



BUILDING
the
COMMUNE

Toussaint Losier

Join us for a discussion of this text alongside
“Blackstone Rangers: U.S. Experiment Using
‘Gangs’ to Repress Black Community Rebellion”
by j. sakai.

October 15th, 7pm
Flood’s Hall, 1515 E. 52nd Pl. Chicago.

“THE MORTAR BETWEEN
THE BRICKS WILL BE BLOOD”:

*Black Street Gangs, Labor Market Discrimination, and
the Politics of Surplus Labor in Postwar Chicago*

“IF YOU DON’T CLOSE DOWN, THE MORTAR
BETWEEN THE BRICKS WILL BE BLOOD”:

*Black Street Gangs, Labor Market Discrimination,
and the Politics of Surplus Labor in Postwar Chicago*

BY TOUSSAINT LOSIER

At the heart of the matter lies the contradiction discussed earlier: capitalism needs the poor and creates poverty, intentionally through policy and organically through crisis. Yet capitalism is also directly and indirectly threatened by the poor. Capitalism always creates surplus populations, needs surplus populations, yet faces the threat of political, aesthetic, or cultural disruption from those populations. Prison and criminal justice are about managing these irreconcilable contradictions.

- Christian Parenti (2000)

White America treats the Negro as an infectious disease from which escape must be sought in the form of economic inoculation from the work force and total separation in social discourse. The transition from exploitation to uselessness with its concomitant of complete banishment cannot, however, be accomplished without resistance from the 20,000,000 blacks. The Negro rebellion spreading across the nation testifies to this fact.

- Sidney Wilhelm (1971)

On the morning of August 12th, 1969, a crowd of more than a hundred Black youths attempted to force their way onto the construction site of a multi-million dollar research facility on the University of Illinois Circle campus. Finding the front gate locked, these protestors, nearly all of them members of the Black Peace Stone Rangers street gang as well as small numbers of Black Disciples and Conservative Vice Lords, threatened the foreman and attempted to scale the job site’s 8-foot fence. As a waiting group of police officers stepped in, all hell broke loose. First words, and then blows, were exchanged, with the ensuing scuffle leaving three officers knocked to the ground.

Targeting those who seemed to be charge of the crowd, police arrested seven people, including three leaders of the Coalition for United Community Action (CUCA), the broad alliance of community organizations and civil rights groups that had organized the demonstration. When police refused to release them from custody, a growing crowd of more than 200 red (Black Peace Stone Ranger Nation) and tan (Conservative Vice Lord) beret wearing youths, members of the city's three largest and most notorious gang organizations, marched from the university's near west side campus through the city's downtown area, snaking its way to Chicago Police Department (CPD) headquarters on the near south side. With an equal number of police blocking their entry, the mass of protesters demanded and received a meeting with the Deputy Police Superintendent and the Assistant States Attorney, pressing the case for the release of those just arrested. Unsuccessful, they walked out of their impromptu meeting with police and prosecutors, vowing to continue their direct action campaign against racial discrimination in Chicago's building trades.¹

Unlike that morning's protest, prior demonstrations had successfully halted work at various construction sites on Chicago's south and west sides. During the preceding three weeks, LSD, an acronym for the Lords, Stones, and Disciples, had joined with CUCA in pressing construction firms and building trades unions ended racial discrimination in their hiring practices. In leaflets, press statements, and direct threats, they not only demanded drastic changes to apprenticeship, hiring, and seniority policies, but also the immediate provision of 10,000 on-the-job trainee positions. "Why are Blacks excluded from the trade unions," asked one pamphlet. "Why do Whites from the suburbs come in and build on our turf denying us jobs?" When the city's largest construction firms and building trades unions balked at these demands, CUCA's broad coalition of neighborhood groups, civil rights organizations, and street gang organization repeatedly forced a halt work on over 20 construction sites on projects totaling more than \$80 million. In case after case, site supervisors and foremen saw their employees being threatened by crowds of baton-wielding, beret-wearing youths and decided it best to close down until further notice. Indeed, no arrests occurred during this first round of demonstrations, in part because foremen routinely refused to sign onto a police complaint out of fear for the safety of their

broader influx of black residents of Chicago, Cairo, Rockford, East St. Louis, and other cities into Illinois' prison system. By the early 1970s, Black men would make up a majority of the state's prison population. Behind bars, these men found themselves facing an overwhelmingly rural, white custodial and administrative staff as well as few prison jobs and even fewer educational opportunities.

Over the course of the decade, this new generation of Black prisoners would play an important role in some ten major disturbances that occurred inside Illinois state prisons: from a hostage-taking in Menard Prison in 1973 to two takeovers of Stateville prison in 1979. Here, the involvement of Chicago street organizations in the broader turmoil that roiled the state's prison system offers a window into the ways in which the uneven politicization begun on the city's West and South Sides continued behind bars.

In Illinois, this prison turmoil directly challenged the prevailing policy of rehabilitation, itself a response to an earlier round of prisoners' rights struggles. Ultimately, this approach to corrections failed to accommodate a renewed challenge by state prisoners. Instead, correctional officers, prison officials, and state lawmakers sought to reassert their control within prison facilities through a host of new policies and mechanisms of control, including a key set of sentencing reforms that would spur a round of prison siting and construction that later derided as small town Illinois' "prison lottery." Taken together, this punitive turn in the philosophy and practice of corrections would directly inform the substantial expansion of the state's prison population. Between 1970 and 1989, the average daily number of those held in Illinois prisons rose from a low of 7,300 to a high of 27,000, establishing a nearly four-fold increase in the number of those held behind bars during the run up to the federally-funded War on Drugs. Indeed, it was during this period, largely overlooked by scholars like Alexander, Wacquant, and Gilmore, that the foundation for the exponential growth in the size and scale of Illinois' carceral state would be laid, as assumptions about the effectiveness of urban policing, determinate sentencing, and prison construction, changed in direct response to the challenge posed by the involvement of these gangs in an insurgent prison movement.

¹ James Strong, "Protesters arrested at Building Job," *Chicago Tribune*, August 13, 1969, 1.

U.S. Department of Labor. In assessing this new plan, historian Jeffery Helgeson finds the gains “were limited, with the number of workers actually placed in the hundreds rather than in the thousands.”⁵² Tragically, the CUCAs jobs campaign began with an initial demand for 10,000 job positions, but wrung from the building industry only a few hundred job, hardly any of which went to the LSD members who had served as the force behind the campaign.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

In his short book, *Explosion of Chicago's Black Street Gangs: 1900 to the Present*, scholar, playwright, and youth worker Useni Eugene Perkins also describes the 1969 jobs campaign in largely tragic terms, but for a starkly different reason. “In is noteworthy that during these CUCA demonstrations, particularly during the one that tried to shut down the construction site at the University of Illinois Chicago Campus, several gang leaders were arrested,” Perkins writes. “These arrests were followed by many more, and by the early seventies almost all of the major leaders of Black street gangs were incarcerated.”⁵³ Those leaders indicted and, in nearly all instances, incarcerated would include Bobby Gore of the Lords, Leonard Sengali and Jeff Fort of the Stones, and David Barksdale of the Disciples. A 1970 city report, “Organized Youth Crime in Chicago,” estimated a total of 300 indictments against members of the three largest gangs since the launch of its War on Gangs. By publication, prosecutors had secured over 100 felony convictions, 20 of them for murder.⁵⁴

These arrests and convictions would be consequential in several different ways. They laid the foundation for a marked decline in gang activity on the south and west sides of Chicago. Yet, this decline did not mean the end of these gang organizations, but rather their reconstitution and expansion within the Cook County Jail and the Illinois prison system. As targets of Daley's War on Gangs, members of Chicago's three largest Black gangs made up an important aspect of the

employees. As Thomas J. Murray, President of the Building Trades Council, noted just a day before the circle campus protest, while it might have been inconceivable that street gangs like the Rangers and Disciples could stop or even slow the pace of construction in Chicago, this is exactly what they were doing it.²

Yet, the August 12th arrests would mark the start of a sharp backlash to the construction site shutdowns. Two days later, several large contractors and construction firms sought and won a preliminary injunction not only to prevent coalition members from entering construction sites, but also limiting picketing outside a job site to just six people at a time.³ Coalition partners also came under greater surveillance from the Chicago Police Department, particularly its Gang Intelligence Unit. For their part, Murray and other officials in the trades unions stalled negotiations, agreeing to meet but refusing to seriously consider the coalition's demands. As CUCA leaders mulled over whether to defy the injunction, those in LSD pressed forward, continuing demonstrations at various construction sites, including those on the circle campus. Within a few short months, their campaign had intensified to the point where Mayor Richard J. Daley and the U.S. Department of Labor attempted to mediate, helping to broker an agreement known as the 1970 Chicago Plan.⁴

The formation of LSD and its involvement in this jobs campaign stands out as a unique moment in an otherwise tumultuous period of heightened, often violent gang activity. Through the 1960s, gang conflict between groups like the Devil's Disciples and Blackstone Rangers as well as the Roman Saints and the Vice Lords, left Chicago with one of the worst teen violence problems in the nation.⁵ Repeated interventions by conservative politicians, liberal foundations, and avowed revolutionaries, had done little to stem the tide of shootings and stabbings, with many of these efforts either failing at the outset or quickly proving themselves short-lived. In contrast, CUCAs campaign is one of the few instances of sustained partnership, both amongst

⁵² Jeffery Helgeson, *Crucible of Black Empowerment: Chicago's Neighborhood Politics from the New Deal to Harold Washington* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014) 196.

⁵³ Perkins, 37.

⁵⁴ Jacobs, 143.

² CUCA pamphlet, n.d., in author's possession.

³ “Judge Restrains Job Protests,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1969, 1.

⁴ Andrew J. Diamond, *Mean Streets: Chicago Youths and the Everyday Struggle for Empowerments in the Multiracial City, 1908-1969* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 306.

⁵ “Cite Chicago Teen Gangs Worst in Nation,” *Chicago Defender*, June 19, 1969, 5.

Chicago's three largest gangs as well as between them and a broad swatch of community activists. According to Useni Perkins, these successful partnerships came as a result of internal pressures. "Older gang members realized they needed funds to maintain their operation and provide jobs for their members," Perkins argues. Additionally, "many were becoming tired of fighting each other and were receptive to gaining meaningful and legitimate jobs."⁶ Externally, CUCA's campaign also came amidst Cook County States Attorney Edward Hanrahan's openly declaration of a War on Gangs, escalating an already aggressive policing of Chicago's youth gangs by identifying the Lords, Stones, and Disciples as the city's greatest criminal threat. Hanrahan's effort to crackdown on Black street gangs overlaps with their involvement in the campaign against racial discrimination in the building trades. After 1969, the "shift in law enforcement resources and priorities" quickly sent away large numbers of their members first to Cook County jail and then downstate prison. Over the next decade, waves of gang-involved prisoner organizing shape a prolonged "crisis of control" within Illinois penitentiaries, laying the foundation for the changes in criminal sentencing, institutional management, and prison construction often associated with the emergence of mass incarceration.⁷

In addition to state repression, the LSD coalition would also have to contend with the reaction from the building trades unions, exhibited on the city's streets and at the negotiating table. Six weeks after the first circle campus protest, for instance, over two thousand of union members rallied in the city's downtown to disrupt a Labor Department hearing on discrimination in the building trades. Chanting "No coalition, No coalition, No gangs, No gangs," this mob of white construction workers marched through the downtown Loop area, blocking several CUCA representatives from testifying before federal officials, and making clear their commitment to minimizing the Black Chicagoans access to the building trades. Taken together, these contending efforts to challenge and maintain a racially segregated labor market, speak to the way in which the late 20th century's emergence of mass incarceration in Illinois, came not simply as a consequence of deindustrialization, globalization and other broad economics shifts,

⁶ Useni Eugene Perkins, *Explosion of Chicago's Black Street Gangs: 1900 to Present* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1987) 37.

⁷ James B. Jacobs, *Stateville: The Penitentiary in Mass Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) 172-3

Bearing placards identifying various unions, as well as others that read, "We had to Learn to Earn," and "No Coalition," the mob sought to forcefully shutdown the hearing before marching through the Loop and holding its own rally in opposition to the ongoing negotiations in the Civic Center plaza.⁴⁸

After several tense minutes, a police chief escorted Vivian and his wife to a nearby squad car where the couple would be left to sit for four hours, while the chanting crowd continued to menace them. "We went to the hearing expecting an orderly objective atmosphere where both sides could be heard and instead we found that the unions had no intention of having a hearing," C. T. Vivian later recounted.⁴⁹ Indeed, the crowd continued to disrupt the hearings until a contingent of one hundred and fifty officers finally arrived to clear it out. The only arrests made that day were of four young black men who had been attacked by the mob after attempting to enter the building after one of them, in the midst of being pummeled, pulled out a revolver and fired a series of warning shots to secure his escape from the mob.⁵⁰

In his interview with a Chicago Defender reporters, Vivian opined that the day's events testified to the "unwillingness on the labor unions' part to seriously consider a thought-out solution to deal with their racism." He went on to say, "it is our hope that the federal government will refuse to be intimidated by such action and will continue the hearings as soon as possible."⁵¹ While the hearings would be rescheduled for a subsequent day and proceed without further incident, the resistance of the building trades union would remain a tangible roadblock to the achievement of CUCA's demands. According to the 1970 Chicago Plan, one thousand black workers would immediately be placed on the job, one thousand young black men would receive an on-the-job trainee position, and another one thousand would be placed at Washburne. This agreement would later be revised as the New Chicago Plan in 1972, one of fifty-three "hometown plans" subsidized by \$1.7 million in funding from the

25, 1969, 3, 36.

⁴⁸ CPD Surveillance Report, U.S. Custom's House (Demonstration), September 26, 1969, pg. 1, in author's possession.

⁴⁹ Christmas, "Whites halt job hearing," 3, 36.

⁵⁰ Faith Christmas, "White Mob at Hearing," *Chicago Defender*, September 29, 1969, 4.

⁵¹ Christmas, "Whites halt job hearing," 3, 36.

This second round of arrests would mark a turning point in the campaign, galvanizing a broader layer of Black Chicago into public support of the campaign, with circle campus, one of the mayor's key initiatives a flashpoint for protests. Just days after these arrests, some two hundred and fifty women and children affiliated with CUCA picketed and held a prayer vigil outside the circle campus construction site.⁴⁴ Within a week, labor representatives, ministers, city aldermen, and state legislators had decried these recent arrests, voiced their support for CUCA's campaign, and called upon Daley to mediate the dispute.⁴⁵ According to Diamond, LSD's intervention was pivotal:

Such pressure forced the Daley administration to broker an agreement between CUCA and the unions, referred to as the Chicago Plan of 1970, which, while failing to adequately address the problem of racial discrimination in the building trades, nonetheless, suggested the great potential of such coordinated actions between civil rights leaders like Jackson and Chicago's super gangs.⁴⁶

Yet, prior to the signing of the Chicago Plan and the end of CUCA's campaign, LSD would not be left as the only party to forcefully intervene on the jobs issue. This intervention occurred on September 26th, just days after a recently released Jackson had mobilized thousands for a "Black Monday" rally, held in the support of the CUCA's negotiation demands and in solidarity with similar campaign demonstrations taking place in four other cities. That morning, a rowdy and, in some instances, drunk, crowd of nearly 3,000 white construction workers massed outside the entrance to federal hearings on labor market discrimination. Held at the U.S. Customs Building in the Loop, the hearings were supposed to address allegations of the building industry's failure to comply with Executive Order 11246's affirmative action requirements. Yet, when CUCA's Vivian and his wife attempted to enter the building, those in the mob pushed and shoved them while a small contingent of police officers looked on.⁴⁷

44 Faith Christmas, "Mother, Kids Join Job Fight," *Chicago Defender*, September 13, 1969, 1.

45 Faith Christmas, "Fight to Free Jackson," *Chicago Defender*, September 10, 1969, 1.

46 Diamond, 306.

47 Faith Christmas, "Whites halt job hearing," *Chicago Defender*, September

but also a political struggles that kept those at the margins of major cities like Chicago surplus in relation to the broader functioning of the labor market.

THE PLACE OF SURPLUS LABOR

Recent scholarly literature on the crisis of mass incarceration has identified its emergence as a direct consequence of the ways in which the labor of poor and working class urban residents has been left surplus to an accumulation of capital. Of this scholarship, the work of legal scholar Michelle Alexander has been the best received. Although the focus of her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2012), is nationwide in scope, there are several instances in which she uses the case of Chicago to exemplify the consequences of large-scale imprisonment. In the decades after CUCA's campaign, Alexander contends, "a new regime of racially disparate mass incarceration has emerged in Chicago and become the primary mechanism for racial oppression and the denial of equal opportunity." Fueled by the War on Drugs, this new regime has resulted in high rates of arrest, imprisonment, and felony records in the city's poor and working class Black neighborhoods.⁸

For Alexander, the foundation for this new regime of racial control was laid by the urban deindustrialization and the resulting crisis of joblessness. "Prior to 1970, inner-city workers with relatively little formal education could find industrial employment close to home. Globalization, however, helped to change that," Alexander explains. Similarly, "dramatic technological changes revolutionized the workplace – changes that eliminated many of the jobs that less skilled workers once relied upon for their survival."⁹

Rather than being broadly distributed, the impact of these economic shifts would be felt most acutely in poor and working class Black neighborhoods, the central site for the reproduction of what she describes as a system of racialized social control that persists even after prisoners have served their time. "Through a web of laws, regulations, and informal rules," Alexander asserts, "all of which are powerfully reinforced by social stigma, they are confined to the

8 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012) 189.

9 Ibid, 50.

margins of mainstream society and denied access to the mainstream economy,” Alexander argues. “They are legally denied the ability to obtain employment, housing, and public benefits – much as African Americans were once forced into a segregated second-class citizenship in the Jim Crow era.”¹⁰ Carried out through all together legal forms of racial discrimination, this web of laws, regulations, and informal rules operates as a form of what Alexander terms racial caste control.

To some large degree, Alexander’s conception of mass incarceration as a new form of racial caste control is premised on the scholarship of sociologist Loic Wacquant. In a series of academic articles, Wacquant laid out his analysis of post-WWII Chicago as emblematic of how mass incarceration now serves as the latest iteration of racial caste control. Beginning with plantation slavery and developing through Jim Crow and then urban ghettoization, U.S. society relied on forms of racial domination that he likens to caste control. As each system falters, another rises to replace it. Drawing on this historical precedent, Wacquant contends that the same pattern has continued into the present with “the astounding upsurge in black incarceration in the past three decades as a result of the obsolescence of the ghetto as a device for caste control and the correlative need for a substitute apparatus for keeping (unskilled) African Americans ‘in their place’, i.e. in a subordinate and confined position in physical, social and symbolic space.”¹¹ Indeed, it is largely by drawing on Wacquant’s depiction of U.S. society’s need to contain “a super-numerary population of younger black men, who either reject or are rejected by the deregulated low-wage labor market,” that Alexander develops her conception of mass incarceration as a form of caste control. While its attention the historical development of racial caste is unique, Wacquant’s examination of mass incarceration’s central role in disciplining working Black folks left surplus by the labor market – “either as ‘social junk’ or ‘social dynamite’” – echoes claims made by Marxist scholars like Christian Parenti, Ray Michaelowski, William Chambliss, and Jeffery Reiman; claims which remain influential.¹² Yet,

10 Ibid, 4.

11 Loic Wacquant, “Deadly Symbiosis: When ghetto and prison meet and mesh,” *Punishment & Society* 3(1) 2001, 97.

12 Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso Books, 2000) 45.

the historic moon landing, CUCA leaders made their way to City Hall, calling upon Mayor Richard J. Daley to move forward negotiations with the contractors and labor unions. After meeting briefly with his aides, CUCA leaders held a short press conference and then joined those who had remained in the plaza in retracing their route back to the west side.⁴¹

As this impromptu shift in strategic focus to the mayor’s office might suggest, CUCA’s jobs campaign was becoming increasingly concerned with their inability of their direct action protest to force the hand of the contractors and the trades unions. They had already held a series of meetings with these parties, but negotiations continued to stall on several of the demands, particularly the provision of 10,000 on-the-job trainee positions.⁴² However, any sort of mayoral intervention would not be immediately forthcoming. Over the next couple months, the CUCA would attempt to maintain the momentum of their campaign and keep the issues their demonstrations had raised on the front page of city newspapers. However, their efforts were considerably hindered by the court injunction, effectively limiting them to symbolic pickets. As negotiations stalled and contractors resumed work on a number of the two-dozen construction sites that protests had shut down, LSD itself took the initiative. On September 8th, over a month after the first demonstration at circle campus, LSD rallied its supporters alongside Jesse Jackson and other civil rights leaders to the same construction site where they had previously been arrested. In clear violation of the injunction, they led a mass picket of more than 800 people, encircling the work site and the scores of police that ringed the block-long area. When the building supervisors refused to halt work, police arrested Jackson and LSD’s leaders – Patterson of the Lords, Sengali of the Stones, and Weathers of the Disciples – on charges of trespassing. And just as with the initial demonstration at the site, a scuffle and a spate of rock throwing broke out, leaving several officers injured.⁴³

41 CPD Surveillance Report, Coalition for United Community Action, August 4, 1969, pg. 2, in author’s possession.

42 On this point, they were not alone. In one instance, House Representative Roman Pucinski suggested that federal funds for career education could be put towards an expansion of the building trades apprentice program. “Federal support said to be crucial for black jobs,” *Chicago Today*, August 22, 1969, 5.

43 Faith Christmas, “Jesse, 3 Leaders: We’ll stay in jail,” *Chicago Defender*, September 9, 1969, 1.

the [CUCA] in marching against construction sites.”³⁸ By the end of 1969, these efforts to illegally harass and legally curtail the jobs campaign would come together in a manner that would narrow its demands and silence its most militant participants.

“YOU DON’T HAVE ENOUGH POLICE TO HANDLE THIS ...”

On August 13th, the day after the arrests at circle campus, those in the CUCA jobs campaign once again to the streets, though with a slightly different target in mind. According to a GIU surveillance report, nearly one hundred people, most of them appearing to be members of the Stones, began gathering in the early morning hours outside of KOCO’s offices in the south side. Just before 8 a.m., the waiting crowd boarded a school bus that then traveled westbound to offices of the West Side Organization (WSO), near Roosevelt and Halstead, where they unloaded. Over the next hour, several buses dropped off roughly equal numbers of Lords and Disciples. By 9 a.m., the crowd, now about 350 to 400 people strong began marching east on Roosevelt, back to the circle campus construction site.³⁹ Waiting for them was the city’s Assistant Corporation Counsel, a line of nearly 200 police officers, and officials from the Gust K. Newberg construction company, the contractors on the project. The contractors’ superintendent agreed to meet with CUCA representatives, only to tell them that he would not be shutting down the site and called upon police to arrest any one who crossed its fence line “You don’t have enough police to handle this,” the Stones’ Leonard Sengali reportedly exclaimed, “if you don’t close down the mortar between the bricks will be blood.”⁴⁰ Yet, after a brief standoff, with demonstrators marching around the site, the crowd shifted its attention and continued east to the Loop area, ultimately winding their way to the Civic Center plaza. There, at Dearborn and Clark streets along Washington, they assembled in a loose, military formation – just as the plaza was being prepared to host crowds attending the welcoming parade for the Apollo 11 astronauts. As gang members stood silently, disrupting the plaza’s celebration of

38 CPD Interview Report, Leonard Sengali, August 8, 1969, pg. 1, in author’s possession.

39 CPD Surveillance Report, Coalition for United Community Action, August 4, 1969, pg. 1, in author’s possession.

40 James Strong, “Blacks carrying clubs march on Civic Center,” Chicago Tribune, August 14, 1969, 1.

while particularly insightful, Wacquant’s approach fails to sufficiently foreground the dynamics of inter and intra class conflict that frame this process.

For geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore, the rise of mass incarceration has not primarily been a problem of racial domination as much as it has been a general consequence of the economic transformation that began in the early 1970s. “The prison,” she argues, “constitutes a geographic solution to socio-economic problems, politically organised by a state which is itself in the process of radical restructuring.” Grounding her study specifically in California, Gilmore argues that the rise in factors like outsourcing, capital flight, and mechanization have combined with capital divestment and the rollback of social welfare programs to concentrate profound insecurity amongst “modestly educated people in the prime of life who once might have gained wages making and moving things.” While they have not been sole population impacted by these shifts, young men in working class Black communities have been particularly impacted by this dispossession. “These dynamics are not simply the residual outcomes of ‘market forces’ but, rather, the predictable results of capital abandonment,” facilitated by the state itself. In addition to shepherding this process, California, she argues, also turned to large-scale prison construction as a means of addressing the problems created by surpluses in labor, land, finance capital, and state capacity. “Fashioned from surpluses that the emergent post-golden-age political economy was not absorbing in other ways,” mass incarceration emerged as part of a broader project of neoliberal state building.¹³

While Gilmore’s incisive analysis goes a long way towards clarifying the key factors that have gone into making mass incarceration, it too easily relies on the broad-scale shift from a Keynesian to a post-Keynesian political economy as the impetus for its emergence. Left unaddressed are the ways in which imprisonment has been used to resolve the problem of surplus labor prior to the emergence of a post-golden-age political economy. It is worth noting that in his classic study *Who Needs the Negro?* (1971), sociologist Sidney Wilhelm cautioned against a similar reliance on broad explanations to make sense of the barriers to improved race relations: “assigning blame for

13 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Globalisation and US Prison growth: from military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian militarism,” *Race & Class*, 40, 2/3/ (1998/99) 174, 182- 3.

the present situation to ‘impersonal’ social forces introduces vagueness. Discrimination is a reality, and it is people who discriminate.” Indeed, for Wilhelm, it was this problem of racial discrimination, taken up and carried out not by economic structures or societal dynamics, but by actual people, that played the preeminent role in shaping the experience of Black people. This problem, of course, did not negate significance of specific social forces, but rather that they simply conditioned the circumstances in which racial discrimination might be practiced. This distinction, Wilhelm argues, was particularly important for identifying the technological advances in production associated with automation. In his analysis, a veritable revolution in the use of advanced machinery has shaped the persistence of inner-city unemployment amidst the steady economic growth and rising productivity of the 1960s. With stunning improvements in the use of automated equipment and computerized devices, industries required fewer workers. Although their wages were lower than those of their white counterparts, Black workers, both skilled and unskilled, found themselves jobless. According to his estimates, by 1967 the rate of unemployed and underemployed Black workers in Chicago ran as high as 48 percent, as technological improvements provided employers the opportunity to rid themselves of those who remained unwanted.¹⁴

In contrast to more recent scholarship, Wilhelm takes economic transformation as the context for the elaboration of racial discrimination, rather than a force that is in its own rights responsible for discriminatory effects. For instance, it is white racism that has been and continues to be cause of prolonged joblessness amongst Black workers. Where Southern agricultural and Northern industrialization made a Black worker’s labor profitable, mechanization and automation made it easier for racist employers to dismiss it. “Increasingly, [a Black worker] is not so much economically exploited as he is irrelevant,” Wilhelm contends. “And now, in terms of automation, joblessness loses the peculiar quality of being a mere transitory moment that will fade upon the resumption of economic prosperity. The new technology informs the Negro of permanent workless years even as the economy establishes new productive records and profits.”¹⁵ Following this logic

14 Sidney Wilhelm, *Who Needs the Negro?* (New York: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1970) 201.

15 *Ibid.*, 210, 215

this flyer. Most likely penned by an LSD member, this addition points to the degree to which the partnership between the city’s largest gangs and its most active civil rights organizations was premised on the easy slippage between gang turf and national territory.³⁵

During the first several weeks of these protests, foremen repeatedly called police to the site of these protests, but refused to sign criminal complaints, ostensibly leaving officers with little ground on which to pursue the arrest of hundreds of avowed gang members. In many of these instances, black workers made up a sizeable portion of those on site and, in a few instances, stopped work in solidarity with the protests. According to media reports, the response of white workers varied from fear and confusion to outright hostility. As coalition members announced their intention to block some \$38 million in federal funds to the Chicago model cities program because of a violation of its citizen participation commitments, a group of white construction workers began to press for a more robust state response.³⁶ On August 7th, for instance, the Chicago Tribune reported that nearly two-dozen construction workers confronted U.S. Attorney Thomas Forman outside of the federal building downtown after protests had stopped work at three building sites on the west side, including an addition to Mt. Sinai hospital. They complained that although police were present, some 200 gang members “swarmed the project, cheering, waving clenched fists” after which the foremen “ordered the project closed and said he did it to protect the workers.” Offering only that his office could investigate their complaint, Forman suggested the workers press their general contractors to seek an injunction against further protests.³⁷ Although CUCA would continue to threaten and in a few instances, did carry out further work stoppages, a judge would grant the unions and contractors an injunction two days after the arrests at circle campus. Joining this legal effort was the escalating harassment of LSD members, with coalition leaders openly complaining that gang members were being “beaten, picked up and harassed by the police, and threatened because of their activity with

35 *Ibid.*

36 Pierre Guilment, “Coalition Fights City Hall,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 7, 1969, 2.

37 James Strong, “Trades Ask for Aid in Threat by Negroes,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 8, 1969, 6.

and located on the south side, had left roughly 700 workers idle and closed nearly \$70 million in building project.³² Through these actions, LSD members were effectively taking advantage of the expansion and consolidation of what historian Arnold Hirsch refers to as the city's Second Ghetto. With its roots in a key set of decisions made during the early 1950s, the Second Ghetto was profoundly shaped by government actions. "With the emergence of redevelopment, renewal, and public housing," Hirsch writes, "government took an active hand not merely in reinforcing prevailing patterns of segregation, but also in lending them a permanence never seen before ... it virtually constituted a new form of de jure segregation."³³ During the summer of 1969, LSD members repeatedly targeted federally funded construction sites, projects that, while expanding Black Chicagoans' access to public services, like education, housing, transportation, and health care, also helped to consolidate the scope of the city's stark racial segregation.

The expanding purview of the city's black neighborhoods is even evident in the CUCA's leaflets. "How long will we let others build our communities," one asks. Typed onto a standard 8 by 11 inch sheet of paper and drawing on the rhetoric of Black militancy, it states: "the Coalition for United Community Action is carrying on a fight to end racism in the trade unions, open up thousands of jobs in the Black community and increase the Black community's power of self-determination." Further, it lists a set of demands, beginning with the call for the immediate provision, of 10,000 union on-the-job trainee positions, which would be a key sticking point of subsequent negotiations. Reflecting the call for community control rippling through Black Power protests, the flyer concluded: "Support the Coalition's fight to win these demands. It's Our Right to Jobs on Our Turf...."³⁴ Just as the creation of the city's second ghetto fixed in space the lines of racial separation, it also afford Chicago's black residents a broader sense of their own territory, a concept that likely resonated with an LSD coalition members concerned less with Black Power and more with ganga empowerment. As if to accentuate this point, the phrase, "It's Our Thang," was written across the top and bottom of

32 In author's possession.

33 Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940- 1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998) 254-55.

34 CUCA flyer, in the author's possession.

of displacement, separation, and isolation, Wilhelm concluded that the consequences of this racial discrimination would be more poverty, hunger, and, ultimately, racial genocide.

More consequential than Wilhelm's ominous conclusion is his refusal to reify the social impact of broader economic changes. Automation might reflect technological advances, but its racially disparate impact was a reflection of all too human decision-making. In his analysis, this was true not only of urban joblessness, but also the rising Black militancy of the 1960s. "Negroes grow more conscious not only of their uselessness but also of white neglect to cope with black rejects; disposed as a waste product according to terms laid down by the efficiency of the new technology, the Negro awakens to his own plight," Wilhelm argues. "His new anger extends from his increasing isolation, not only from jobs but also from the total society as separation becomes, as we have seen, more pronounced in the daily affairs of black people."¹⁶ While they might fail to address other plausible explanations for the rebelliousness of the 1960s, this argument open up opportunities for us to consider the marginalization of Black labor as a contested political issue rather than simply the unquestioned consequence of the structural transformation of an industrial economy.

GANG POLITICIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Occurring just prior to the publication of Wilhelm's study, the 1969 construction sites demonstrations reflect long simmering concerns about the isolation of working class black youth from the broader labor market. Beginning in 1967, first the Blackstone Rangers and Devil's Disciples on the South side, and then the Conservative Vice Lords on the West side, launched efforts to address the joblessness of their members. Although these efforts varied in terms of the scope of their partnership with local organizations, their reliance on private foundation as opposed to federal funding, and their emphasis on vocational training or entrepreneurialism, they all speak to a commitment to securing gang members a stable and secure livelihood. While the Stones and Disciples' Youth Manpower Project was beset by negative press and canceled the following year, the success of the Lord's Operation Bootstrap would be joined by other

16 Ibid, 216.

accomplishments, including running a vocational training program, two youth centers, an employment agency are more evident.¹⁷ Despite the differences, each gang efforts consistently point to a demand for greater economic inclusion, or put another way, an incipient challenge to the isolation and marginalization, or Wilhelm's terms 'uselessness' with which a layer of working class Black youth had been forced to contend. In addition to addressing economic concerns, they were also caught up in the process of gang politicization. As such, the 1969 campaign reflects a continuation of these earlier efforts to combat a growing sense of neglect and isolation, and force the city to break with the status quo. As one former gang member reminisced: "our coalition used the name with those ordered letters LSD to argue that WE the Unified Youth intended to 'take Chicago on a trip.'"¹⁸

These prior efforts had faced opposition and this would continue in 1969. As historian Andrew Diamond notes, gang politicization initiatives stretch back to the beginning of the decade, but were taken up with greater frequency towards its end. "By the summer of 1967," he writes, "Black Power thinking and its most vocal promoters – groups like ACT, RAM, SNCC, the Black Panther Party, and the Afro-American Student Association, and the Deacons for Defense – had increasingly strong influence on local organizations on the South and West sides, gang and community organizations alike." Most importantly, he notes that for each of the main participants in the LSD coalition, these influences would heighten tensions between members "who were fully engaged in the struggle for community improvement and others who were unable to give up the pursuit of respect on the streets for higher goals." Following Diamond, it is important to take the militancy of the LSD coalition not as full-fledged turn towards political struggle, but as more aspirational. For while proponents of the campaign might later remember the coalition as having "over 50,000 active and mobilized members of the L.S.D. ... a true force to be reckoned with," this recollection glosses over divisions internal to each gang organization. It is worth noting that LSD's leaders – the Lords' Lawrence Patterson, the Stones' Leonard Sengali, and the

or national origin on federally funded projects and required federally assisted contractors to take affirmative action in hiring. Contrary to Murray's view, Vivian contended that racial discrimination was systematically intertwined with training and hiring within the skilled trades, from the beginning of the apprentice program all the way through the union hall referral system. While addressing the issue of discrimination, this litigation would have little bearing on the demand to hire thousands of on-the-job trainees through the CUCA's coalition partners. As a result, CUCA pressed forward with its direct action, seeking to make good on its threat to shut down all building construction in the black community. It was in carrying out this threat that LSD played an indispensable role. According to Diamond, "although CUCA consisted of some sixty organizations citywide, the muscle LSD provided to the campaign enabled CUCA to effectively shut down eleven construction sites between July 28 and July 30."³¹ On July 28th, for instance, 200 members of LSD shut down work on four south side construction sites: the Woodlawn YMCA, Woodlawn Gardens, Madden Park Homes, and the new Martin Luther King High School. On July 29th, coalition members shut down six construction sites on the west side, including four the sites of four Chicago Housing public housing project.

Yet, the scale of these protests was broader than even this account suggests. During the first two-weeks of August 1969, LSD members continued to halt work at construction sites across the city, carrying out a sustained series of demonstrations that would push the contractors association and trades union to the negotiating table. Although private building and rehabilitation projects, like the construction of the University of Chicago's Joseph Regenstein library, would temporarily become the focus of these protest, most of LSD's attention focused on large-scale, federally funded construction projects, namely public housing, public school, and medical center facilities, as well as "L" stations on the Dan Ryan expressway. By August 1st, these protests had stopped work on an estimated \$35 million worth of construction. Even after negotiation began with representatives of the building trades, demonstrations continued as CUCA noted its frustration with the failure of union officials to weight their demands in a serious manner. The Chicago American calculated that by August 6th, continued demonstrations, a number of them lead by the Stones

17 Andrew J. Diamond, *Mean Streets: Chicago Youths and the Everyday Struggle for Empowerment in the Multiracial City, 1908-1969* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 278.

18 Noble-Ameer Ali, *The Blue-Light Book of the "Original" Brothers of the Struggle* (Chicago: Blue Light Publishing & "Brain-Bang" Campaign Company, 2016) 39.

31 Diamond, 306.

that were these demands were not framed in terms of unemployment and underemployment. Rather than addressing the relationship of LSD members to the labor market, CUCA cast its demands in the rhetoric of equal opportunity, distributive justice, and community control.²⁶

With no prior warning about the demonstration and sit-in, union officials were taken aback. “We had no indication something like this was going to happen today,” remarked Murray, president of the Building Trades council. “There’s been no controversy and things have been going along nicely and apparently this group isn’t aware of all our efforts.”²⁷ Since 1965, Murray’s building trades council has participated in the Chicago Apprenticeship Minority Program. Initiated in partnership with the Chicago Urban League, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Illinois employment service, and the Building Construction Employers Association, and the Chicago Board of Education, this program had provided a narrow pathway for more than five hundred minority apprentices. According to the Department of Labor, the program had contributed to a 46 percent increase in Black apprentices within the local construction industry.²⁸ Murray touted the fact that Black Chicagoans now made up 14 percent of apprentices in the union training program and were securing a slightly larger percentage of the existing construction jobs.²⁹ And with a large number of construction projects being finalized, it was clear that the number of job opportunities would continue to grow, creating opportunities for an even greater number of skilled workers, Black and white alike.³⁰

Following the first surprise demonstration, veteran civil rights activist and CUCA spokesmen C. T. Vivian vowed to sue the building trades union for racial discrimination. Specifically, he alleged the union’s failure to comply with the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Orders 11063 and 11246. Taken together, these regulations sought to eliminate discrimination based upon race, color,

26 Faith Christmas, “Seek Construction Jobs,” *Chicago Defender*, July 23, 1969, 1.

27 Ibid.

28 “Black Construction apprentices up 46%,” *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1969, 30.

29 Christmas, 1.

30 “Black Construction apprentices up 46%,” 30.

Disciples’ Frank Weathers – were not only older than their members, but also had strong links to both local community organizations and those gang factions more oriented towards community concerns. As such, the LSD coalition represented an attempt not only to win living wage employment and broader social inclusion, but also to work through each gang’s internal divisions by pursuing a vision that placed community empowerment over gang empowerment.

A variety of forces, principally the Chicago Police Department’s Gang Intelligence Unit (GIU), had attempted to sabotage the gangs’ vocational programs and undermine political turn in gang activities by exacerbating these tensions. Less covert than the department’s notorious surveillance unit, or “red squad,” the GIU tasks extended beyond simple crime prevention. It was active in the monitoring of alleged gang members as well as in tracking their interactions with civil rights activists and radical militants. Indeed, it is worth noting that after launching a Youth Group Intelligence Unit in 1961, the CPD significantly reorganized and expanded it into the GIU in 1967, coincidentally, just as the Rangers and Disciples were preparing to launch their Youth Manpower project. “Participants in the project were regularly stopped on the street, searched, verbally abused, and arrested on disorderly conduct charges,” writes sociologist James B. Jacobs. “The [Youth Manpower] training centers ... were frequently intruded upon by the police without search warrants.”¹⁹ Diamond, who was one of the first historians to gain access to the GIU records emphasizes this point, with these interactions constituting a substantial portion of the unit’s archived records. “Readily apparent from a survey of the files is the presence of infiltrators who not only observed proceedings and dug up dirt, but also planted the seeds of destruction in the already fragile alliances of gangs, community organizations, and Black Power groups,” he concludes. “The intense attention paid to the shifting alliances between these groups suggests a deep concern in the mayor’s office about the possible threat posed by the organizing activities under way in black Chicago beginning in the spring of 1967.”²⁰ Over the next several years, the GIU would continue to devote considerable resources to monitoring these sort of political activities.

19 James B. Jacobs, *Stateville: The Penitentiary in Mass Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) 141.

20 Diamond, 277.

It remains unclear precisely what led to the formation of LSD and its involvement in the jobs campaign. Following continued gang politicization efforts, the Stones and the Disciples were ready to announce a new truce between the city's two largest gangs by early July 1969.²¹ At roughly the same time, a loose coalition of groups including Operation Breadbasket and the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), as well as the Stones and the Lords that had been meeting to discuss the exclusion of young black men from the city's Washburne Trade School.²² An LSD spokesman would later claim that this gang coalition was the motivation behind CUCA's formation and the launch of its building trades jobs campaign.²³ In published accounts of the CUCA, collaboration with these street gangs is seen as key as their members statistically and psychologically represented the "hard-core of the unemployed" in the city's Black neighborhoods.²⁴ While LSD's involvement would catch GIU investigators, as well as the rest of the city, by surprise, monitoring these developments would soon take up an inordinate share of the unit's investigation and

21 Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and the Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013) 161. According to the account prepared by former members of LSD, this formation of this coalition, or more accurately, merger, took place between March and June that year and involved all three gangs. Ali, 39.

22 Natalie Y. Moore and Lance Williams, *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation: The Rise, Fall, and Resurgence of an American Gang* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2011) 113.

23 "LSD' Working for a Better Black Area," *Chicago Defender*, October, 16, 1969, 16; According to the account prepared by former members of LSD, "the Coalition for United Community Action was formed as an umbrella organization for the LSD coalition under the orders of the Leadership of the LSD coalition in March, 1969 and was composed of many organizations with different issues, coming together under the direction and guidance of the LSD Coalition to actively fight oppression found within their communities. The CUCA UMBRELLA MOVEMENT was made up of about 61 citywide street and grassroots organizations and Tribes who called and relied upon the LSD Coalition for PROTECTION, MUSCLE AND MOBILIZING FORCE. By July 1969, the LSD's became the driving force and majority influence and voice of the Umbrella Coalition. Ali, 39.

24 Erik Gellman, "The Stone Wall Behind': The Chicago Coalition for United Community Action and Labor's Overseer's, 1968-1972," in *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry*, ed. David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010) 118-19.

infiltration activities. As such, GIU's files offer a unique window onto the efforts of LSD and its coalition partners to reframe the problem of racially disproportionate unemployment from the elaboration of abstract economic forces to the routinized functioning of labor market discrimination that left black workers at the margins.

"IT'S OUR THANG"

On July 22nd, the CUCA announced the start of its jobs campaign by holding a demonstration in the heart of Chicago's financial district. "Our LSD Coalition decided to begin our good fight against racial discrimination within construction and building trades by taking direct action," one LSD supporter later recalled.²⁵ That morning, several hundred of teenagers and young adults affiliated with the Lords, Stones, and Disciples, marched from Garfield Park on the West Side to the downtown loop. Carrying signs that "I am somebody" and "Blacks demand same chance," gang members and their coalition partners picketed the construction site of a First National Bank annex at Clark and Madison, blocking its gates and briefly halting work. These coalition partners including the Kenwood Oakand Community Organization, Operation Breadbasket, Lawndale Peoples Planning and Action Conference, Valley Community Organization, and the Welfare Rights Organization. Later, seventeen gang members sat-in at the offices of the Building Trades Union Council at 130 N. Wells St, occupying them for more than two hours before being arrested for trespassing. Refusing to talk with union officials, coalition members instead shared their list of demands with the press. These demands included providing 10,000 on-the-job trainee positions to black youth, elevating black union members with at least four years experience to foremen and supervisory positions, eliminating testing for the on-the-job trainee program, provide automatic deduction system for trainee dues, and abolish the union hall referral system. Taken together, CUCA sought to rectify the various ways in black workers had consistently been barred from relatively high-paying positions within the skilled building trades. Coalition members also warned that unless these demands were met they would halt all building construction in the black community. It also worth noting

25 Ali, 41.