

COMPLICATIONS

*What on earth was it, I mused,
bending my head to the wind,
that made us leave
the warm, mild weather of home
for all this cold,
and never to return,
if not for something worth hoping for?*
—RALPH ELLISON, *Invisible Man*

CHICAGO, 1939–1940
IDA MAE BRANDON GLADNEY

THINGS HAD GROWN DESPERATE, and, although she had three little ones at home, Ida Mae had to find some kind of work if they were to survive another year. The options for colored women fresh from the field were limited up north—mainly, to cleaning white people's homes, doing laundry, or working a factory line, if the factory was short of men or of white women. For Ida Mae, domestic work was the likeliest option for now.

It was still the Depression, and it seemed as if the North just didn't know what to do with colored women who were still learning the ways of the cities. Even in the best of times, many industries, while accepting black men for their strong backs, and then only in limited numbers, refused to hire black women, seeing no need to have them around. Throughout the North and West, black women migrants were having the hardest time finding work of all the people pouring into the big

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cities, harder than Polish and Serbian immigrants to Chicago, harder than Italian and Jewish immigrants to New York, harder than Mexican and Chinese immigrants of either gender in California. They were literally at the bottom of the economic hierarchy of the urban North, the least connected by race and gender to the power brokers in their adopted lands and having to stand in line to hire out scrubbing floors when times got hard during the Depression years.

Some employers started requiring them to have college degrees, which neither they nor the vast majority of other unskilled laborers could have been expected to have. Some demanded that black women take voice tests to weed out those from the South, tests that Mississippians just up from the plantation would have been all but assured of failing. Even those lucky enough to land in a training course for assembly-line work found that they were often shunted to "positions in either the cafeteria or bathrooms."

Entire companies and classes of work were closed off to them without apology. A few years after Ida Mae arrived, a plant in Ohio, for instance, sent out a call for five hundred women, specifying that they be white. The plant had to alter its age limits, lower its requirements, and go to neighboring states like Illinois to get enough white women, who were more likely than colored women to be able to stay at home with their children. Even when it was unable to fill its quota, the plant still refused to hire colored women.

Thus colored women were left to fight for even the most menial of jobs, facing intense competition from the Irish, German, and Scandinavian servant girls preferred by some of the wealthier white families.

There emerged several classes of domestics. Those on the lowest rung resorted to "slave markets" where colored women gathered on street corners from as early as six in the morning and waited for white housewives from the Bronx and Brooklyn in New York or from Hyde Park or Pill Hill in Chicago to bid on them for as little as fifteen cents an hour.

Twenty-five such markets were active in New York City alone by 1940. One was by a five-and-dime at 167th and Gerard near the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, where the lowliest women from Harlem sat on crates waiting to be picked. Another was a few blocks north at 170th and Walton, the waiting women a little better clothed and slightly less desperate, knowing that the Bronx housewives had to pass them first before getting to the market at Gerard. In Chicago, there was a crowded market at Twelfth and Halsted, where colored women jockeyed over the white housewives who were looking them over, the whole enterprise

having the effect of bidding down the colored domestics' wages. One woman at the Chicago slave market reported making fifty cents a day, what she would have made picking cotton in the field.

If she were desperate enough, a colored woman needing work would just show up in a white neighborhood, the wealthier the better, and simply walk down the street. "Someone would invariably call out the window," wrote the sociologist Barbara Clegg Gray, and hire the woman on the spot to clean the toilets or scrub the floors or whatever the white housewife discovered she needed for maybe a dollar or two.

In Los Angeles, due to the "great horde of jobless domestics, white families in one of the wealthiest cities in the country could hire colored domestics for as little as five dollars a week" in the 1930s. For that sum, families got someone who would work ten or twelve hours a day doing anything from washing dishes and clothes to cooking and scrubbing floors for not much more than she could have made picking cotton back in Texas.

One colored woman in Los Angeles said she thought getting her high school diploma would make a difference. She kept trying to find different work. Jobs on assembly lines, running elevators, clerking in stores, filing in offices, were typical jobs open to unskilled women in those days. "But everywhere I went," she said, "they wanted to keep me working as a domestic."

The randomness of this kind of work, hiring oneself out to total strangers with no standards in duties or wages, opened domestics to all kinds of exploitation for very little pay. They could never know for sure what they would be asked to do, how long they would be expected to do it, or if they would be paid what was promised.

It seemed everyone was trying to wring the most out of whatever they had, some white housewives even turning back the hands of the clock to keep from paying a domestic for all the hours she actually worked. Older domestics took to forewarning the new ones to take their own clock to work with them and to prepare for any indignity. One housewife ordered a domestic to eat her lunch out of the pet's bowl, not wanting the help to eat from the same dishes as the family.

In many cases, the housewives were neither accustomed to hired help nor familiar with colored people, harboring assumptions and prejudices of the day due to lack of exposure. The housewives and their domestics brought differing expectations, and frequently each side felt somehow aggrieved. While an employer could go out and hire someone else, some employees, having no legal recourse, took their frustrations out on their

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madames' homes when not paid or otherwise exploited, slashing the draperies they had just ironed or defacing the floors they had scrubbed.

Aside from these sources of friction, colored domestics could not know what perils they might face from opportunistic sons or husbands assuming that younger domestics would do more than just clean. As it was, the very act of walking the streets for work came awfully close in appearance to how prostitutes plied their trade—except that the domestics were working at the whim of Janes instead of Johns.

The expectation that any colored woman walking in the white section of town was available to scrub floors and wash windows would continue into the 1960s, such that a colored professional woman appearing in a white neighborhood in the North had to be prepared to be called out to just because she was black. "Say, girl," a woman called out to my mother in the late 1950s when she was on her way, in her tailored suit and heels, to decorate and fit slip covers in Cleveland Park, a wealthy neighborhood in Washington, D.C. "Could you come up here and clean my bathroom?"

"I'm looking for someone to clean mine," my mother yelled back to the woman.

Ida Mae's husband would not have stood for his wife to walk the streets for work, and in any case, Chicago had grown so segregated that the wealthy white neighborhoods were far from where they lived. But one day Ida Mae got word of a job from someone she knew from back home in Mississippi, and that felt a little safer.

A girl who was doing day's work for a well-to-do couple on the North Side needed someone to fill in for her. It would be temporary, Ida Mae's friend told her, but would have to do for now.

"Miss Gladney will work in your place," Ida Mae's friend told the girl.

The job was more than an hour away on the streetcar, farther north of the Loop than she lived south, almost up near Evanston. The regular girl who mopped floors and folded laundry for the family would be away for a week. The job was paying something like four or five dollars a day. Ida Mae didn't hesitate.

"I was glad to take her place," she would say years later.

She dressed for the job and took a change of clothes with her. It turned out to be a man and his wife living in a grand apartment above a shoe store the wife ran.

Ida Mae took the elevator up and went into a glorious apartment, where she found the husband alone in the couple's bedroom. He was

still asleep, which seemed odd to Ida Mae, so she began looking for things to do. The husband roused himself and told Ida Mae what he expected of her.

"Get in the bed with me," he said.

He told her the regular girl stayed in bed with him all day long. He reassured Ida Mae not to worry, he'd do the cleaning later. He figured that was a fair exchange and good deal for her, a cleaning girl not having to clean at all and still getting paid for it.

Ida Mae was in her midtwenties, a mother of three by then, married to a pious man who wouldn't stand for another man touching his wife. She knew white men in the South took whatever liberties they wanted with colored women, and there was nothing the women or their husbands could do about it. All her life in Mississippi, she had managed to avoid unwanted advances because she had rarely worked in white people's homes. Now here she was in Chicago, a white man expecting her to sleep with him as if that were what any colored woman would just naturally want to do. And no matter what happened, she would have no legal recourse. There would be no witnesses. It just would be a privileged man's word against hers.

She was thinking fast. She was as mad at the girl who sent her without warning her of what the job really entailed as she was at the man expecting her to climb into bed with him with his wife just a floor below. She started to leave. But she had come all this way, had spent the train fare, and she needed the money.

Her body stiffened, and she backed away from the man.

"Just show me what you want cleaned," Ida Mae said.

Somehow, something in the way she stood or looked straight at him as she said it let the man know she meant business. He didn't press the matter. He left her alone.

"He didn't say no more 'cause he seen I wasn't that type of person," Ida Mae said years later.

And perhaps in that moment Ida Mae discovered one difference between the North and South. She would not likely have gotten out of it in Mississippi. Her refusal would have been seen as impudence, all but assuring an assault. And there would have been nothing done about it. Here, the northern man seemed to view such a conquest as a hoped-for fringe benefit rather than a right. That, along with Ida Mae's indignation over the whole thing, appeared to keep her safe.

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changed the linens as she had gone there to do. The man stayed in his room. She never went back.

She missed out on the rest of the week's pay, which she desperately needed. Later, she confronted the regular girl who worked for the couple.

"So you don't do nothin' but stay in the bed all day, huh?" Ida Mae said. "Don't ask me to go back up there again."

The girl paid Ida Mae out of the money she was making off the couple. The whole sordid affair stayed with Ida Mae for years. She couldn't see how the girl could live with herself.

"I just don't know," Ida Mae would say years later. "Supposing the wife came back home? I just couldn't see how she did it."

With five mouths to feed, the family couldn't go much longer unless Ida Mae found a job. In the fall of 1939, something finally opened up at Inland Steel, over at Sixty-third and Melvina, on the city's southwest side. George had a brother working there. At this point, Ida Mae didn't much care what it was as long as it wasn't day's work cleaning toilets and fighting off the madame's husband.

It was her first real job in Chicago. They called her a press operator. She was in the canning department, where her job was to work the presser that attached the curved tops that cover cans as they came down the assembly line. She had to fit the tops on, her arms going up and down and up and down, over and over and over again.

She was excited at first but then found it to be a nerve-jangling endeavor. The factory was loud, the noise a little like being inside a car engine. The mechanical arms that she operated were sharp and heavy and were known to slice off people's fingers and hands.

She was on the line one day when another worker, a colored woman, got some of her fingers cut off. Ida Mae was a couple of machines down from her.

There wasn't much of a commotion, as Ida Mae remembered it.

"They stopped everybody for a while," she said. "Then they went out with her so fast. And she never did come back."

Ida Mae quit soon after that. A line job turned up at Campbell Soup, where George was working. It wouldn't last long either, after a woman stole her coat that winter. She got a job at a printing press, and it looked to be a good one. But in time she would get a job at a hospital, Walther

Memorial on the West Side of Chicago, working as a hospital aide. She sterilized instruments, cheered up patients, which was her specialty, and organized the gauzes, bandages, and intravenous lines in central supply.

It took her a while to learn how everything worked and how to get the little scissors and scalpels cleaned just so.

"I wash tray by tray and put the instruments back in there till I learned it," Ida Mae said. "And I learned all them instruments. Some of them I couldn't call the name, but you better believe I know where they went."

Sometimes she would poke her head in during surgery when she dropped off a tray of instruments she had sterilized. She liked to see the babies come into the world, and the doctors let her stay sometimes.

She had been through it four times herself and still marveled at the sight and sound of a new life making its entrance. "They always come out hollering," she said. Just like her babies had.

"You know, that's amazing, ain't it?" she said.

With Ida Mae working, the family could move out of the one-room apartment at Twenty-first and State and into a flat big enough for everyone. In the coming years, they would live all over the black belt.

Now that they were getting situated, people from back home in Mississippi started to make their way north to stay or to visit and see what it was like.

Saint, who had helped them move their things from Edd Pearson's plantation and get out of Mississippi, came up with his wife, Catherine, and their children, and stayed for good. Ida Mae's brother-in-law Aubrey, her younger sister Talma's husband, came up for a while to see if he would like it, but he didn't and moved back to Mississippi, where the people tipped their hat to you as they passed and looked up to him because of his family's long years in the South, where he had made peace and found a way to get along with the white people and benefit from it. Joe Lee, whose flogging was the reason George and Ida Mae had left, even came up and lived there for a while. But he was never quite right after all he had been through. He never married and did not make out very well or live too long, and nobody cared to talk about him very much.

One time, George's brother Winston, whom everyone called Win, came up from the plantation just for a visit and wasn't ashamed to look up at the tall buildings reaching for the sky.

George took him around the first day, and at the end of it they settled in for the night. Win got ready for bed and then started calling for his brother.

"Come help me," Win said. "I can't blow this light out."

George found him standing by the bulb. Win had been blowing on the bulb until he was almost out of breath.

"Win, you can't blow it out, you got to turn it off," George told him, reaching for the light switch and shaking his head. It hadn't been that long ago that he, too, had been callow to the New World.

"George showed him how to cut it off," Ida Mae said, "and we never had no more trouble with him."

They were becoming Chicagoans now. They would talk about Win and that lightbulb for years.

It was only a matter of time before just about every colored family in the North, unsettled though they might have been, got visitors as George and Ida Mae did. There was a back-and-forth of people, anxious, giddy, wanting to come north and see what all the fuss was about. And whenever a colored guest paid a visit while the Migration was on, and even decades later, he or she could be assured of finding the same southern peasant food, the same turnip greens, ham hocks, corn bread in Chicago as in Mississippi.

But the visitors were a curiosity to the children of the North. The uncles and cousins from the South often had a slow-talking, sweetly alien, wide-openness about them that could both enchant and startle some of the more reserved nieces and nephews who barely knew them, as was the case with a character from Mississippi visiting relatives in Pittsburgh in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* in the following exchange:

BOY WILLIE: *How you doing, sugar?*

MARETHA: *Fine.*

BOY WILLIE: *You was just a little old thing last time I seen you.*

You remember me, don't you? This your Uncle Boy Willie from down South. That there's Lymon. He my friend. We come up here to sell watermelons. You like watermelons?

(MARETHA nods.)

We got a whole truckload out front. You can have as many as you want. What you been doing?

MARETHA: *Nothing.*

BOY WILLIE: *Don't be shy now. Look at you getting all big. How old is you?*

MARETHA: *Eleven. I'm gonna be twelve soon.*

BOY WILLIE: *You like it up here? You like the North?*

MARETHA: *It's alright.*

BOY WILLIE: *That there's Lymon. Did you say hi to Lymon?*

MARETHA: *Hi.*

LYMON: *How you doing? You look just like your mama. I remember you when you was wearing diapers.*

BOY WILLIE: *You gonna come down South and see me? Uncle boy Willie gonna get him a farm. Gonna get a great big old farm. Come down there and I'll teach you how to ride a mule. Teach you how to kill a chicken, too.*

NEW YORK, 1950S

GEORGE SWANSON STARLING

GEORGE WAS JUST BACK ONE EVENING from a forty-eight-hour turnaround from New York to Florida and to New York again and had gotten his check and cashed it. Rather than head straight home to Inez, he thought he'd stop and get a drink at a bar near Penn Station.

He was with another colored railroad attendant, chugging his beer as the bar filled up. He and his co-worker barely noticed that everyone else at the bar happened to be white as they regaled each other with stories from riding the rails. When it was time to go, they paid their tab and put their glasses down.

The bartender had said very little to them the whole time they were there. Now the bartender calmly picked up their glasses, and instead of loading them into a tray to be washed, he took them and smashed them under the counter. The sound of glass breaking on concrete startled George and his co-worker, even though this wasn't the first time this had happened to them, just not at this bar, and it attracted the attention of other patrons.

"They do it right in front of us," George said. "That's the way they let

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*Let's not fool ourselves,
we are far from the Promised Land,
both north and south.*

—DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

*It was a hoax if you ask me. . . .
They're packed tight
into the buildings,
and can't do anything,
not even dream of going North,
the way I do
when it gets rough.*

— A COLORED MAN WHO NEVER
LEFT ALABAMA, QUOTED IN
The New York Times IN 1967

CHICAGO, 1951

IDA MAE BRANDON GLADNEY

BY MIDCENTURY, the receiving cities of the Great Migration strained under the weight of millions of black southerners trying to situate themselves as tens of thousands more alighted from Pontiacs and railroad platforms each week. In the spring of 1951, a colored bus driver and former army captain named Harvey Clark, and his wife, Johnetta, faced an impossible living situation.

It was a dilemma confronting Ida Mae and her family and just about

every colored household up from the South. There was not enough housing to contain them, and the white neighborhoods bordering the black belt were barricading themselves further, not flinching at the use of violence to keep the walls in place.

Ida Mae and her family moved from flat to flat within those walls. Once they lived in an apartment over a funeral home, where little Eleanor played among the caskets and rode with the undertaker to pick up bodies. As it was, Chicago was trying to discourage the migration of any more colored people from the South. In 1950, city aldermen and housing officials proposed restricting 13,000 new public housing units to people who had lived in Chicago for two years. The rule would presumably affect colored migrants and foreign immigrants alike. But it was the colored people who were having the most trouble finding housing and most likely to seek out such an alternative. And it was they who were seen as needing to be controlled, as they had only to catch a train rather than cross an ocean to get there. Nothing had worked before at keeping the migrants out once the Migration began, and this new plan wouldn't either. But it was a sign of the hostility facing people like Harvey Clark and Ida Mae, as white home owners stepped up pressure on the city to protect their neighborhoods.

"They don't want the Negro who has just moved out of rural Dixie as their neighbor," a city official told the *Chicago Defender* in a story that described what it called a "2-Year City Ban on Migrants."

With close to half a million colored people overflowing the black belt by 1950, racial walls that had been "successfully defended for a generation," in the words of the historian Allan Spear, were facing imminent collapse, but not without a fight. Chicago found itself in the midst of "chronic urban guerilla warfare" that rivaled the city's violent spasms at the start of the Migration, "when one racially motivated bombing or arson occurred every twenty days," according to the historian Arnold Hirsch.

Harvey Clark was from Mississippi like Ida Mae and brought his family to Chicago in 1949 after serving in World War II. Now that they were in the big city, the couple and their two children were crammed into half of a two-room apartment. A family of five lived in the other half. Harvey Clark was paying fifty-six dollars a month for the privilege, up to fifty percent more than tenants in white neighborhoods paid for the same amount of space. One-room tenement life did not fit them

at all. The husband and wife were college-educated, well-mannered, and looked like movie stars. The father had saved up for a piano for his eight-year-old daughter with the ringlets down her back but had no place to put it. He had high aspirations for their six-year-old son, who was bright and whose dimples could have landed him in cereal commercials.

The Clarks felt they had to get out. By May of 1951, they finally found the perfect apartment. It had five rooms, was clean and modern, was closer to the bus terminal, and cost only sixty dollars a month. That came to four dollars a month more for five times more space. It was just a block over the Chicago line, at 6139 West Nineteenth Street, in the working-class suburb of Cicero. The Clarks couldn't believe their good fortune.

Cicero was an all-white town on the southwest border of Chicago. It was known as the place Al Capone went to elude Chicago authorities back during Prohibition. The town was filled with first- and second-generation immigrants—Czechs, Slavs, Poles, Italians. Some had fled fascism and Stalinism, not unlike blacks fleeing oppression in the South, and were still getting established in the New World. They lived in frame cottages and worked the factories and slaughterhouses. They were miles from the black belt, isolated from it, and bent on keeping their town as it was.

That the Clarks turned there at all was an indication of how closed the options were for colored families looking for clean, spacious housing they could afford. The Clarks set the move-in date for the third week of June. The moving truck arrived at 2:30 in the afternoon. White protesters met them as the couple tried to unload the truck.

"Get out of Cicero," the protesters told them, "and don't come back."

As the Clarks started to enter the building, the police stopped them at the door. The police took sides with the protesters and would not let the Clarks nor their furniture in.

"You should know better," the chief of police told them. "Get going. Get out of here fast. There will be no moving in that building."

The Clarks, along with their rental agent, Charles Edwards, fled the scene.

"Don't come back in town," the chief reportedly told Edwards, "or you'll get a bullet through you."

The Clarks did not let that deter them but sued and won the right to occupy the apartment. They tried to move in again on July 11, 1951. This time, a hundred Cicero housewives and grandmothers in swing

coats and Mamie Eisenhower hats showed up to heckle them. The couple managed to get their furniture in, but as the day wore on, the crowds grew larger and more agitated. A man from a white supremacy group called the White Circle League handed out flyers that said, KEEP CICERO WHITE. The Clarks fled.

A mob stormed the apartment and threw the family's furniture out of a third-floor window as the crowds cheered below. The neighbors burned the couple's marriage license and the children's baby pictures. They overturned the refrigerator and tore the stove and plumbing fixtures out of the wall. They tore up the carpet. They shattered the mirrors. They bashed in the toilet bowl. They ripped out the radiators. They smashed the piano Clark had worked overtime to buy for his daughter. And when they were done, they set the whole pile of the family's belongings, now strewn on the ground below, on fire.

In an hour, the mob "destroyed what had taken nine years to acquire," wrote the historian Stephen Grant Meyer of what happened that night.

The next day, a full-out riot was under way. The mob grew to four thousand by early evening as teenagers got out of school, husbands returned home from work, and all of them joined the housewives who had kept a daylong vigil in protest of the Clarks' arrival. They chanted, "Go, go, go, go." They hurled rocks and bricks. They looted. Then they firebombed the whole building. The bombing gutted the twenty-unit building and forced even the white tenants out. The rioters overturned police cars and threw stones at the firefighters who were trying to put out the blaze.

Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson had to call in the National Guard, the first time the Guard had been summoned for a racial incident since the 1919 riots in the early years of the Migration. It took four hours for more than six hundred guardsmen, police officers, and sheriff's deputies to beat back the mob that night and three more days for the rioting over the Clarks to subside. A total of 118 men were arrested in the riot. A Cook County grand jury failed to indict any of the rioters.

Town officials did not blame the mob for the riot but rather the people who, in their view, should never have rented the apartment to the Clarks in the first place. To make an example of such people, indictments were handed down against the rental agent, the owner of the apartment building, and others who had helped the Clarks on charges of inciting a riot. The indictments were later dropped. In spite of everything, the Clarks still felt they had a right to live in a city with good, af-

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fordable housing stock. But the racial hostility made it all but impossible to return.

Walter White, the longtime leader of the NAACP, kept close watch of the case. He had been challenging Jim Crow since the 1920s and compared the hatred he saw in the Cicero mob to the lynch mobs he had seen in the South. "It was appalling to see and listen to those who were but recently the targets of hate and deprivations," he said, "who, beneficiaries of American opportunity, were as virulent as any Mississippian in their willingness to deny a place to live to a member of a race which had preceded them to America by many generations."

It was the middle of the Cold War, and the famous columnist and broadcaster of the day Walter Winchell weighed in on what he called the "bigoted idiots out there," who "did as much for Stalin as though they had enlisted in the Red Army."

That fall, Governor Stevenson, who would go on to become the Democratic nominee for president the following year, told a newly convened state commission on human rights that housing segregation was putting pressure on the whole system. "This is the root of the Cicero affair," the governor said, "the grim reality underlying the tension and violence that accompany the efforts of minority groups to break through the iron curtain."

The Cicero riot attracted worldwide attention. It was front-page news in Southeast Asia, made it into the *Pakistan Observer*, and was remarked upon in West Africa. "A resident of Accra wrote to the mayor of Cicero," according to Hirsch, "protesting the mob's 'savagery' and asking for an 'apology to the civilized world.'"

It was U.S. Attorney Otto Kerner whose job it was to prosecute the federal case against the Cicero officials accused of denying the Clarks their civil rights. Kerner's name would later become linked to one of the most cited reports on race relations in this country. President Lyndon Johnson chose him to head a federal investigation into the racial disturbances of the 1960s. The commission's findings, released in February 1968 as the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, would come to be known as the Kerner Report. Its recommendations would be revisited for decades as a measure of the country's progress toward equality, its stark pronouncement invoked many times over: "Our nation is moving toward two societies," the report said, "one black, one white—separate and unequal."

Well into the twentieth century, Cicero would remain synonymous with intolerance and corruption. It would come to be seen in the same

light as other symbolic places, like Ocoee, Florida, or Forsyth County, Georgia, where many blacks dared not think of living and thought twice before even driving through, well into the 1990s. By then Cicero was racked by a series of scandals involving a mayor who would ultimately serve prison time on federal corruption charges. Even white immigrant families were leaving Cicero, ceding it to Mexican immigrants. In 2000, the U.S. Census found that, of Cicero's population of 85,616, just one percent of the residents were black, nearly half a century after the riots that kept the Clarks from moving in.

It was an article of faith among many people in Chicago and other big cities that the arrival of colored people in an all-white neighborhood automatically lowered property values. That economic fear was helping propel the violent defense of white neighborhoods.

The fears were not unfounded, but often not for the reasons white residents were led to believe, sociologists, economists, and historians have found. And the misunderstanding of the larger forces at work and the scapegoating of colored migrants, those with the least power of all, made the violence all the more tragic.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the decline in property values and neighborhood prestige was a by-product of the fear and tension itself, sociologists found. The decline often began, they noted, in barely perceptible ways, before the first colored buyer moved in.

The instability of a white neighborhood under pressure from the very possibility of integration put the neighborhood into a kind of real estate purgatory. It set off a downward cycle of anticipation, in which worried whites no longer bought homes in white neighborhoods that might one day attract colored residents even if none lived there at the time. Rents and purchase prices were dropped "in a futile attempt to attract white residents," as Hirsch put it. With prices falling and the neighborhood's future uncertain, lenders refused to grant mortgages or made them more difficult to obtain. Panicked whites sold at low prices to salvage what equity they had left, giving the homeowners who remained little incentive to invest any further to keep up or improve their properties.

Thus many white neighborhoods began declining before colored residents even arrived, Hirsch noted. There emerged a perfect storm of nervous owners, falling prices, vacancies unfillable with white tenants or buyers, and a market of colored buyers who may not have been able

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to afford the neighborhood at first but now could with prices within their reach. The arrival of colored home buyers was often the final verdict on a neighborhood's falling property value rather than the cause of it. Many colored people, already facing wage disparities, either could not have afforded a neighborhood on the rise or would not have been granted mortgages except by lenders and sellers with their backs against the wall. It was the falling home values that made it possible for colored people to move in at all.

The downward spiral created a vacuum that speculators could exploit for their own gain. They could scoop up properties in potentially unstable white neighborhoods and extract higher prices from colored people who were anxious to get in and were accustomed to being overcharged in the black belt.

"The panic peddler and the 'respectable' broker earned the greatest profits," Hirsch wrote, "from the greatest degree of white desperation."

It seemed as if little had changed from the hostilities of the early years of the Migration, when colored tenants on Vincennes Avenue got the following notice: "*We are going to blow these flats to hell and if you don't want to go with them you had better move at once. Only one warning.*" The letter writers carried out their threat. Three bombs exploded over the following two weeks.

Thirty years later, things were no better and may actually have been worse, as the black belt strained to hold the migrants still pouring in even as the borders with white neighborhoods were being more vigorously defended.

By the late 1950s, Ida Mae and George, now both working blue-collar jobs and their children now adults and with blue-collar jobs of their own, were dreaming of finding a place where they could pool their incomes and live together under one roof. But it would be some time before they were in a position to act or could find a safe and affordable place to go.

At the same time, an urban turf war had risen up around them. Bombings, shootings, riots, or threats greeted the arrival of nearly every new colored family in white-defended territory. The biggest standoffs came between the groups with the most in common, save race: the working-class white immigrants and the working-class black migrants, both with similar backgrounds and wanting the same thing—good jobs and a decent home for their families—but one group not wanting to be

anywhere near the other and literally willing to fight to the death to keep the other out.

It was a chilling parallel to the war playing out at the very same time in the South, from the arrest of Rosa Parks in 1955 for refusing to give up a bus seat in Alabama to white troops blocking nine colored students in 1957 on their first day of school in Little Rock, Arkansas, after the Supreme Court said they had the right to enroll.

After World War II, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and other northern and western cities would witness a fitful migration of whites out of their urban strongholds. The far-out precincts and the inner-ring suburbs became sanctuaries for battle-weary whites seeking, with government incentives, to replicate the havens they once had in the cities.

One such suburb was Dearborn, Michigan, just outside Detroit. By the mid-1950s, Dearborn was swelling with white refugees from the city. The suburb's mayor, Orville Hubbard, told the *Montgomery Advertiser* in Alabama that the whites had been "crowded out of Detroit by the colored people." He was more than happy to welcome these new white residents and said, to the delight of southern editorialists, "These people are so anti-colored, much more than you in Alabama."

Having already fled the cities, the newcomers were not going to let colored people into their new safehold. "Negroes can't get in here," Mayor Hubbard told the southerners. "Every time we hear of a Negro moving in, we respond quicker than you do to a fire."

Decades later, the message would still hang in the air, the calculus pretty much the same. By the end of the twentieth century, blacks would make up more than eighty percent of the population of Detroit. Just across the Ford Expressway, the black population of the suburb of Dearborn, the 2000 census found, was one percent.

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