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Crime, Cost, and Segregation

What will it take for Chicagoans to recognize a Chicago problem?

Today state Representatives **LaShawn Ford** (Austin) and **John Fritchey** (Lakeview) held a **press conference** [PDF] to bring attention to the costs of violent crime to all Chicagoans. The theme of the presser was that the rampant violence in parts of the city--particularly the West Side--end up costing all Chicagoans, not just the poor souls who live amidst the killing. While that's a good point, it's also a little distressing that in a single city, we need to use statistics like this:

Rep. Fritchey cited a 2009 University of Chicago Crime Lab report titled "Gun Violence Among School-Age Youth in Chicago"¹, which states that the social costs that gun violence impose on Chicago exceed \$2.5 billion per year, which is roughly \$2,500 per Chicago household. According to previous research by Crime Lab member Philip Cook of Duke University and Crime Lab Co-director Jens Ludwig of the University of Chicago (Cook and Ludwig, 2000; Ludwig and Cook, 2001), every crime-related gunshot wound imposes costs on society on the order of \$1 million.

...to convince people that the public needs to begin pushing for a real comprehensive look at the *causes* of street crime, and stop pretending that paramilitary operations are the only solution.

Chicago's violence has gone down in a historical sense; it is still high (and homicides are out pacing last year's numbers). If the two West Side police districts, the 11th and 15th, were their own city, **they'd make the most violent city in America**. As you'd expect, this isn't news to the people of the West Side. For years, the problem of street level violence--and de facto control of neighborhoods by street gangs--has been treated as a parochial *over there* problem. It is emblematic of the disconnect between the different reform movements in the city, and is one of the nastiest results of Chicago's unconscionable segregation. Of course, segregation is also a cause of the problem: the practical lack of mobility keeps people in neighborhoods, compounding a problem over generations.

Reps. Ford and Fritchey (who will presumably be taking Forrest Claypool's seat on the Cook County Board this year) have the right idea: they are trying to connect the two types of reform that have been effectively disconnected by Mayor's ruling coalition-- "Machine Lite"--for at least the last fifteen years. Former Chicago Reader reporter **Gary Rivlin** called this tension "white reform vs. black reform", or process reform and **distributive justice**. By talking about the shared cost, they are trying to identify for Chicagoans an intersection of interests on the issue of street violence. The process-minded reformers characteristic of the so-called Lakefront Liberal have little organizational or social ties to the independent political reform movements in minority communities and vice-versa; this disconnect is a major fact underlying the ineffectual nature of Chicago's independent politics.

It's a difficult case to make. The identity politics that still characterize some distributive reform movements tend to be hostile to coalition politics, and the market obeisance that has infected high-minded liberalism treats segregation as the result of spontaneous market order and is cynical about "social engineering". Both approaches reinforce segregation and with it the alienation of Chicagoans one from another.

The ideal of "An injury to one is an injury to all" died an ignoble civic death in the face of years of rabid free market fantasy. Perhaps by reminding people that despite the mythology, nothing happens in a vacuum, that individual choices often have repercussions for all of us, enough people can be moved to tackle this issue. So long as it is considered an isolated, in-group problem ("a culture"), the carnage will continue.

— *Ramsin Canon*