, on the second Thursday of every month, the most dedicated believers turn out for police beat meetings to report what they are seeing, hear what the police are doing, and make their voices heard. The meetings are part of a community policing plan known as the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy, or CAPS.

These days, Ida Mae goes to the beat meetings with the regularity and sense of obligation with which some people go to church. She never misses one because there is always so much to report. She and James and their friend and tenant Betty put on their coats and gather themselves for each meeting regardless of whether the problems are solved, which they frequently are not.

The four of us are in the car heading to a beat meeting one November when we see teenagers on the corner north of their three-flat.

"They're out there again," James says.

I ask him what they're doing.

"Drugs," he says matter-of-factly. "They're selling drugs."

Night is falling as a handful of people gathers for the meeting of Police Beat 421 at the South Shore Presbyterian Church. The people descend the steps to the church basement, where a man sits at a table in the back with a stack of flyers and neighborhood crime lists, called hot sheets, laid out in neat piles.

The hot sheets are like a neighborhood report card and are the first things the people reach for. They rifle through them, scanning for their street and block number to see the details of whatever crimes have been reported, if the knifing or carjacking they saw was ever called in, what the police say they are doing about it, and whether there have been any arrests.

About twenty people, including Ida Mae, James, and Betty, are still

going over their hot sheets as they take their seats in the gray metal folding chairs in a basement with yellow cinder-block walls and a red-painted concrete floor, when the meeting is called to order.

The moderator asks what new problems there are. James and several others reach for the index cards being distributed to write out the things they have witnessed. The residents often do not put their names on the cards for fear of reprisal. Ida Mae rarely speaks up because she is convinced the gangs send moles to the meetings, which are public after all, to see who is snitching.

In the meeting, the people learn that Beat 422 held a march against gangs and crime, but they are not certain if they can muster such a march.

"We're at the last stand here," the moderator says. "We don't have any other alternative. If we don't do something, they will take us over."

Everyone knew who she meant by "they."

Someone brings up a worrisome but low-end priority: prostitution is getting worse over at Seventy-ninth and Exchange.

"We know that, okay," the moderator says. "That's a hot spot," she admits and quickly moves on to the robberies, shootings, and drug dealing.

After the meeting adjourns, Ida Mae pulls a policeman over to report one of the more benign sightings, but a measure of the general unruliness around them. "They pull up a truck and take the stoves out," Ida Mae says of theft going on in the building next door.

The police officer stares straight ahead. It's barely worth his time. He walks away to another conversation.

"They don't know nothing," Ida Mae says.

She buttons her coat and walks over to her son. "We ain't done nothing here," she says.

"The important thing is to keep coming," James says.

It is mid-May, the start of the crazy season in South Shore. The weather will be warm soon, and the kids will be out of school, roaming the streets with nothing to do. This time, a gang officer, a big, bearded man in a blue Nike sweatshirt and jeans, is there to brief the beat meeting.

"You have two gangs operating in 421," the officer is telling residents. "The Black Stones and the Mickey Cobras."

The residents listen, but they know they have a gang problem. They start to rattle off street names they want the police to check.

The officer jumps in. "We been hitting that area hard," the officer

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says. "Every day we've been locking someone up new. We're hitting Colfax, Kingston, Phillips real hard. They know our cars. They got so many guys out there doing lookout, hypes who work for them. They whistle when we get close."

He tells the residents to report whatever they see. "I call the police enough, they should know my name," a middle-aged woman in a brown beret says. "We got some terrible kids over where we are. It be raining and sleeting and they coming and going. And the girls are worse than the boys."

"Amen," Ida Mae chimes in.

The next meeting begins with a sober announcement: "We had a shooting of one of our CAPS members at Seventy-eighth and Coles."

"Did they catch the offender?" a resident asks.

"No, not as of yet." The people look down at their hot sheets.

The beat meetings attract all kinds of visitors—city hall bureaucrats, politicians running for reelection, people heading rape crisis centers or collecting names for this or that petition. This time, the visitor is a legal advocate in a beard and corduroy pants who doesn't live in the neighborhood. He rises to speak and tries to get the group to join him in opposing a city ordinance that would clamp down on loitering.

"It will make open season on all black youth," the man says of what he believes will happen if the ordinance were to pass.

The residents want the ordinance anyway, anything to bring them relief.

A man in his sixties stands up as if to speak for them all.

"We live in this neighborhood," the man says. "We own houses and pay taxes. We're scared to go outside. Practically every evening there's a shooting. I don't care about their rights. Maybe you have to get the good ones to get the bad."

This being Chicago, famously local in its politics, the residents of South Shore have learned where to get their immediate needs met—a broken hydrant fixed, a pothole patched, a house condemned. The alderman is the closest politician to turn to. Most Chicagoans know their alderman by sight or even personally and will call upon him without hesitation if they think he can help.

When Ida Mae's alderman, William Beavers, shows up at her beat meeting, there is great anticipation because he is one of the most powerful black politicians in the city and everyone knows him. He has been

the Seventh Ward alderman for fourteen years. He arrives in a brown double-breasted suit and has cameras and lights and a television crew with him, which only adds to the sense of the drama of his visit.

"The area is coming back," he announces to the residents. He then lists what he's doing for the ward: "We got a new field house. We're building a senior home at Seventy-fourth and Kingston. We have a new shopping center at Ninety-fifth and Stoney."

Then he gets to what matters to them most, the crime, says he's seen it himself, especially the prostitutes over on Exchange Street. "They're on Exchange all day and all night," he says. "They be waving, 'Hey, Alderman Beavers!'"

A woman raises her hand with a complaint that is right up his alley. "There's no curb across the street for us," she says.

"I put them on the other side," he says without apology. "I put them where the people vote."

He then leaves them with a hotline number to call to report crime: the number, he says, is 1-800-CRACK-44.

South Shore is in Police Beat 421, Ward Seven, State Representative District 25, and State Senate District 13. The officeholders of the latter two districts rarely figure into the daily concerns of most people in Chicago. The state legislators are just low enough on the political food chain to go unrecognized, focused as they are on approving budgets and legislation. They are just lofty enough, however, to be seen as of little help in an immediate crisis as when, say, a drug dealer sets up shop in front of your house. It could be argued that many people could not name their state legislators off the top of their heads. As for state senators, there are fifty-nine of them, they meet in Springfield, and they are not usually household names, as would be the mayor or even one's alderman.

So when, in 1996, a young constitutional lawyer and community activist from Hyde Park ran for the Illinois State Senate seat in District 13, Ida Mae, voting her usual straight Democratic ticket, would become among the first people ever to have voted for the man. She would not have to give it much thought. He did not have Chicago roots and the name was unusual—Barack Obama. But he was running unopposed, having edged out the woman who had asked him to run in her place before changing her mind. His wife, Michelle, had grown up in South Shore, in the more stable section of bungalows further to the west. So

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Ida Mae and an overwhelming majority of the Democratic stronghold of predominantly black South Shore voted him into office as their state senator.

On August 14, 1997, exactly one month before Alderman Beavers shows up with cameras and lights at Ida Mae's beat meeting, Barack Obama makes an appearance. He is introduced as the state senator for the district, which not everyone in the room could be expected to know, as he has only been in office since January. He is tall, slight of build, formal in speech and attire, looks like a college student, and he arrives without lights, cameras, or entourage.

He stands before them and gives a minilecture to these bus drivers, secretaries, nurse's aides, and pensioners about what state legislators do. He says that while the state legislature is not responsible for the police department, it passes laws that the police have to enforce. He describes the role of the legislature in education policy and in health care. And he invites those assembled to call his office anytime.

"Sometimes a call from the senator's office," he says like the professor he once was, "may be helpful in facilitating some issues that you have concerns about. Sometimes a call from my office will be answered much more quickly so we can move through some of the bureaucracy a little bit faster."

Ida Mae and the rest of the people listen politely and with appreciation. But, as this is just another meeting, they sit in anticipation of the reason they are here tonight: the discussion with police about the latest shootings, stabbings, and drug deals, the immediate dangers they will face just getting back home.

The thirty-six-year-old freshman state senator finishes his presentation to Beat 421. The people clap with gratitude as they always do and then turn back to their hot sheets.

That night, as he bounded up the steps and out of the church basement, nobody in the room could have imagined that they had just seen the man who, a decade from now, would become the first black president of the United States.