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Economic Genocide and the Black Press:
Articulating African American Illness and Death in Chicago, IL (1910-1951)

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Abstract

In 1946, Polish legal scholar Raphael Lemkin coined the term *genocide* to describe the deliberate mass destruction of a racial, ethnical, national, or religious group. In 1948, the United Nations subsequently ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, making racial persecution an international issue for the first time. Within genocide studies, scholars have widely accepted that the Holocaust can be used to measure the magnitude of other mass atrocities. However, a growing body of scholarship on *economic genocide* rejects this approach, exploring how structural economic oppression creates conditions which facilitate the extermination of a group over time by depleting its health and lifespan. Using economic genocide as a theoretical lens, this case study examines Black illness and death in twentieth-century Chicago, IL. I begin to fill knowledge gaps in genocide studies by folding medical research into human rights discourse, allowing quantitative medical data to supplement the qualitative nature of Black Chicagoans' lived experiences. This thesis examines the language of Black historical newspapers to create a rhetorical database from which to determine the markers of economic genocide as experienced and described by Black Chicagoans. In using this source base, I seek to first and foremost center Black human rights discourse in order to push the boundaries of the Convention and challenge Holocaust-driven genocide studies.

Key Words: *economic genocide, African American history, Genocide Convention, newspapers*

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my friends, colleagues, and fellow activists at the African American Redress Network. Thank you for welcoming me into your community.

Introduction

In the wake of World War II, the world united to seek a second chance at peace. In 1945, the United Nations was established as an international forum through which humankind could find common legal ground. This postwar internationalism marked an attempt at dismantling fascist theories of racial difference and preventing further mass atrocities.¹ The Holocaust in particular shed light on the dangers of systematic persecution, engendering a worldwide call for basic human dignity to be legally recognized.² In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) defined human rights as a collection of thirty civil and economic protections, including the right to non-discrimination. Polish legal scholar Raphael Lemkin, however, argued that *mass murder* and *denationalization* did not adequately capture (1) the magnitude of and (2) intent behind Nazi Germany's crimes. In April 1946, he wrote a public-facing piece for *American Scholar* which coined the term *genocide* as the international "crime of destroying national, racial or religious groups."³ This term connoted the "legal, moral and humanitarian nature" of what Lemkin saw as the calculated "biological destruction" of a group based on its identity.⁴ In 1948, the UN subsequently adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which, for the first time, made racial persecution an international crime.

In the Genocide Convention, Article 2 states that any of the following acts constitute genocide: (a) killing group members, (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm against a group, (c) deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to facilitate a group's physical destruction, (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within a group, and/or (e) forcibly transferring

¹ Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2001), 173-174, 232.

² Ibid, 173-174.

³ Raphael Lemkin, "Genocide," *American Scholar* 15:2 (April 1946), [URL](#).

⁴ Ibid.

children to another group.⁵ It further affirms that these acts qualify as genocide regardless of whether they exterminate a group “in whole or in part.”⁶ Article 3 states that any individual guilty of (a) genocide, (b) conspiracy to commit genocide, (c) direct incitement of genocide, (d) attempt to commit genocide, and (e) complicity in genocide shall be punishable under international jurisdiction.⁷ Above all else, the Convention specified that genocide must be “committed with intent to destroy.”⁸ This proof of intent clause, combined with ambiguous legal language, effectively limit the scope of the Convention, making it difficult for victim groups to claim and successfully charge genocide as an international crime.

Today genocide studies tend to center around the Holocaust and the Genocide Convention, which only further narrows the legal scope of what qualifies as genocide. However, Lemkin originally envisioned *genocide* as a very expansive *concept*. The New York Public library holds Lemkin’s writings and outlines in which he explored various techniques and markers of genocide—including economic means of death. In recent years, scholars have brought an economic interpretation to Article 2(c), which describes the act of “deliberately inflicting... conditions of life calculated to bring about” a group’s “physical destruction in whole or in part.”⁹ A growing body of scholarship has since emerged on *economic genocide*, the theory that structural economic oppression creates harmful conditions which facilitate the extermination of a group over time by depleting its health and lifespan. On these grounds, comparative health indices can be used to track and measure structural genocide against specific demographics. Such measurements

⁵ United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (1948), [URL](#).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

include but are not limited to: mortality rate, maternal death rate, infant death rate, morbidity rate, infection rate, average life expectancy, and likelihood to be diagnosed with a chronic illness.

Lemkin's writings reveal the importance of studying genocide as a multi-faceted *concept* which can arise through various forms and techniques not explicitly listed in international law. As such, this thesis presents its own historical case study, examining Black illness and death in segregated Chicago, IL during the first half of the twentieth century through the theoretical lens of economic genocide. It explores the following research questions: How does the Chicago Black press articulate the socioeconomic causes of Black illness and death (1) during the early twentieth century (1910-1939), (2) during WWII and the Holocaust (1939-1945), and (3) after the ratification of the Genocide Convention (1945-1951)? How does Black human rights discourse challenge the accepted legal definition of genocide?

There has been little to no research on the relationship between genocide, economic oppression, and African American health. This thesis therefore analyzes the language of African American newspapers to create a rhetorical database of economic genocide as experienced and described by Black Chicagoans. I also fold medical research into human rights discourse, allowing quantitative health trends to supplement Black Chicagoans' lived experiences. In using newspapers as a source base, I allow Black human rights discourse to dictate what constitutes genocide, both before and after the creation of the term. This methodological approach enables me to conceptualize genocide in *and* outside of the Convention by centering Black voices and experiences. I also employ Critical Race Theory and the Social Determinants of Health framework to avoid falling into a Holocaust-centric analysis of genocide.

This historical research has important modern-day implications for Black Chicagoans, who continue to suffer from apartheid and economic oppression today. In highlighting the magnitude

of structural oppression in Chicago, this case study rethinks the definition of genocide and in turn the scope of the Convention. I hope that this research provides Black-led organizations with a new argument and further evidence to support their demands for historical redress and accountability.

Chapter 1: Current Literature and Theoretical Framework

1.1 Genocide Studies and the Holocaust

In genocide studies, scholars often use the Holocaust to measure the magnitude of mass atrocities, which effectively disqualifies any form of mass civilian death that does not resemble Nazi-like crimes. Jürgen Zimmerer and Khatchig Mouradian criticize the Holocaust “singularity” thesis as ahistorical and problematic.¹⁰ In treating the Holocaust as unprecedented, they point out, scholars implicitly understate the historical significance of other instances of genocide and mass atrocity. David E. Stannard and Thomas Kühne explain how this “uniqueness discourse” has allowed the Holocaust to gain authority amongst scholars as the archetype of genocide.¹¹ As a result, Jerry Fowler argues that a case’s “likeness to the Holocaust” has come to determine its legal characterization more so than whether it falls under the Genocide Convention.¹² Taner Akçam thus describes the Holocaust as the “yardstick” used to “measure... genocide” claims, in both scholarly *and* public discourse.¹³ Holocaust centrism assumes a false “hierarchy of suffering,” which, Michael Rothberg and Thomas Brudholm note, ultimately downgrades the significance of other forms of genocide.¹⁴ Even Lemkin himself recognized that the concept of genocide would create

¹⁰ Jürgen Zimmerer, “Colonialism and the Holocaust: Towards an Archaeology of Genocide,” trans. Andrew H. Beattie, in *Genocide and Settler Society*, ed. Dirk A. Moses (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2004), 51, [URL](#); Khatchig Mouradian, “Genocide and Memory: ‘The Closed Circle of Our Exile,’” in *A Cultural History of Genocide in the Era of Total War*, ed. Elisa von Joeden-Forgey (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2021), 202.

¹¹ David E. Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship,” in *Is the Holocaust Unique?: Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, ed. Alan S. Rosenbaum (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2008), 299, [URL](#); Thomas Kühne, “Colonialism and the Holocaust: Continuities, Causations, and Complexities,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 15:3 (2013): 339-362.

¹² Jerry Fowler, “The Holocaust, Rwanda, and the Category of Genocide,” in *Is the Holocaust Unique?: Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, ed. Alan S. Rosenbaum (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2008), 219, [URL](#).

¹³ Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), xxix, [URL](#).

¹⁴ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3, 7-9; Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment’s Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008), 15.

politics of trauma recognition, envisioning a book section on “The Hierarchy of Protection through the Concept of International Crime.”¹⁵

This hyperfocus on the Holocaust within genocide studies has actively promoted a Holocaust-driven *legal* interpretation of the Genocide Convention. Dirk A. Moses emphasizes that, in the decades following WWII, Nazi atrocities *unquestionably* shaped the world’s “imagination of transgression” and subsequent understanding of international human rights law.¹⁶ In 1946, Lemkin quoted British Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s famous description of the Holocaust as “a crime without a name;” as such, many scholars have assumed that Lemkin’s efforts to coin the term *genocide*—particularly in international law—were first and foremost inspired by the Holocaust.¹⁷ G. Daniel Cohen and Irwin Cotler emphasize the Holocaust’s tangible impact on the Convention, noting “traceable” references to the legal precedents set by the Nuremberg Trials.¹⁸ P. Sean Morris likewise relates each article back to specific crimes committed during the Holocaust.¹⁹ As such, Jerry Fowler explains, the Convention and the Holocaust have virtually become legally “synonymous.”²⁰ However, Dirk A. Moses and P. Sean Morris insist that reading the Convention as a mere condemnation of Nazi mass atrocities creates long-term consequences for international human rights law, as it effectively discredits other forms of genocide.²¹ Understanding genocide—and the history of its definition—in terms of the Holocaust ultimately

¹⁵ “Introduction into the Study of Genocide,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folder 2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

¹⁶ Dirk A. Moses, *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 20-21, [URL](#).

¹⁷ Lemkin, “Genocide.”

¹⁸ G. Daniel Cohen, “The Holocaust and the ‘Human Rights Revolution’: A Reassessment,” in *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History*, ed. Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, and William I. Hitchcock (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 57, [URL](#); Irwin Cotler, “The Holocaust, Nuremberg, and Human Rights: Elie Wiesel and the Struggle against Injustice in Our Time,” in *Celebrating Elie Wiesel: Stories, Essays, Reflections*, ed. Alan Rosen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 281.

¹⁹ P. Sean Morris, “Economic Genocide Under International Law,” in *The Journal of Criminal Law* 82:1 (2018): 25, [URL](#); Fowler, “The Holocaust, Rwanda, and the Category of Genocide,” 218.

²⁰ Fowler, “The Holocaust, Rwanda, and the Category of Genocide,” 218.

²¹ Morris, “Economic Genocide Under International Law,” 25; *ibid*.

“*narrowed*” the scope of the Convention.²² While international courts have found perpetrators guilty of genocide that is different in scope and nature than the Holocaust, structural forms of genocide are harder to convict because they occur so often and tend to go unnoticed.

1.2 The Politicization of Genocide as a Concept

Contrary to this Holocaust centrism, Lemkin did not conceptualize *genocide* solely in terms of Nazi crimes; rather, he developed an expansive and interdisciplinary definition which incorporated numerous genocidal techniques, including economic means of death. Lemkin’s writings on genocide reiterate that the “word...is relatively new, but the recognition of group persecution and disintegration is not,” entitling one piece “Genocide, Ancient Crime with a New Name.”²³ As such, he developed the definition of genocide through historical case studies, analyzing instances of civilian destruction around the world from antiquity through modern times.²⁴ His research findings concluded that there exist eight techniques of genocide, which can be used alone or in combination with one another: political, social, cultural, economic, biological, physical, and moral.²⁵ Dirk A. Moses rightfully describes Lemkin’s original definition as “extraordinarily broad,” which, Douglas Irvin-Erickson adds, further challenges the assumption that genocide must look like the Holocaust.²⁶ Furthermore, Lemkin himself noted that “economic considerations entered into every case” of genocide against Jews, whom he refers to as “the

²² Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 28.

²³ “The Concept of Genocide in Sociology,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folder 2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY; “GENOCIDE, Ancient Crime with a New Name,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 4, box 3, folder 6, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

²⁴ See Outline of case studies, in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folders 6-16, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY; “A Memorandum on the Genocide Convention,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 4, box 3, folder 6, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY; Book project description, in Raphael Lemkin, *Introduction to the Study of Genocide*, reel 3, box 2, folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

²⁵ Douglas Irvin-Erickson, *Raphaël Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 88-93.

²⁶ Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 176, 188.

classical victim of genocide.”²⁷ Douglas Irvin-Erickson explains that, to Lemkin, genocide was a variable “process of destroying nations that was not necessarily quick nor violent.”²⁸

However, when coding genocide into international law, the Genocide Convention effectively compromised the term’s widespread applicability. UN delegates operated as political stakeholders, constructing the vocabulary of genocide with their national agendas in mind. Lemkin’s original definition received widespread support amongst non-Western delegates, who—amidst decolonization—recognized how economic and political contexts drove civilian destruction within their own countries.²⁹ On the other hand, the United States played a key role in excluding economic language from the final draft.³⁰ As reported by *The New York Times* in 1950, U.S representatives like Senator Brien McMahon reviewed the Convention draft with the firm conviction that the United States ““never had an act of genocide...and...never will.””³¹ The wording of the Convention thus served as a platform to redefine and effectively limit genocide as a concept. By rhetorically emphasizing the “extremity” of genocidal acts, Dirk A. Moses explains, the UN disqualified other structural forms of civilian destruction, such as slavery, assimilation, and apartheid.³² He thus argues that the “legalization” of the term *genocide* undermined its conceptual scope by “dramatically *narrow[ing]* the inherited imagination of transgression” and ultimately compromising its applicability under international law.³³ As such, Lemkin entitled a

²⁷ “Genocide in Economics,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 3, folders 1-2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

²⁸ Irvin-Erickson, *Raphaël Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide*, 81.

²⁹ Morris, “Economic Genocide Under International Law,” 25.

³⁰ Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 33.

³¹ “Approval of Pact on Genocide Urged,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), April 13, 1950, in Raphael Lemkin, reel 1, box 1, folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

³² Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 17, 27.

³³ *Ibid.*, 28.

section of his book project “The Problem of Definition,” which the subtitle (“Is it not a case of Genocide”) suggests is indexing the degree of group trauma.³⁴

1.3 A Legal System Designed to Fail

As a result, the Genocide Convention first and foremost reinforces state sovereignty, guaranteeing that nations could commit structural forms of civilian destruction within their own borders without the threat of international prosecution. Dirk A. Moses emphasizes that the “heroic narrative” of the struggle for human rights law is historically inaccurate; in reality, the language of the Convention “enshrined...the interests of states” that drafted it.³⁵ Achille Mbembe thus sees sovereignty as a tool of “necropolitical power,” meaning a state’s ability to control its citizens by deciding “who is able to live and who must die.”³⁶ In defining genocide as the crime of all crimes, the Convention detracts attention from what Dirk A. Moses describes as “more common” yet “equally destructive” forms of systemic violence that occur on a daily basis; furthermore, it also downgrades the legal consequences associated with such crimes.³⁷ This ambiguous legal language therefore enables states to deny the genocidal nature of the structural forms of civilian destruction which Lemkin incorporated into his original definition.³⁸ While international tribunals have deepened the definition of genocide since 1948, Jerry Fowler and Alexander Hinton agree that the Convention’s lack of enforceability actively facilitates impunity in the face of genocide.³⁹ Dirk A. Moses thus sees the law of genocide as an attempt at achieving “permanent security.”⁴⁰

³⁴ Outline, in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folder 2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

³⁵ Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 16-17, 45.

³⁶ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 66, [URL](#).

³⁷ Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1, 9, 17.

³⁹ Fowler, “The Holocaust, Rwanda, and the Category of Genocide,” 219; Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 16-17; Alexander Hinton, *It Can Happen Here: White Power and the Rising Threat of Genocide in the US* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2021), 135, [URL](#).

⁴⁰ Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 44-45.

By limiting the definition of genocide in international law, the UN simultaneously compromised the effectiveness of the Genocide Convention itself. Dirk A. Moses argues that the “political problem” of genocide is “founded on a conceptual one:” how its limited legal definition “distorts our thinking” about what constitutes civilian destruction.⁴¹ Once genocide became understood in terms of international human rights law, he explains, public and academic discourse “tied genocide to the language of power.”⁴² As a result, the Convention’s ambiguous language makes claiming even the most commonly seen forms of genocide very difficult.⁴³ Conceptually, economic oppression forces people into genocidal “conditions of life,” as listed in Article 2(c); however, P. Sean Morris and Dirk A. Moses point out, ambiguous legal rhetoric complicates the process of “testing” for deliberate “intention” behind economic genocide and other structural means of death.⁴⁴ Helen Fein suggests that nations might instead construe “the processes leading to genocide by attrition” as “unintended consequences” to avoid accountability.⁴⁵ The Convention therefore creates what P. Sean Morris sees as “a fundamental crack” between how to define genocide and “how to bring perpetrators to justice” under international law.⁴⁶ Ironically, Achille Mbembe states, human rights law permits the international community to show “indifference” toward “objective signs of cruelty;” it suggests that states bear no responsibility for committing economic genocide, which, Helen Fein adds, compromises justice for its many victims.⁴⁷

1.4 Economic Genocide, an Intervention

⁴¹ Ibid., 1, 7.

⁴² Ibid., 33.

⁴³ Ibid., 480-481.

⁴⁴ Morris, “Economic Genocide Under International Law,” 19, 23; Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 33-34.

⁴⁵ Helen Fein, “Genocide by Attrition, 1939-1993: The Warsaw Ghetto, Cambodia, and Sudan,” *Health and Human Rights* 2:2 (1997): 13, [URL](#).

⁴⁶ Morris, “Economic Genocide Under International Law,” 18.

⁴⁷ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 38; Fein, “Genocide by Attrition, 1939-1993,” 17.

In recent years, however, scholars have reexamined the Genocide Convention's language, seeking to expand the definition once again by thinking outside of the confines of legal rhetoric. Many experts argue that Article 2(c) explicitly applies to environments that facilitate death. Helen Fein and Lauren Berlant, for example, emphasize that "structural" oppression has long-term consequences which can destroy a population by "undermining" its "physical and mental health" over time.⁴⁸ While destructive environments do not cause "time-framed...traumatic events" like the Holocaust, Lauren Berlant stresses that they gradually deplete populations through daily "repetitions" of violence.⁴⁹ Achille Mbembe reiterates that, although these "small massacres" do not individually cause genocide, they collectively have a genocidal impact over time.⁵⁰ Achille Mbembe, Lauren Berlant, and Dirk A. Moses explain how the ordinariness of structural oppression makes such forms of genocide less noticeable, as a constant pattern of deaths is much more forgettable than a mass murder.⁵¹ However, other scholars argue that Article 2(c) "makes clear" that genocide does not necessarily connote immediate destruction, as genocidal "conditions of life" can gradually and indirectly "bring about" a group's "physical destruction."⁵²

As a result, these scholars often interpret Article 2(c) to mean economic techniques of genocide, specifically how systematic socioeconomic oppression forces certain groups into destructive life conditions. Lauren Berlant emphasizes that capitalism relies on "structural subordination" and in turn the "mass physical attenuation" of human labor.⁵³ This "sacrificial

⁴⁸ Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33:4 (Summer 2007): 760, [URL](#); Fein, "Genocide by Attrition, 1939-1993," 30.

⁴⁹ Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," 759.

⁵⁰ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 38.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 38; Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," 759-760; Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 507.

⁵² Robert Johnson and Paul S. Leighton, "Black Genocide? Preliminary Thoughts on the Plight of America's Poor Black Men," *Journal of African American Men* 1:2 (Fall 1995), 5, [URL](#); Fein, "Genocide by Attrition, 1939-1993," 11; United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*.

⁵³ Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," 754.

economy,” Achille Mbembe asserts, effectively commits “organized destruction” by “cheapening ...the price of life.”⁵⁴ Robert Johnson and Paul S. Leighton note how the “systematic degradation” of laborers drives their “material impoverishment,” which accounts to genocide when it threatens a group’s health or ability to survive.⁵⁵ Such economic deprivation makes certain groups vulnerable to genocidal conditions by impairing their access to necessary resources or denying their right to food and adequate shelter.⁵⁶ P. Sean Morris therefore insists that “a linkage must be made between genocide” as it is defined in Article 2(c) of the Genocide Convention and “its root economic causes.”⁵⁷ In determining salaries and working conditions, capitalist systems actively engage in calculating genocidal conditions of life, which he sees as proof of “intent.”⁵⁸

Furthermore, early drafts of Lemkin’s writings confirm that he conceptualized economic genocide in terms of not only numerous disciplines but also the Genocide Convention itself. In “Poland 1915,” Lemkin explicitly mentioned economic genocide by name: “Although the draft convention makes no mention of ‘economic’ genocide, I am including the following example in my research, since I feel it should fit in somewhere. If the drafted convention doesn’t cover it, perhaps there is need of a further category under Art. I, 2) 1. D) – the purposes of the deprivations of means of living.”⁵⁹ Here, he explicitly recognized the limitations of the Convention’s definition, arguing that the study of economic genocide is important *because* the UN failed to recognize it under international human rights law. Lemkin described genocide as “a gradual process” which “may begin with...economic displacement” or oppression.⁶⁰ In his historical case studies, he listed

⁵⁴ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 38.

⁵⁵ Johnson and Leighton, “Black Genocide? Preliminary Thoughts on the Plight of America’s Poor Black Men,” 5-6.

⁵⁶ Fein, “Genocide by Attrition, 1939-1993,” 12, 32.

⁵⁷ Morris, “Economic Genocide Under International Law,” 23.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁹ “Poland 1915,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folder 16, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁶⁰ “The Concept of Genocide in Sociology,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folder 2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

“slavery,” “taxes,” “deprivation of livelihood,” and “flogging...and killing” in occupational environments as genocidal “conditions of life,” a phrase derived directly out of Article 2(c); he also listed “greed” as a cause and “debt” as a technique of genocide, with “economic destruction” taking place in the aftermath.⁶¹ Furthermore, Lemkin explained how such conditions can lead to “the gradual disintegration of health and mass death” such as through “disease,” “starvation,” and “prevention of birth.”⁶² P. Sean Morris thus calls on scholars to give Lemkin “philosophical credit” for what would become the modern theory of economic genocide.⁶³

Legal experts, medical professionals, and interdisciplinary scholars have since expanded upon Lemkin’s work, developing new terminology to conceptualize economic genocide outside of the terms of the Genocide Convention. Helen Fein uses the phrase *genocide by attrition* to describe the gradual destruction of a population living and working in conditions that cause starvation, overcrowding, exhaustion, and disease.⁶⁴ The word ‘attrition’ speaks to Lauren Berlant’s idea of “survival as *slow death*,” specifically how the “physical wearing out” or “deterioration” of a population over time has a genocidal impact [my italicization].⁶⁵ In that same vein, Achille Mbembe poses that capitalism forces laborers into a constant “*state of injury*,” only keeping them alive so long as their “labor is needed and used.”⁶⁶ P. Sean Morris underscores that the Convention could “quantify” *economic genocide* by tracking the implementation of “economic policies and motives” which create conditions of life that result in widespread displacement and killings.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Outline of case studies, in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folders 6-16, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁶² Book project description, in Raphael Lemkin, *Introduction to the Study of Genocide*, reel 3, box 2, folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY; Outline of case studies, in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folders 6-16, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁶³ Morris, “Economic Genocide Under International Law,” 22.

⁶⁴ Fein, “Genocide by Attrition, 1939-1993,” 31.

⁶⁵ Berlant, “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency),” 754.

⁶⁶ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 75.

⁶⁷ Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 33.

Therefore, he argues, the accepted scope of the Convention should be expanded so as to explicitly recognize economic means of genocide.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Studying (Economic) Genocide Through Historical Case Studies

Throughout his unpublished papers, Lemkin stressed the significance of studying economic genocide, recognizing knowledge gaps in both international law and academia. He thus intended for his forthcoming book project *Introduction to the Study of Genocide* to develop “a new angle of economic research,” which to his knowledge, had “never before been fully investigated.”⁶⁸ While “the draft convention makes no mention of ‘economic’ genocide,” Lemkin also made a point of “including” economic forms in his research, feeling that “it should fit in somewhere.”⁶⁹ As such, Lemkin studied economic genocide across a wide variety of non-legal disciplines, including economics, psychology, and sociology. For example, in “The Concept of Genocide in Sociology,” Lemkin suggested that individual participant research could provide insight into the connections between “occupation,” “physical and mental health,” and “socio-economic status.”⁷⁰ In his debut article “Genocide,” Lemkin cited “examples” of genocide throughout history to explain the term to the general public for the first time.⁷¹ His book project later outlined historical case studies on nearly “every case of genocide in antiquity, middle ages, and modern times,” many of which recognize the economic means of death.⁷² Lemkin therefore called on researchers to examine “economic factors as motivating forces in the destruction of human groups throughout history.”⁷³

⁶⁸ Book project description, in Raphael Lemkin, *Introduction to the Study of Genocide*, reel 3, box 2, folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁶⁹ “Poland 1915,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folder 16, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁷⁰ “The Concept of Genocide in Sociology,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folder 2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁷¹ Lemkin, “Genocide,”

⁷² Book project description, in Raphael Lemkin, *Introduction to the Study of Genocide*, reel 3, box 2, folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁷³ Ibid.

Adopting Lemkin’s approach, this thesis presents a relevant historical case study through which to evaluate economic genocide and expand upon current scholarship: the public health crisis facing African Americans living and working in segregated Chicago, Illinois during the twentieth century. Under racist Jim Crow laws, Black residents were victims of not only deep-seated poverty—reinforced by low-paying jobs and high living expenses—but also widespread environmental injustices, such as congested housing and dangerous industrial conditions. This structural economic oppression and subhuman standard of living unsurprisingly gave rise to high rates of disease, chronic illness, and death amongst predominantly Black communities.⁷⁴ Within a segregated hospital system, African Americans were also consistently denied of the healthcare needed to address their health issues.⁷⁵ As such, Provident Hospital opened as a Black-led institution to offer South Side residents the care that was not afforded to them at white hospitals. However, as H. L. Harris, Jr. observed in 1927, disinvestment resulted in “a woeful, almost criminal, lack of hospital facilities, free clinics, and dispensaries.”⁷⁶ The resulting racial differences in morbidity and mortality rates confirmed that Black Chicagoans had a much lower life expectancy their white counterparts.⁷⁷ This case study therefore evaluates what constitutes economic genocide by exploring how racism and economic oppression force Black Chicagoans into destructive conditions of life that result in widespread, unaddressed illness and death.

This history of economic suffering has long-term impacts which still shape the state of Black health across the United States today. Alyssa G. Robillard et al. explains how economic oppression instills an cyclical “burden of death and disease” on Black communities: poor health

⁷⁴ Robert R. Gioielli, *Environmental Activism and the Urban Crisis: Baltimore, St. Louis, Chicago* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2014), [URL](#).

⁷⁵ Douglas C. Ewbank, “History of Black Mortality and Health before 1940,” *The Milbank Quarterly* 65:1 (1987): 100, [URL](#).

⁷⁶ H. L. Harris, Jr. “Negro Mortality Rates in Chicago,” *Social Service Review* 1:1 (Mar. 1927): 60, [URL](#).

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Schlabach, “The Influenza Epidemic and Jim Crow Public Health Policies and Practices in Chicago, 1917-1921,” *The Journal of African American History* 104 (January 2019), [URL](#).

originates from economic suffering and ultimately *ensures* continued economic deprivation by “restrict[ing]” Black people’s ability to work.⁷⁸ Sociological research shows that a large number of African Americans develop chronic—and often disabling—health conditions during their lifetime, such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Elgie McFayden Jr. adds, Black people are more likely to die from such illnesses than whites with the same diagnosis.⁸⁰ As a result, health studies consistently find “grossly disproportionate” racial differences in morbidity, mortality, and life expectancy rates.⁸¹ Some medical professionals, state governments, and even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have declared racism a public health crisis in the United States.⁸² However, there has been little to no research on the relationship between African American health and genocide. This thesis begins to fill that knowledge gap by folding medical research into human rights discourse, allowing quantitative medical data to supplement the qualitative nature of Black Chicagoans’ lived experiences.

2.2 The African American Struggle for Human Rights

In order to analyze local manifestations of economic genocide in Chicago, this case study also considers African American activists’ adoption of a human rights agenda across the United States during the twentieth century. In 1951, just three short years after the ratification of the

⁷⁸ Alyssa G. Robillard et al., “Expanding the African-American Studies Paradigm to Include Health: a Novel Approach to Promoting Health Equity,” *Journal of African American Studies* 19:1 (March 2015): 96, [URL](#); Johnson and Leighton, “Black Genocide? Preliminary Thoughts on the Plight of America’s Poor Black Men,” 5.

⁷⁹ Mark D. Hayward et al., “The Significance of Socioeconomic Status in Explaining the Racial Gap in Chronic Health Conditions,” *American Sociological Review* 65:6 (Dec. 2000): 910, [URL](#); Elgie McFayden, Jr., “Key Factors Influencing Health Disparities Among African Americans,” *Race, Gender & Class* 16:3 (2009): 120, [URL](#).

⁸⁰ McFayden, Jr., “Key Factors Influencing Health Disparities Among African Americans,” 121.

⁸¹ See Johnson and Leighton, “Black Genocide? Preliminary Thoughts on the Plight of America’s Poor Black Men,” 16; Hayward et al., “The Significance of Socioeconomic Status in Explaining the Racial Gap in Chronic Health Conditions;” McFayden, Jr., “Key Factors Influencing Health Disparities Among African Americans.”

⁸² Beverly J. Vandiver, “Message from Editor in Chief: Racism as Public Health Crisis,” *The Association of Black Psychologists* 46:5 (Oct. 2020), [URL](#); Annie J. Rohan and Kathleen Rice Simpson, “Black Lives Matter: COVID, Crisis, and Color,” *The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing* 46:1 (Jan./Feb. 2021): 5, [URL](#); Delan Devakumar et al., “Racism, the public health crisis we can no longer ignore,” *Lancet* 395:10242 (June 2020): e112-e113, [URL](#); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Racism is a Serious Threat to the Public’s Health,” *Minority Health*, [URL](#).

UDHR and Genocide Convention, the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) published *We Charge Genocide*, a petition that found the United States guilty of committing numerous forms of genocide against African Americans. The petition provided over 150 pages of evidence showing how lynching, racial violence, police brutality, and structural oppression across the nation constituted genocide according to the Convention.⁸³ The CRC explicitly charged the United States with “economic genocide,” explaining how segregated economies caused Black people to struggle for survival with low incomes under dangerous working and living conditions.⁸⁴ Carol Anderson reiterates these findings, estimating that around 32,000 African Americans died from work-related diseases in the twentieth century from insufficient income and healthcare.⁸⁵ Using terminology straight out of the Convention, the CRC contended that “low pay, bad housing, ill-health, and lack of education” facilitated African Americans’ “*deliberate* physical destruction.”⁸⁶ This economic distress ultimately “deprived” Black people “on an average of nearly eight years of life” compared to their white counterparts.⁸⁷ Carol Anderson thus takes issue with scholars who misrepresent civil rights as the ultimate “‘prize’ for black equality,” as African Americans originally demanded social, political, *and* economic rights.⁸⁸

As Black Americans increasingly showed interest in human rights, the United States sought to ensure that the Genocide Convention would be legally ineffective to avoid international scrutiny. Lemkin’s papers confirm the United States’ unrelenting resistance to ratifying the law of

⁸³ Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1951), [URL](#).

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 5, 125-132.

⁸⁵ Carol Anderson, “Bleached Souls and Red Negroes: The NAACP and Black Communists in the Early Cold War, 1948-1952,” in *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988*, ed. Brenda Gayle Plummer (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 95.

⁸⁶ Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide*, 132.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 46-47.

⁸⁸ Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1, 3.

genocide, creating entire folders dedicated to writings on the “U.S. and the Genocide Convention” and correspondence with the U.S. Committee for a United Nations Genocide Convention regarding its reservations.⁸⁹ In 1950, *The New York Times* reported that the Senate Foreign Relation subcommittee agreed to ratify the Convention with four “‘understandings’...designed to quiet fears.”⁹⁰ In the midst of the Cold War, Lemkin recognized that U.S. delegates did not want the UN to serve as a platform from which the Soviet Union could scrutinize the United States’ human rights abuses.⁹¹ Carol Anderson emphasizes that these reservations preserved domestic jurisdiction at the expense of legal accountability to not only block the creation of an international enforcement mechanism but, more importantly, “discourage African Americans from appealing to the UN.”⁹² Both *CBS News* and *The New York Times* reported that opposition in the Senate almost entirely arose out of fears that the Convention could become “a potential instrument against the techniques of racial discrimination” in the United States.⁹³

From 1948 to 1950, Lemkin consistently corresponded with Senate committees, American journalists, and U.S. governmental officials who feared that domestic racism would constitute genocide.⁹⁴ He understood that African American activists “frighten away the southern Santas from ratification” by charging the United States with “committing Genocide on the Negroes.”⁹⁵ In order to convince this racist and anti-Communist government to ratify the Convention, Lemkin

⁸⁹ Raphael Lemkin, in box 1, folder 3 and box 3, folder 6, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁹⁰ “Approval of Pact on Genocide Urged,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), April 13, 1950, in Raphael Lemkin, reel 1, box 1, folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁹¹ Raphael Lemkin to Gertrude Samuels, 7 Dec. 1951, in Raphael Lemkin, reel 1, box 1, folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁹² Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 133.

⁹³ “Charles Collingwood – CBS – September 2, 1950, 11pm,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 1, box 1, folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY; “Approval of Pact on Genocide Urged,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), April 13, 1950, in Raphael Lemkin, reel 1, box 1, folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁹⁴ Reel 1, box 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁹⁵ Raphael Lemkin to Gertrude, 6 Jun. 1950, in Raphael Lemkin, reel 1, folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

published newspaper editorials that denounced genocide in the USSR and denied genocide in the United States.⁹⁶ William L. Patterson, the author of *We Charge Genocide*, publicly criticized Lemkin's change of heart, emphasizing that his "anti-Soviet opinions proved of more significance to the *Times* than the words he had written into the Genocide Convention."⁹⁷ Douglas Irvin-Erickson thus argues that Lemkin's international political goals lead him to betray "his own universalist values," further confirming the politicization of the term.⁹⁸

While there is no record of Lemkin explicitly declaring American racism a genocide, his private papers suggest that he believed otherwise. Douglas Irvin-Erickson points out that Lemkin's manuscripts contain none of the "racist sentiments" included in his newspaper articles around the same time; instead, they "advance a different argument, that the treatment of... 'negroes' throughout US history was consistent with his conception of genocide."⁹⁹ In "The Concept of Genocide in Sociology," Lemkin saw racial difference as a "fiction" propagated by the United States to justify forcing Black Americans into a "common socio-economic status" for purposes of exploitation.¹⁰⁰ Here, Lemkin implicitly explored the concept of economic genocide in recognizing that economic oppression served as the foundation for racism in the United States. Furthermore, Lemkin outlined a case study on Native American genocide for his forthcoming book, listing "greed," "slavery," "starvation," and outright "killing" as just some of the many markers of genocide.¹⁰¹ These findings reiterate the importance of evaluating genocide outside the confines of the Convention and the human rights politics surrounding it.

⁹⁶ Irvin-Erickson, *Raphaël Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide*, 14.

⁹⁷ William L. Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers Co., 1971), 191.

⁹⁸ Irvin-Erickson, *Raphaël Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide*, 14.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ "The Concept of Genocide in Sociology," in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folder 2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

¹⁰¹ "Indians," in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folders 6, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

2.3 Thinking Outside of the Genocide Convention

Given the Genocide Convention's structural flaws, Lemkin developed an additional vocabulary of genocide which accounts for economic forms of destruction not explicitly included in the legal definition. Lemkin outlined his historical case studies against a list of genocidal "categories," which draws on the language of the Convention *and* includes new terminology (Fig. 1).¹⁰² By evaluating genocide through historical case studies, Dirk A. Moses explains, Lemkin was able to "look beyond the confines of our inherited legal...categories."¹⁰³ For example, Lemkin considered the genocidal nature of *culture conflict* and *cultural losses*, which speaks to his early insistence that cultural genocide be included in the final draft of the Convention.¹⁰⁴ This thesis, in particular, explores how many of Lemkin's categories both explicitly and implicitly cover the driving causes and manifestations of economic genocide. Like *conditions of life, aftermath* recognizes that not all genocides result in the immediate, Nazi-like destruction of a population; instead, structural genocides might cause "disease," the "depopulation of cities," and "destruction of trade" within a group. These phenomena not only describe many of the long-term effects of economic genocide—in Lemkin's words, they explicitly recognize how the "disintegration of...the economic existence of national groups" results in the subsequent "destruction of the...health...of the individuals belonging to such groups."¹⁰⁵ In listing "greed," "racial hatred," and "power considerations" as possible *motivations* of genocide, Lemkin recognized that "economic conditions" often play "a dominant role in ethnic persecutions and genocide."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² "CATEGORIES," in Raphael Lemkin, Reel 3, Box 2, Folder 1, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

¹⁰³ Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 46.

¹⁰⁴ Leora Bilsky and Rachel Klagsbrun, "The Return of Cultural Genocide?," *European Journal of International Law* 29:2 (May 2018): 388, [URL](#).

¹⁰⁵ Lemkin in Martin Shaw, *What is Genocide?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2015), 82.

¹⁰⁶ "Genocide in Economics," in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 3, folders 1-2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

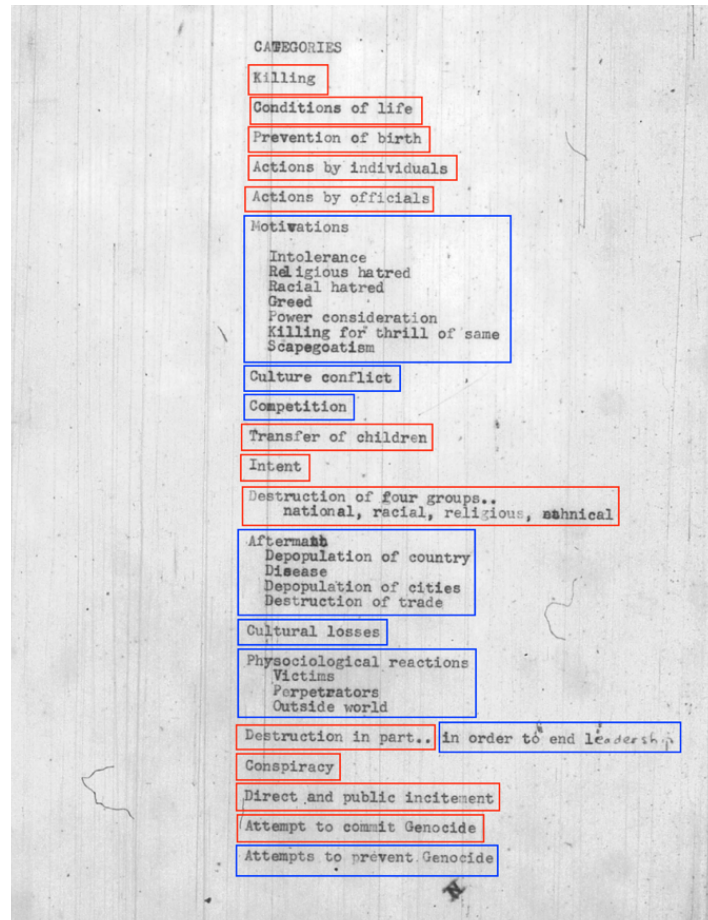


Figure 1: Raphael Lemkin’s outline of genocidal categories, with the language of the Genocide Convention boxed in red and new terminology boxed in blue.

Using the lens of economic genocide theory, this thesis draws on Lemkin’s expanded vocabulary of genocide to explore how the Black Chicago press articulated the relationship between economic oppression, illness, and death amongst local residents. My historical analysis examines Black historical newspapers published in Chicago across three time periods: (1) the early twentieth century (1910-1939), (2) WWII and the Holocaust (1939-1945), and (3) the ratification of the Genocide Convention (1946-1951). These newspapers closely tracked economic oppression in Chicago, from job loss, housing issues, and segregation to the Tuberculosis outbreak, healthcare inaccessibility, and mortality rates. The Chicago Black press later reported on the similarities between Nazi brutality and American racism alongside other Black newspapers across the country.

With the creation of the UN, international human rights law provided the Black press with the legal rhetoric to frame racism in the United States as genocide. Collecting my data according to these distinct historical eras enables me to track how the language used to describe Black illness and death in Chicago changed with the ratification of international human rights law. In using this source base, I seek to first and foremost center Black human rights discourse in order to push the boundaries of the Convention and challenge Holocaust-driven genocide studies.

2.4 Locating the Language of Genocide in the Chicago Black Press

This thesis examines the language of African American newspapers to create a rhetorical database from which to determine the markers of economic genocide as experienced and described by African Americans over time. I compiled my source base from two online archival databases: *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers* and *Readex: African American Newspapers*. While these digitized collections contain historical newspapers from a wide variety of places and time periods, I filtered my search to six Black newspapers published in Chicago from 1910-1951 (Table 1). Inspired by Lemkin, I created a list of key search terms for each date range in order to locate the language of economic genocide relevant to each historical time period (Table 2). In selecting this terminology, I drew from economic genocide theory, Lemkin's outline of genocidal categories, the Genocide Convention, and human rights discourse more broadly. The resulting database enabled me to track the evolution of genocidal rhetoric across publications *and* time, specifically how Black newspapers articulated the driving forces, experiences, and long-term impact of economic genocide on African American health in Chicago. Through taking a historical approach, this methodology centers Black voices and experiences in genocide research, thereby conceptualizing genocide outside the limits of the Convention.

Table 1: Names and publication dates of Chicago-based Black historical newspapers consulted per time period.

Early Twentieth Century (1910-1939)	<i>Bags and Baggage</i> (1937-1943), <i>Broad Ax</i> (1899-1927), <i>Metropolitan Post</i> (1938-1939), <i>The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition)</i> (1909-1921), <i>The Chicago Defender (National Edition)</i> (1921-1967)
World War II and the Holocaust (1939-1945)	<i>Bags and Baggage</i> (1937-1943), <i>The Chicago Defender (National Edition)</i> (1921-1967), <i>Chicago Bee</i> (1943-1947)
Ratification of the Genocide Convention (1945-1951)	<i>The Chicago Defender (National Edition)</i> (1921-1967), <i>Chicago Bee</i> (1943-1947)

Table 2: Search terms used to locate relevant articles in online databases per time period.

Early Twentieth Century (1910-1939)	disease, economic, health, mortality, living conditions, working conditions, Provident Hospital, death rate, life, humanity, illness, welfare, discrimination, segregation
World War II and the Holocaust (1939-1945)	Nazi, Hitler, fascism, Jim Crow, segregation, race, Jews, concentration camp, ghetto, conditions, mortality, death, illness, economic, health, destruction, massacre, murder, lynching, prisoners, Hitlerism, innocent, wipe out, extermination, atrocities, hard labor, liberation, gestapo, brutality
Ratification of the Genocide Convention (1945-1951)	human rights, economic, race, Nuremberg Trials, genocide, health, humanitarian, welfare, racial discrimination, convention, United Nations, Roosevelt

This thesis examines a wide variety of Chicago-based Black newspapers that observed and commented on economic means of death. *Metropolitan Post* prided itself in being the Chicago Black Press’s “Intelligent Newspaper,” producing weekly publications for just one year.¹⁰⁷ *Broad Ax* was another local weekly newspaper which sought to ensure that Black Chicagoans received “Society News Published Free.”¹⁰⁸ Other newspapers, however, were dedicated entirely to reporting on the most pressing economic and health-related racial justice issues. *Bags and Baggage*, for example, was a monthly publication that gave voice to the struggles of Black workers

¹⁰⁷ *Metropolitan Post* (Chicago, IL), February 18, 1939: 1, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁰⁸ *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), March 12, 1927: 1, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

in Chicago, proudly displaying the slogan: “Devoted to the Economic and Social Security of the Red Cap Craft” (Fig. 2).¹⁰⁹ *The Chicago Defender* was a regional weekly newspaper catered to both local and national Black audiences. This thesis examines both versions of the newspaper: the *National Edition* and *Big Weekend Edition*. While *The Chicago Defender* mainly provided local news coverage, it also reported on the struggles of urban African American communities around the country.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, *Chicago Bee* brought an international human rights framework to its weekly Sunday newspaper. It began featuring “The Bee Platform” in 1947, publicly declaring its dedication to securing “human rights” for Black Americans (Fig. 3).¹¹¹



Figure 2: Newspaper title and slogan.

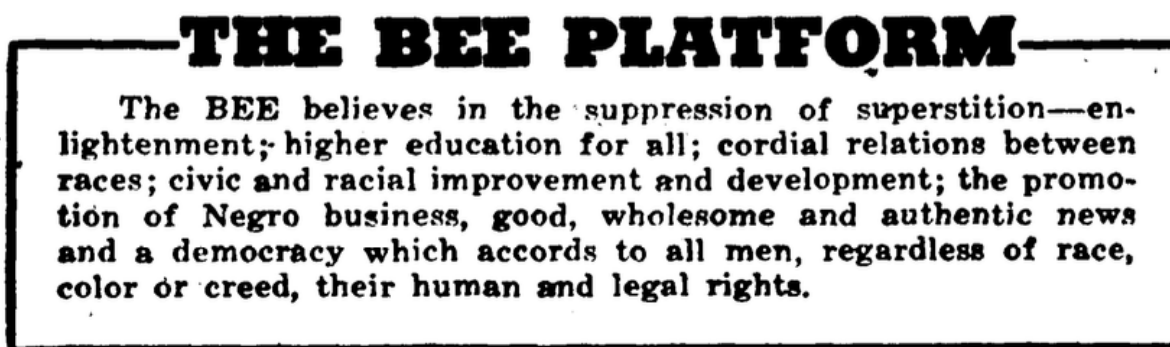


Figure 3: Newspaper political platform.

¹⁰⁹ *Bags and Baggage* (Chicago, IL), August 1, 1937: 1, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹¹⁰ “About Us,” *Chicago Defender*, [URL](#).

¹¹¹ *Chicago Bee* (Chicago, IL), February 16, 1947: 8, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

Following qualitative data collection, this thesis applies Critical Race Theory to various health frameworks to analyze how newspapers articulated the relationship between economic oppression and Black health outcomes in Chicago. Many newspapers highlighted differences in the mortality rates and life expectancy calculations of Black versus white communities. Such “indices of health,” Alyssa G. Robillard et al. explains, show how low socioeconomic status correlates with illness and death.¹¹² Lemkin argued that the “extent of genocide” often “correlated with...economic indices.”¹¹³ The United Health Foundation’s Hardship Index, for example, statistically measures how economic conditions determine community-level healthiness.¹¹⁴ In a piece entitled “Genocide in Economics,” Lemkin noted that economic exploitation is historically rooted in racism.¹¹⁵ This thesis takes such research one step further by using Critical Race Theory to reveal an undeniable connection between economic oppression, health, *and* race.¹¹⁶ As such, the Social Determinants of Health provide a framework through which to examine how structural racism facilitated illness and death by denying Black Chicagoans of (1) economic stability, (2) education access and stability, (3) healthcare access and stability, (4) neighborhood and built environment, and (5) social and community context.¹¹⁷ If these five pillars reflect a state of health equity, then their lack thereof suggest a state of economic genocide.

¹¹² Robillard et al., “Expanding the African-American Studies Paradigm to Include Health,” 95.

¹¹³ “The Concept of Genocide in Sociology,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folder 2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

¹¹⁴ United Health Foundation, “Public Health Impact: Economic Hardship Index,” *America’s Health Rankings*, [URL](#); Johnson and Leighton, “Black Genocide? Preliminary Thoughts on the Plight of America’s Poor Black Men,” 3; Robillard et al., “Expanding the African-American Studies Paradigm to Include Health,” 96.

¹¹⁵ “Genocide in Economics,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 3, folders 1-2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

¹¹⁶ Robillard et al., “Expanding the African-American Studies Paradigm to Include Health,” 98; McFayden, Jr., “Key Factors Influencing Health Disparities Among African Americans,” 124.

¹¹⁷ Commission on Social Determinants of Health, *Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health – Final report of the commission on social determinants of health* (World Health Organization, 2008), [URL](#); Samantha Artiga and Elizabeth Hinton, “Beyond Health Care: The Role of Social Determinants in Promoting Health and Health Equity,” *Kaiser Family Foundation* (May 10, 2018), [URL](#); Susan Egerter et al., *How Social Factors Shape Health: Violence, Social Disadvantage and Health*, Issue Brief Series: Exploring the Social Determinants of Health (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: May 2011), [URL](#).

Chapter 3: A Black Public Health Crisis

3.1 Surviving an Urban, Jim Crow Economy

During the early twentieth century, segregation forced Black people into structural poverty across the United States, turning urban centers into sites of economic exploitation and environmental injustice. The Chicago Black press recognized that “economic pressure falls heaviest upon” Black residents, finding racial disparities in local economic data trends.¹¹⁸ *Broad Ax* reported that “low incomes among Negro families are two to four times as numerous” compared to white families; at the same time, *The Chicago Defender* found that Black unemployment was “four to six times as high as the rate of the city as a whole.”¹¹⁹ As a result, Black Chicagoans often worked long hours of service, held multiple jobs at once, and accepted unpopular positions in dangerous working conditions.¹²⁰ However, given the extortionate costs of housing, food, and clothing in segregated neighborhoods, *The Chicago Defender* reported that the average Black family *still* “falls \$371 below a budget of a decent living.”¹²¹ Newspapers therefore found that the “highest mortality rate is invariably in the industrial sections,” where “poor economic conditions,” “lack of proper food,” and “insufficient rest contributed greatly” to starvation and

¹¹⁸ “Figures Showing High Death Rate Cause Alarm: Mortality Is Double That Of White Race,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), August 21, 1926: A1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹¹⁹ “The Effects of the Economic Position of the Negro on the White Workers,” *Bags and Baggage* (Chicago, IL), September 1, 1937: 7, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); A. Philip Randolph, “What the Universal Economic Depression Has Meant to Members of the Race,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 14, 1933: 8, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams, “Defender Health Editor Looks Back,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 4, 1935: 24, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹²⁰ Dr. W. A. Driver, “Talks on Health, Cleanliness, Proper Living, Sanitation, Etc.: Progress and Poverty or Prevention of the Spread of Tuberculosis,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), April 10, 1915: 4, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); “The Beast of Burden,” *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 10, 1915: 2, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); Williams, “Defender Health Editor Looks Back.”

¹²¹ Randolph, “What the Universal Economic Depression Has Meant to Members of the Race.”

the spread of disease.¹²² The lack of economic opportunity afforded to Black Chicagoans not only compromised their health but also rendered them unable to improve it.¹²³

These economic constraints forced Black families to live in low-income housing in segregated areas, which newspapers often likened to living conditions in Nazi Germany. In 1939, *The Chicago Defender* described European Jews as “ghetto (segregated districts) dwellers,” using the language of Jim Crow to explain the nature of fascism.¹²⁴ At the same time, news of Jewish persecution in Nazi Germany made local newspapers reflective on racial oppression at home. *The Chicago Defender* emphasized that Black Americans have “‘always known’” the Nazi ghetto—“‘sometimes by law, always by custom.’”¹²⁵ Poet Langston Hughes empathized with Polish Jews who “lived in ghettos away from the rest of the people,” as “that is how I, a Negro, live in Cleveland.”¹²⁶ *The Chicago Defender* even argued that Black-only housing in Chicago was “more...dilapidated and disease-ridden than the worst central European slums.”¹²⁷ As such, local newspapers evoked the imagery of Nazi concentration camps to underscore the degree of suffering in segregated neighborhoods.¹²⁸ *The Chicago Defender*, for example, featured an image of a

¹²² “The Beast of Burden;” “Tuberculosis, If Treated In Its Early Stages, Can Be Cured, Says Authority,” *Metropolitan Post* (Chicago, IL), January 21, 1939: 9, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); “With the Magazines: ‘Negro Workers’ Children,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 22, 1933: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “Melange,” *Bags and Baggage* (Chicago, IL), October 1, 1937: 1, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹²³ Carter G. Woodson, “The Negro In Our History,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 26, 1923: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹²⁴ William L. Patterson, “The Sad Case of Poland,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 30, 1939: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹²⁵ Lucius C. Harper, “Dustin’ off the News: What One Man Found Out In Our Democracy,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)*, May 23, 1942: 1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹²⁶ Langston Hughes, “Here to Yonder,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 15, 1944: 12, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “Other Papers Say—The Inevitable Mr. Gaines (The Missouri Student),” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 7, 1939: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹²⁷ Edward Toles, “Writer For London Daily Raps Jim Crow In America,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), April 1, 1944: 5, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹²⁸ “Gary Ridicules ‘Crude’ Housing Project: Say Buildings Resemble Big Penitentiary,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), October 12, 1940: 7, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); Earl Conrad, “Yesterday And Today: What’s Worst Section of South,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL),

nearby housing project that “looks more like a concentration camp” than a low-rent residence (Fig. 4).¹²⁹ For Black Americans struggling to survive in segregated conditions, news of racial persecution abroad was an old story at home.

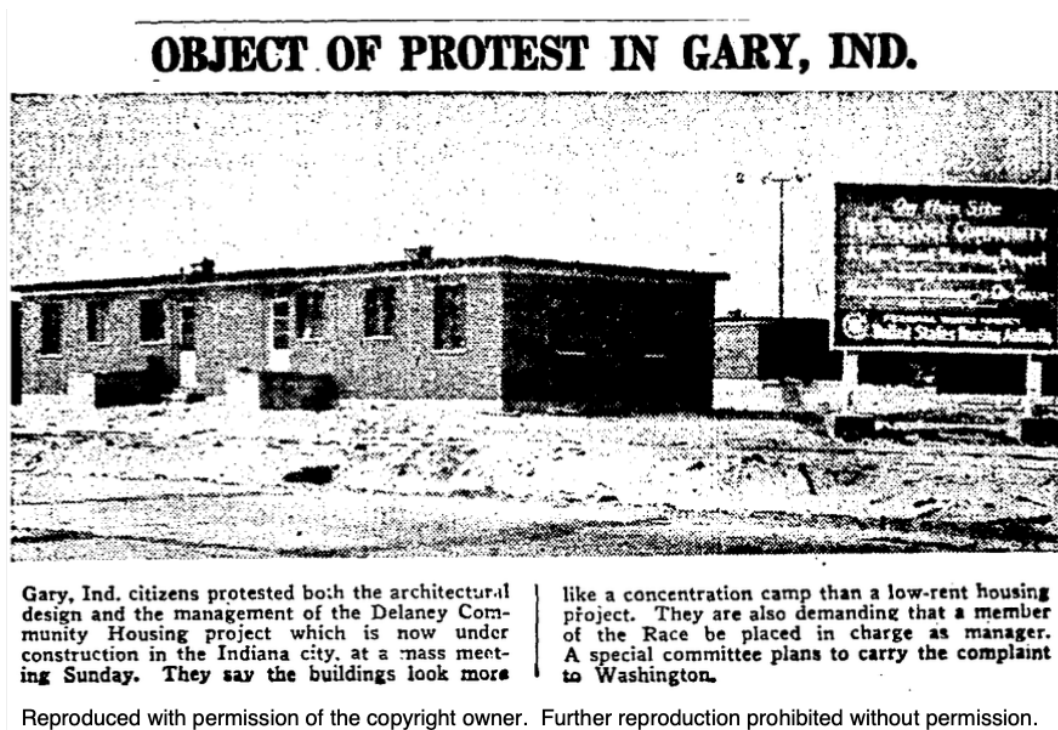


Figure 4: Photograph of housing project with newspaper article comparing it to concentration camp.

3.2 Recognizing Genocidal Conditions of Life

As tuberculosis spread rapidly among Black residents, local newspapers came to see economic oppression as the driving force of widespread illness and death in segregated, poverty-stricken areas. *Broad Ax* described the “environment” as “an all important predisposing factor” to the spread of disease, describing “unsanitary, overcrowded” conditions as “breeding places for

June 16, 1945: 17, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Where Do We Live, and Why?,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 28, 1939: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹²⁹ “Object of Protest in Gary, IND.,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), October 12, 1940: 5, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

tuberculosis.”¹³⁰ Many Black people worked in such conditions, laboring for long hours in poorly ventilated workshops and factories on a daily basis. As a result, *Broad Ax*’s “statistics about occupational mortality from tuberculosis” found that Black wage-earners succumbed to the disease at a particularly high rate.¹³¹ The newspapers also recognized that low-income housing “added to the menace of health,” being located in “slum areas” where deteriorating property and congested living conditions facilitated the spread of tuberculosis.¹³² In naming tuberculosis “A Disease of the Poor,” *Broad Ax* explicitly recognizes that poor economic status increased susceptibility to illness and death.¹³³ The newspapers further pointed out how economic disparities directly correlated with racial disparities in local public health data. In 1932, *The Chicago Defender* emphasized that “the Race death rate from tuberculosis was 3½ times that of the white rate,” particularly in “Jim Crow areas” where Black residents were “discriminated against in the receipt of relief and industrial care.”¹³⁴ *Broad Ax* therefore recognized that “segregation means more poverty, more tuberculosis,” and ultimately “more misery.”¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Driver, “Talks on Health, Cleanliness, Proper Living, Sanitation, Etc.: Progress and Poverty or Prevention of the Spread of Tuberculosis;” Dr. W. A. Driver, “Talks on Health, Cleanliness, Proper Living, Sanitation, Etc.: Tuberculosis,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), January 1, 1916: 5, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Health Notes,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), October 18, 1913: 2, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “30,000 Die Annually From Tuberculosis,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 11, 1935: 4, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹³¹ “Will Organize Working Men in Tuberculosis Fight: Association of Employers and Employees Proposed with Fund for Consumptive Workers,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), July 15, 1916: 2, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Health Notes;” Driver, “Talks on Health, Cleanliness, Proper Living, Sanitation, Etc.: Tuberculosis.”

¹³² “The Effects of the Economic Position of the Negro on the White Workers;” “Colorful News Movies By The Cameraman,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), November 6, 1926: 3, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “A Baby Aristocracy,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), May 24, 1919: 4, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); Horace B. Clayton, “Views and Reviews: Negroes Live in Chicago,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 8, 1938: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹³³ Driver, “Talks on Health, Cleanliness, Proper Living, Sanitation, Etc.: Progress and Poverty or Prevention of the Spread of Tuberculosis.”

¹³⁴ “Race High In Tuberculosis Death Rate,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), August 3, 1935: 2, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹³⁵ Driver, “Talks on Health, Cleanliness, Proper Living, Sanitation, Etc.: Progress and Poverty or Prevention of the Spread of Tuberculosis.”

Local newspapers recognized genocidal *conditions of life* decades before the ratification of the Genocide Convention, developing their own vocabulary to describe the environmental and economic determinants of Black illness and death. Through observing local health trends, *Broad Ax* concluded that the “rate of mortality...may be predicted” among populations “subject to similar climatic influences,” such as “similar...occupations.”¹³⁶ *The Chicago Defender* similarly found that the “sanitary condition of the home has much to do with the health of infants.”¹³⁷ News coverage on the unsanitary living conditions and slave labor which occurred at Nazi concentration camps allowed the Black Chicago press to expand upon this vocabulary of economic genocide.¹³⁸ *The Chicago Defender* noticed that the health and economic status of Jews and Black Chicagoans were “limited and circumscribed by similar circumstances,” emphasizing that Jewish prisoners “succumb just as much to the ravages of contagious diseases as our people.”¹³⁹ It in turn described “the poor health condition” of Black Chicagoans as a “vicious by-product of the low economic status of our people.”¹⁴⁰ In his case study outlines, Lemkin noticed that the spread of disease often occurs in the aftermath of genocides when (1) a group is subjected to economic oppression, (2) widespread illness subsequently targets that group, and (3) that group is then denied the healthcare needed to address it. The Chicago Black press actively reported on this phenomenon, recognizing that *structural* economic means of death drove *structural* Black health issues.

¹³⁶ “Memorable Game of Cards: Said to Have Suggested System of Life Insurance to Eminent French Mathematician,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), May 17, 1919: 2, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹³⁷ “Sunlight, Fresh Air, But The Most Important Is Milk,” *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition)* (Chicago, IL), August 7, 1915: 4, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹³⁸ “Chicago GI Tells Horrors Of Nazi ‘Murder Factory’ Prison Camp,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 12, 1945: 7, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “First 99th P.W. Loses 30 Pounds In Nazi Prison,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), August 11, 1945: 4, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); Patterson, “The Sad Case of Poland.”

¹³⁹ “Tuberculosis And The Underprivileged,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), February 24, 1940: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁴⁰ “About Your Health,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), October 29, 1938: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

During the first half of the twentieth century, local newspapers explored how the Black public health crisis in Chicago virtually facilitated racial destruction over time. *The Chicago Defender*, *Metropolitan Post*, and *Broad Ax* compiled data from medical studies and federal census reports to compare white versus Black health statistics, creating tables to visualize the “startlingly high death rate for members of the Race” across the country (Fig. 5).¹⁴¹ After recognizing these racial patterns of illness and death, newspapers began to investigate “the health of the Negro as a racial problem” linked to structural Jim Crow segregation.¹⁴² *The Chicago Defender* and *Metropolitan Post*, for example, examined how the creation of Provident Hospital, Chicago’s first all-Black medical institution, improved “community health.”¹⁴³ In using this term, the press acknowledged that economic conditions impact health at the community-level *and* in racial terms. *The Chicago Defender* therefore argued that Black mortality rates shed light on the “devastating effect” of racial discrimination on health; they represented “all the short comings of a life abridged by segregation.”¹⁴⁴ This talk of decreased Black life chances explicitly evokes the language of

¹⁴¹ “Figures Showing High Death Rate Cause Alarm: Mortality Is Double That Of White Race;” Dr. W. J. Walls, “Hospitals Greatest Aid to Mankind: Bishop Walls, in Address Before Gathering, Lauds Program of Association,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), August 26, 1933: 10, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “About Your Health;” “Find Child Death Rate Far Too High,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), August 14, 1926: A1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams Talks On Preventative Measures First Aid Remedies Hygienics and Sanitation: Birth and Death Rates Among Afro-Americans;” “Provident Hospital Gives Extra Care To Children’s Health,” *Metropolitan Post* (Chicago, IL), September 10, 1938: 4, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Tuberculosis Death Rate increase Due to Lack of Facilities for Treatment,” *Metropolitan Post* (Chicago, IL), December 31, 1938: 9, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Epochs In Race Progress: Year Book Tells of Afro-Americans Achievements Since Emancipation,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), November 29, 1913: 3, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁴² Louis L. Dublin, “Insurance Executive Explains Why He Believes Race Health Is Improving,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 4, 1935: 24, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁴³ “Urge Nation-Wide War On Our High Death Rate: Communities To Go In For Health Work,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), August 28, 1926: A1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Provident Hospital Women’s Auxiliary Board Members Contribute \$1,000.00 to Fund,” *Metropolitan Post* (Chicago, IL), November 26, 1938: 3, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁴⁴ M. O. Bousfield, “Race Health Is An Important Factor In Community Health, Says Doctor: Sees Death Rate On Decline,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 4, 1935: 24, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

genocide. To *Bags and Baggage*, income figures further affirmed that “poverty...grinds down the Negro” because of “the special racial exploitation to which he is subject.”¹⁴⁵

The following table shows the deaths, exclusive of stillbirths, of infants under one year of age per 1,000 births in selected cities, arranged in the order of decreasing number of deaths for the year 1923:

City	Colored	White
Wilmington, Del.	191	89
Richmond, Va.	177	75
Norfolk, Va.	170	53
Pittsburgh, Pa.	164	93
Louisville, Ky.	153	82
Washington, D. C.	143	71
Cincinnati, Ohio	143	73
Chicago, Ill.	143	94
Indianapolis, Ind.	137	78
Detroit, Mich.	141	81
Philadelphia, Pa.	138	75
Baltimore, Md.	126	75
Omaha, Neb.	122	69
Cleveland, Ohio	123	61
New York, N. Y.	116	65
Boston, Mass.	105	87

Figure 5: Table of Black versus white infant mortality rates in newspaper.

3.3 Fascism as Economic Destruction, In Whole or In Part

In the years leading up to WWII, the Chicago Black press reported on fascism as a system of racial oppression constructed to rationalize and preserve economic hierarchies. *The Chicago Defender* argued that Nazi dictator Adolph Hitler’s “campaign...against the Jews in Germany” served “to get their job and wealth for his followers.”¹⁴⁶ Writing for *Bags and Baggage*, W.E.B. Du Bois further noted that “Nazi domination means the wiping out of all trade union rights” and other economic protections for Jews.¹⁴⁷ In describing greed and racial hatred as the driving forces

¹⁴⁵ “The Effects of the Economic Position of the Negro on the White Workers.”

¹⁴⁶ Herman G. Canady, “Mentality Of Whites, Negroes The Same: Psychologist Writes Study On New Tests,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 19, 1941: 7, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, “We Fight for a Free World... This Or Nothing!: Bond of Ideals, Not Color, Links Negroes And Asiatic Peoples,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 26, 1942: A4, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁴⁷ “Crosswaith Hits Nazi Execution of Norwegian Labor Leaders,” *Bags and Baggage* (Chicago, IL), October 1, 1941: 2, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

of Nazi anti-Semitism, these newspapers explicitly recognized what Lemkin later listed as motivations of genocide (see Fig. 1). *Bags and Baggage* and *The Chicago Defender* thus saw “organized racial discrimination” as one of fascism’s many “by-products,” in which “racial oppression serves as a means of economic oppression.”¹⁴⁸ During WWII, some newspapers even used the word *fascist* to describe economic racism in the United States. *The Chicago Defender* stressed that “Big Business wants fascism for America because it sees the growing revolt against...conditions” that leave most Black people “ill-fed, ill-clothed and ill-housed.”¹⁴⁹ To the Black Chicago press, WWII meant defeating “Jim Crow corporations” and other “home fascists” as well.¹⁵⁰

In his private writings, Lemkin argued that Black Americans’ “racial identity” was “approaching a fiction,” as they were more “united by common socio-economic status.”¹⁵¹ Local newspapers agreed, understanding that low economic status—not biological inferiority—predisposed Black Chicagoans to illness and death. In 1939, *The Chicago Defender* emphasized that “fascist racism is based entirely on false science,” citing anthropological studies which found “no explanation of...innate mental differences” propagandized by Nazi Germany.¹⁵² Years before, *Broad Ax* had already confirmed with doctors “studying the ‘Health Problem of the Negro Child’”

¹⁴⁸ “Discrimination, Inc.!,” *Bags and Baggage* (Chicago, IL), September 1, 1942: 6, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Klan Or Gestapo? Why Take Either: Foremost Negro Author Writes of Devil Hams, Dixie Draws and Axis Dictators,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 26, 1942: A14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁴⁹ William L. Patterson, “Drippings From Other Pens,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), August 12, 1939: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁵⁰ George Seldes, “This Is A War Of Action: War of Action Will Bring Gains For Negro, Says Noted Editor,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 26, 1942: A19, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁵¹ “The Concept of Genocide in Sociology,” in Raphael Lemkin, reel 3, box 2, folder 2, Raphael Lemkin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

¹⁵² Dr. Eugene Holmes, “Spread Of Anti-Semitism Seen Menace To U.S. Battle For Racial Equality,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), June 3, 1944: 11, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); CD(NE)1939.6 “Views And Reviews: Psychologists Criticize ‘Racial’ Psychology,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 7, 1939: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

in the United States that “there is no marked physical inferiority inherent among the Negroes.”¹⁵³ If Black residents were afforded “the same hygiene, sanitation, housing, and working conditions” as white people, *The Chicago Defender* posited, then their health would compare “very favorably” with that of other populations “living in similar environmental conditions.”¹⁵⁴ As such, newspapers inferred that Jim Crow economics made Black Chicagoans more susceptible to illness and death as a *racial group*.¹⁵⁵ *The Chicago Defender* stressed that Black people were not naturally prone to illness; their health only “suffers from miserable conditions forced upon them.”¹⁵⁶ Here, the use of the word ‘force’ raises the question of *intent* and *deliberate* destruction according to the Genocide Convention by suggesting that segregation actively depleted Black health.

¹⁵³ “White And Colored Infants Have No Marked Physical Differences,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), October 30, 1926: 5, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see Canady, “Mentality Of Whites, Negroes The Same: Psychologist Writes Study On New Tests.”

¹⁵⁴ Williams, “Defender Health Editor Looks Back;” “Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams Talks On Preventative Measures First Aid Remedies Hygienics and Sanitation: Death Rate Falling,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), June 24, 1922: 12, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁵⁵ Canady, “Mentality Of Whites, Negroes The Same: Psychologist Writes Study On New Tests;” also see “Melange;” Driver, “Talks on Health, Cleanliness, Proper Living, Sanitation, Etc.: Tuberculosis.”

¹⁵⁶ “Poor Economic Status Causes High Death Rate: Declares Dean Adams Of Howard U. Before Medical Meet,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 5, 1936: 24, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

Chapter 4: Questioning the Fate of the Black Race

4.1 “It is not logical to speak of freedom for Poland and forget Georgia”

At the start of WWII, the Chicago Black press began using the language of Jim Crow and Nazism interchangeably to compare racial persecution at home and abroad. In 1940, *The Chicago Defender* reported that Jews in Hungary were being “jim-crowed,” noting how Nazi policies explicitly “borrow” from American segregation laws.¹⁵⁷ Newspapers in turn inferred that “our anti-Negroism” in the United States “is Nazi,” describing Jim Crow supporters as “the Hitlers of America.”¹⁵⁸ These metaphors served to emphasize the magnitude of Black suffering by presenting Nazi anti-Semitism as comparable with structural racism in the United States. In 1941, *The Chicago Defender* reported that the Philadelphia Navy Yard was labeling Black workers with N badges “in much the same manner as the labels used by Nazis to designate Jews.”¹⁵⁹ While scholars have not confirmed this statement, *The Pittsburgh Courier* and *The New York Age* also reported on it that same day. As such, newspapers came to see Jim Crow economics as “Hitler-like,” criticizing an “American ‘Nazi’ journal” for refusing to support “employment upgrading, wage parity,” and “WPA employment” for Black Chicagoans.¹⁶⁰ The Chicago Black press also identified with racial violence in Nazi Germany, calling American policemen “gestapo” and the Ku Klux

¹⁵⁷ “The Week: Attention! Jews In Hungary – Youth Meets – Figures A Cravath – Dr. Carver Challenged,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 13, 1940: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Hitler Adopts U.S. Jim Crow Laws In Germany: Nazis Adopt U.S. Jim-Crow Rail System: Ape America In Move To Humiliate And Oppress Jewish Citizens,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 7, 1939: 1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁵⁸ “Activities of Women’s National Organizations: Democracy Minus Hypocrisy,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), December 27, 1941: 18, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Under The Lash...: Criticism of Men and Conditions Which Make or Mar The Future of A Race,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), November 15, 1941: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “Release of 500 Martyrs Is Demanded: Editors Plead for Youths Who Struck Against Segregation,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 28, 1940: 13, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁵⁹ “Navy Insists On Race Tag For Workers,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), November 8, 1941: 5, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁶⁰ “Dining Car Employees Make History,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 30, 1939: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); Charley Cherokee, “National Grapevine,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), August 15, 1942: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

Klan “Nazi storm troopers.”¹⁶¹ One poem in *The Chicago Defender* posited that white police officers beat and burned Black people to death “just as the Nazis brutes would do” (Fig. 6).¹⁶²

AT BOWMAN, GA.
I'm told they beat a Negro mother,
'Till her side was broken through;
And then, they beat and bruised another,
Just as Nazi brutes would do.
And why, we ask, was this tormenting?
Listen to the naked truth;
I'm told this torture unrelenting
Was to find her darling youth—
Who ran away to Pennsylvania,
From a Georgia lynching bee;
You know—the Georgian's sport and mania
Is to roast one on a tree.
—WILLIAM HENRY HUFF

Figure 6: Poem in newspaper comparing white racists in the United States to German Nazis.

Newspapers garnered support for the war by portraying Jewish and Black suffering as interrelated, insisting that the risk of racial extermination in Europe threatened Black Chicagoans at home. In 1945, journalists interviewed a Jewish woman who “likens the oppression of the Negro...to the way in which the Nazis treated the Jews,” describing her as “Blonde With A Black Viewpoint.”¹⁶³ *The Chicago Defender* similarly argued that Jews and Black Americans have “a similarity politically,” as “the Negro is...an oppressed minority” in the same way that the “Jewish

¹⁶¹ “Foreign Youths Taught Striking Lesson In D.C. Brand Of Democracy,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 19, 1942: 8, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Release 4 From Jersey ‘Gestapo,’” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), December 5, 1942: 8, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Klan Or Gestapo? Why Take Either: Foremost Negro Author Writes of Devil Hams, Dixie Drawls and Axis Dictators;” “May Probe KKK As ‘5th Column,’” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), June 22, 1940: 2, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁶² William Henry Huff, “Lights and Shadows: At Bowman, GA.,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), October 10, 1942: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁶³ Earl Conrad, “American Viewpoint: Blonde With A Black Viewpoint,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 14, 1945: 11, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “Fisk President Compares Plight Of Race And Jews,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 20, 1940: 9, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

are oppressed Polish national minorities.”¹⁶⁴ By highlighting shared experiences of oppression, these comparisons encouraged Black readers to not only sympathize with Jews but in turn see themselves as *equal* stakeholders in the war on fascism. This call for interracial collaboration, however, was often met with interracial hostilities, as African American anti-Semitism created tensions between Black and Jewish Americans.¹⁶⁵ William L. Patterson therefore stressed “the importance of the Polish issue,” arguing that fighting for Jewish freedom in Nazi Germany “must of necessity help the Negro people.”¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Chicago Black press recognized that fascism put more at risk than just democracy—it threatened the survival of the Jewish race. *The Chicago Defender* thus argued that Black Americans, as the “victim of inordinate persecution” at home, “should be concerned” with “the tragic fate of...Jews who are being systematically exterminated by the Nazis.”¹⁶⁷ Here, the newspaper recognized that racial extermination occurs through structural means, such as economic oppression; it also understood that genocide happens at the *group* or *populational* level, language which later made it into the Genocide Convention’. While newspapers could not yet comprehend the magnitude of the Holocaust, they did collectively realize that something *very different* was happening to European Jewry.

4.2 Economic Means of Black Extermination

¹⁶⁴ Patterson, “The Sad Case of Poland.”

¹⁶⁵ Lee Sigelman, “Blacks, Whites, and Anti-Semitism,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 36:4 (1995): 654, [URL](#); Ryan D. King and Melissa F. Weiner, “Group Position, Collective Threat, and American Anti-Semitism,” *Social Problems* 54:1 (February 2007): 47, [URL](#).

¹⁶⁶ Patterson, “The Sad Case of Poland;” also see “Speakers Urge Minorities to Fight Fascism,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 6, 1939: 22, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁶⁷ “Peace And Justice For All,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), December 26, 1942: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see Lucius C. Harper, “Dustin’ off the News: Men Who Are Prejudiced Can’t Cure Prejudice,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 1, 1943: 1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); Lucius C. Harper, “Dustin’ off the News: Let’s For Once Agree on a National Policy,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 7, 1940: 1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

Over the course of the war, local newspapers observed how segregation, racial violence, and the obvious disregard for Black life made the United States particularly susceptible to fascism and racial extermination. In 1940, *The Chicago Defender* published “Blitz Over Georgia,” a fictional piece that imagined a future of mass execution and enslavement for Black people if the Nazis conquered America.¹⁶⁸ The article served to show that, “without proper protection of the law,” the United States provided “fertile ground for the onswEEPing tide of fascism.”¹⁶⁹ However, the Chicago Black press knew that racial persecution already existed on American soil. *The Chicago Defender* stressed that the American “‘blood-brothers of Hitler’” were already “planning for” the Black man’s “doom,” believing that the United States, like Nazi Germany, “‘has no room / For Cath’lic, Jew or foreign-born or persons dark of face.’”¹⁷⁰ As news broke of Nazi brutalities, journalist Kelly Miller questioned whether Black Americans might also face racial extermination, entitling his piece: “The Plight of the Jewish Minority—Can It Happen Here?”¹⁷¹ *The Chicago Defender* therefore told readers that “we should be concerned...about our rights to live as human beings” in an already-fascist state.¹⁷² In the wake of the Holocaust, American “‘white supremacy’” was defined as a Hitler-like “advocacy of Negro extermination.”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Violet Moten Foster, St. Clair Drake, and Enoc P. Waters, Jr., “‘Blitz Over Georgia,’” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 28, 1940: 1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁶⁹ “‘What of 1939?,”” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 7, 1939: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “‘Our Civil Liberties,”” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), October 7, 1939: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁷⁰ “‘White Supremacy Bloc Kin To Hitler—Browder,”” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 23, 1943: 8, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “‘Lights and Shadows: ‘A Little Bit of Everything’: Our Loyalty Then and Now,”” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 17, 1941: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁷¹ Kelly Miller, “‘Views and Reviews: The Plight of the Jewish Minority—Can It Happen Here?,”” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 21, 1939: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁷² Ishmael P. Flory, “‘Flory Says European Struggle Is Merely Fight Between Three Masters To Rule Colored Slaves,”” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), October 7, 1939: 13, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁷³ Holmes, “‘Spread Of Anti-Semetism Seen Menace To U.S. Battle For Racial Equality;”” also see George F. McCray, “‘The Labor Front: This Is Our War,”” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), February 6, 1943: 7, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

As news broke of the hard labor practices and deplorable living conditions in concentration camps, the Chicago Black press noted that economic exploitation especially facilitated racial extermination in the United States. In 1942, *The Chicago Defender* reported that Jewish people were being forced “to toil like slaves” at German factories, where they “were worked...for 13 hours, on their feet, and without stopping, even for bodily relief.”¹⁷⁴ Newspapers drew on their knowledge of occupational illness and death in Chicago to infer that many European Jews likely died of “slower tortures,” such as starvation and the spread of disease.¹⁷⁵ While the Chicago Black press could not predict the concept of genocide, it *did* follow Lemkin’s way of thinking by observing and commenting on a group-level experience that had always existed. This news coverage drove the Chicago Black press to reflect on the ways in which Black life chances were *also* determined by work capacity and economic survivability.¹⁷⁶ *Broad Ax* explained how “the life of an able-bodied Negro...is worth only the value” which the Jim Crow economy affords it “at a particular time and place.”¹⁷⁷ In twentieth-century Chicago, low wages and unemployment resulted in “economic strangulation,” making it difficult for Black residents to even *survive*.¹⁷⁸ Newspapers therefore concluded that “the black man is only destined for slavery and

¹⁷⁴ “War Information Office Cites Nazi Horrors,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), June 27, 1942: 18, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Chicago GI Tells Horrors Of Nazi ‘Murder Factory’ Prison Camp.”

¹⁷⁵ “War Information Office Cites Nazi Horrors.”

¹⁷⁶ Miller, “Views and Reviews: The Plight of the Jewish Minority—Can It Happen Here?;” A. Philip Randolph, “Should Negroes March On Washington – If So, When?,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 3, 1943: 13, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁷⁷ “Colorful News Movies By The Cameraman,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), September 3, 1927: 3, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “Look for the Hate Axis: Behind the Austin Wadsworth Bill,” *Bags and Baggage* (Chicago, IL), April 1, 1943: 3, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁷⁸ “The Ten Percenters,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 27, 1941: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); McCray, “The Labor Front: This Is Our War;” also see “South Says No, North Says Yes About Migration: Whites Disagree on Benefits; Treat ‘Em Right, North Suggests to Dixie,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 26, 1923: 13, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

extermination,” which, taken together, describe economic genocide.¹⁷⁹ In fact, *The Chicago Defender* recalled, enslaved people’s “refusal to be worked to death” was the *only* reason that “the wholesale extermination of millions of Negroes” had not already occurred centuries ago.¹⁸⁰

4.3 Black Health as Proof of Genocidal Intent

The Chicago Black press explored how the inaccessibility and inadequacy of segregated healthcare effectively functioned to facilitate Black illness and death. In 1938, multiple newspapers noticed how Chicago hospitals admitted white patients “without delay” while “tubercular Negroes must wait from two to four months” despite bed availability.¹⁸¹ *Metropolitan Post* stressed that Provident Hospital, on the other hand, was “notoriously overcrowded,” as it did not have enough space nor facilities to care for tuberculosis patients *or* the local Black population in general.¹⁸² Newspapers clearly understood that racial discrimination was to blame for the woeful lack of Black hospitalization, which in turn prevented early diagnosis and treatment. Furthermore, *Metropolitan Post* found that Black-only medical institutions “lack[ed]...adequate finances” needed to provide “proper medical attention” to even those patients lucky enough to be admitted.¹⁸³ In 1935, *The Chicago Defender* insisted that the University of Chicago had “handicapped” Black

¹⁷⁹ “Lescot Says War Will Aid Black Race,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), February 28, 1942: 5, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁸⁰ “Says South Hates Us,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), November 14, 1942: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁸¹ “Provident Hospital Women’s Auxiliary Board Members Contribute \$1,000.00 to Fund,” *Metropolitan Post* (Chicago, IL), November 26, 1938: 3, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Aid Denied to T.B. Sufferers by Jim Crow: Local Institutions Limit Patients Of The Race Conference Told,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), November 12, 1938: 10, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁸² “Provident Hospital Women’s Auxiliary Board Members Contribute \$1,000.00 to Fund;” “Tuberculosis, If Treated In Its Early Stages, Can Be Cured, Says Authority.”

¹⁸³ “Tuberculosis, If Treated In Its Early Stages, Can Be Cured, Says Authority;” Aaron Johnson, “About Your Health,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), October 29, 1938: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “Aid Denied to T.B. Sufferers by Jim Crow: Local Institutions Limit Patients Of The Race Conference Told.”

doctors by blocking them from getting their necessary training in white institutions.¹⁸⁴ This “policy of jim crowing Race medical students,” it stated, was another example of how segregation drove high Black mortality rates.¹⁸⁵ Newspapers observed that segregation was *designed* to cause illness and increase likelihood of death in two ways: by subjecting Black Chicagoans to (1) a system of economic oppression that caused illness and (2) a compromised healthcare system which ensured that illness resulted in death. In highlighting the *structural* nature of such medical failures, the Chicago Black press implicitly calls into question the *intent* behind them.

Furthermore, newspapers reported that economic conditions not only decreased the life chances of Black adults but also prevented Black births. In 1926, *The Chicago Defender* cited federal census data which showed that the local Black infant mortality rate was “far more than twice as high as it was among whites.”¹⁸⁶ It also pointed out the coinciding Black maternal death rate, tracing it back to a “lack of proper facilities and adequate care for...poor mothers.” Newspapers collectively agreed that “poverty” played “an important factor” in these data trends, as “the baby who belongs to the...‘aristocracy’ had a much better chance of living” regardless of race.¹⁸⁷ In 1919, *Broad Ax* listed job security and a living wage as prerequisites to securing the

¹⁸⁴ M. O. Bousfield, “Race Health an Important Factor in Community Health, Says Doctor: Sees Death Rate On Decline,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 4, 1935: 24, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁸⁵ A. C. MacNeal, “Ask Medical Board Probe in Provident Hospital Jim Crow: Doctors Seeking Big Positions Uphold Segregation,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), February 23, 1935: 13, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Friend Rally to Aid New Hospital Project,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 4, 1930: 3, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see Dr. Louis T. Wright, “Segregated Hospital System Does Race Great Harm Says Dr. Wright: Prominent New York Physician Exposes Jim Crow Set-Up,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), March 9, 1935: 11, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Compare A.M.A to Hitler and Nazi Germany: Policy Of Excluding Race Physicians Costs Many Lives,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 15, 1939: 6, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁸⁶ “Figures Showing High Death Rate Cause Alarm: Mortality Is Double That Of White Race;” also see “About Your Health.”

¹⁸⁷ “Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams: Talks on Preventative Measure, First Aid Remedies, Hygienics and Sanitation: Save Mothers and Babies,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 18, 1926: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “A Baby Aristocracy,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), May 24, 1919: 4, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

healthcare and housing necessary to raise healthy children—none of which were made available to Black Chicagoans living under segregation.¹⁸⁸ As such, the conditions in which Black mothers lived *and* into which Black babies were reared ultimately determined likelihood of survival. *Broad Ax* also attributed deficiencies in the rate of growth amongst Black children to “poor nutrition and unfavorable...economic conditions.”¹⁸⁹

As early as 1914, *The Chicago Defender* noticed that “the death rate of Race persons” tended to “exceed the birth rate” across the country; *Broad Ax* later argued that this phenomenon was a sign that “the Negro race of America is on the wane.”¹⁹⁰ Newspapers recognized that, *because* of segregation, Black health “is hampered from cradle to grave.”¹⁹¹ According to the Convention, there is not enough evidence to trace the intent behind Black illness and death in Chicago back to one perpetrator. The Chicago Black press’s reporting, however, questions this narrow understanding of what constitutes genocidal intent, blaming mass illness and death on racist *systems* created and maintained by society and governments. Just as the Black baby “comes into the world under economic stress,” *Broad Ax* explains, he is virtually destined to suffer and die from it, too—that is, if he manages to survive childhood.¹⁹²

Newspapers ultimately developed their own vocabulary to describe what scholars today understand to be economic genocide, explaining how segregation, economic oppression, and a

¹⁸⁸ “A Baby Aristocracy;” also see “Labor Secretary Gives Infant Mortality Facts,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 19, 1928: A1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁸⁹ “Tabulation of Children’s Year Weighing and Measuring Tests Shows Heights and Weights of American Children,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), January 7, 1922: 1, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁹⁰ David Ward Howe, “The Observation Post: Plan to Renew Fight on Residential Segregation,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 22, 1939: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Colorful News Movies By The Cameraman,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), April 2, 1927: 5, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams Talks On Preventative Measures First Aid Remedies Hygienics and Sanitation: Birth and Death Rates Among Afro-Americans.”

¹⁹¹ “Colorful News Movies By The Cameraman,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), April 23, 1927: 3, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

compromised healthcare system worked hand in hand to gradually destroy the Black race. First, they saw high Black mortality and morbidity rates in Chicago as evidence of *life cut short*. *The Chicago Defender* stressed that “the Negro must plod his long weary way to an equal mortality rate, paying the heavy penalty of early death.”¹⁹³ In 1935, *Bags and Baggage* further pointed out that Black workers who “live on less” essentially “LIVE less.”¹⁹⁴ Given the inefficacy of the segregated healthcare system, newspapers described illness as a *death sentence*. In 1927, during Chicago’s tuberculosis crisis, *Broad Ax* found that many Black residents lived by the “philosophy of fatalism,” believing that if they became ill, “there is no alternative.”¹⁹⁵ The Chicago Black press also questioned what the *future* of the Black race looked like. In 1942, *The Chicago Defender* pointed out that environmental “Conditions...Make Or Mar The Future Of A Race.”¹⁹⁶ On these grounds, Black Chicagoans would have to “struggle for existence,” given their poor living and working conditions.¹⁹⁷ As a result, newspapers began to raise the question of Black *extinction*. *The Chicago Defender* even cited a study which predicted that the Black race “will have disappeared entirely as a group” by 1935.¹⁹⁸ Newspapers eventually arrived at the same conclusion: “excessive morality and paucity of birth” within Black communities virtually “worked for extinction.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ Bousfield, “Race Health Is An Important Factor In Community Health, Says Doctor: Sees Death Rate On Decline.”

¹⁹⁴ “The Effects of the Economic Position of the Negro on the White Workers.”

¹⁹⁵ “Washington Preparing for Health Week,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), March 12, 1927: 1, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁹⁶ “Under The Lash...: Criticism of Men and Conditions Which Make or Mar The Future of A Race.”

¹⁹⁷ “Figures Showing High Death Rate Cause Alarm: Mortality Is Double That Of White Race.”

¹⁹⁸ “Are We Disappearing?,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), April 2, 1927: A2, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

¹⁹⁹ “Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams Talks On Preventative Measures First Aid Remedies Hygienics and Sanitation: Birth and Death Rates Among Afro-Americans;” also see Howe, “The Observation Post: Plan to Renew Fight on Residential Segregation.”

Chapter 5: We the People Charge (Economic) Genocide

5.1 Developing an International Consciousness

In addition to local news coverage, the Chicago Black press reported on other manifestations of economic suffering throughout the colonized world, calling for a united, humanitarian front against fascism. In 1935, *The Chicago Defender* explained how the South African apartheid regime's oppressive labor laws reduced natives to "a band of surfs, existing on the verge of starvation," which "made them an easy prey to diseases like smallpox."²⁰⁰ Newspapers understood that, as in Chicago, "undernourishment," "reduced resistance to disease," and "deplorable" housing conditions caused a "high death rate among coloured infants" in South Africa and Liberia.²⁰¹ *The Chicago Defender* therefore concluded that "the vital issues in relations between races are all economic."²⁰² Newspapers explored how the fight for racial equality in the United States intersected with coinciding struggles for economic freedom in India, Africa, and the Americas.²⁰³ This worldwide demand for "basic human rights of other enslaved millions," *The Chicago Defender* and *Chicago Bee* explained, meant that "fate of the Negro, the Jew, the laboring classes...will be decided by what happens to Puerto Rico."²⁰⁴ *Broad Ax* thus called on readers to "cry out for better wages and better living conditions" not only in Chicago but "for EVERYBODY

²⁰⁰ C. Ziervogel, "Economic Story Of Race Is Told: 'Social Heritage' Is Brought To Africans," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), November 30, 1935: 22, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²⁰¹ "Report Gives Amazing Facts About Africa," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), April 9, 1938: 24, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); "Conditions in Liberia," *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition)* (Chicago, IL), November 6, 1920: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²⁰² "Economic Story Of Race Is Told: 'Social Heritage' Is Brought To Africans."

²⁰³ "American Democracy," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 13, 1940: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); John P. Davis, "Beware the Hate Vendors," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 26, 1942: B22, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²⁰⁴ Luther Townley, "Midwest Negroes Pledge Support to Fourth Term for Pres. Roosevelt," *Chicago Bee* (Chicago, IL), July 2, 1944: 4, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); Deton J. Brooks, Jr., "Negro Fate In U.S. Tied To Puerto Rico Freedom: FDR's Committee Reports on Puerto Rico," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), July 31, 1943: 7, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see "American Democracy."

EVERYWHERE” on “humanitarian grounds.”²⁰⁵ To the Chicago Black press, wining WWII meant declaring a *complete* victory over *all* forms of fascism.

Newspapers saw this international, humanitarian movement as an opportunity for symbiotic collaboration between Jews and Black Americans. In 1943, *The Chicago Defender* stressed that the war on fascism rendered Black Americans and European Jews “more closely united than ever before.”²⁰⁶ Instead of “facing their doom separately,” the newspaper insisted that both groups should “stand up and fight” for racial survival “together.”²⁰⁷ This discussion portrayed racial extermination as an inherently *international* issue that concerns *all* of humankind, an idea that would later be coded into the legal language of genocide. Editor Oscar Lapirow thus called on Jewish Americans to support their “Negro brother,” arguing that “more can be obtained” through political collaboration than pitting causes against one another.²⁰⁸ *The Chicago Defender* similarly promised that “the sympathy of black men for the stricken Jewish people” would “strengthen the arm of every Negro soldier.”²⁰⁹ Newspapers also suggested that Black Americans and Jews could learn from each other’s histories of oppression. *The Chicago Defender* explained how Jewish “self-reliance” was “learned through years of misery,” predicting that this survival tactic would enable Jews to “overcome the menacing heel” of Hitler.²¹⁰ At the same time, newspapers insisted that Jews could also “take a lesson from colored Americans,” whose ability to survive slavery,

²⁰⁵ Driver, “Talks on Health, Cleanliness, Proper Living, Sanitation, Etc.: Progress and Poverty or Prevention of the Spread of Tuberculosis.”

²⁰⁶ “Other Papers Say: The Negro-Jewish Problem,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 8, 1943: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ “Let’s Work Together,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 14, 1939: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²⁰⁹ “Nazi Butchers,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), December 26, 1942: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²¹⁰ Lucius C. Harper, “Dustin’ Off the News: Our Plight Will Change as We Change,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), June 10, 1939: 1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

segregation, and economic oppression further exemplified “why the Polish people will be victorious.”²¹¹

5.2 “Negro Health Needs Democracy”

With the rise of human rights discourse, newspapers began to articulate that Black Chicagoans should be *entitled* to economic freedom, healthcare access, and racial equality according to *international* standards. In 1945, *The Chicago Defender* and *Chicago Bee* covered the drafting of the UN Charter, celebrating that “the principle of racial equality” had merited “inclusion among the goals of world organization.”²¹² Newspapers recognized that consecrating non-discrimination into international law gave Black Americans “universal validity” and global support.²¹³ *The Chicago Defender* further noted that the UN Economic and Social Council was chosen “to insure implementation” of “racial equality” and “economic advancement.”²¹⁴ This understanding that racial discrimination and economic oppression often reinforce one another evokes how scholars define economic genocide today. *The Chicago Defender* later listed “food, clothing,” and “good working conditions” as basic human rights.²¹⁵ However, newspapers recognized that segregation did not afford these economic and health-related rights to Black Chicagoans. As early as 1925, *The Chicago Defender* stressed that Black urban residents should be inherently “entitled to clean streets, decent homes, sanitary arrangements.”²¹⁶ Newspapers

²¹¹ Patterson, “The Sad Case of Poland.”

²¹² “Big Four Agree on Race Plank at ‘Frisco Parley,” *Chicago Bee* (Chicago, IL), May 13, 1945: 1, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); John R. Badger, “Write Equality Into Frisco Pact,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), June 30, 1945: 4, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “UN Adopts Civil Rights For World,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), December 18, 1948: 1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²¹³ Badger, “Write Equality Into Frisco Pact.”

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Langston Hughes, “The UN Universal Declaration Of Human Rights Simplified,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), April 12, 1952: 10, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²¹⁶ “Other Papers Say: Negroes Are People,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), December 19, 1925: A10, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

began to call for a local human rights investigation into “the economic...health and living conditions of the urban Race population” in Illinois—especially now that domestic racism had international consequences.²¹⁷

Under this human rights framework, newspapers charged the United States with deliberately creating and subsequently upholding segregated conditions that exacerbated the Black public health crisis in Chicago. *Broad Ax* insisted that “Negro Health Needs Democracy,” as the lack of hospitalization, inadequate facilities, and improper treatment lowered Black people’s chances of surviving illness.²¹⁸ *The Chicago Defender* therefore insisted that state governments which “refuse to provide proper sanitation and hygienic measures for...the communities in which our people live” must be held responsible for widespread illness and death.²¹⁹ However, despite campaigns for better Black medical facilities, there was still “no interference from national authorities,” which, newspapers argued, “constitutes moral aid” to the Black public health crisis “in and of itself.”²²⁰ Here, the Chicago Black press suggests that the United States (1) *intended* to commit genocide and (2) was *complicit* in genocide. In creating a broken healthcare system, the United States actively *sought* to inflict illness and death onto Black bodies; in choosing not to address the subsequent public health crisis, it passively *endorsed* the loss of Black life. Newspapers thus advertised optional health initiatives, such as hospital fundraisers and national Health Week,

²¹⁷ “The Proposed Chicago Commission,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 27, 1939: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see “Demand United Nations Probe U.S. Race Prejudice: Negro Congress Appeals Issue To Tribunal,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), June 8, 1946: 1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); Earl Conrad, “Yesterday And Today: Victories In Danger,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), June 29, 1946: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); Walls, “Hospitals Greatest Aid to Mankind.”

²¹⁸ “Colorful News Movies By The Cameraman;” also see “Provident Hospital Women’s Auxiliary Board Members Contribute \$1,000.00 to Fund;” Wright, “Segregated Hospital System Does Race Great Harm Says Dr. Wright: Prominent New York Physician Exposes Jim Crow Set-Up.”

²¹⁹ “Southern Slum Conditions Blamed for High T.B. Rate,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), June 7, 1930: 13, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²²⁰ John H. Sengstacke, “Today and Tomorrow,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), August 31, 1940: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

and even provided health advice columns as early as 1922 (Fig. 7).²²¹ These community-led actions show that Black Chicagoans relied on self-preservation to survive outside of a healthcare system designed to fail them.

DR. A. WILBERFORCE WILLIAMS

TALKS ON

**PREVENTIVE MEASURES, FIRST AID REMEDIES
HYGIENICS AND SANITATION**

No Cases Are Diagnosed and No Prescriptions Given in These Weekly Articles

Figure 7: Title of weekly health advice column.

5.3 Recognizing Economic Genocide

Newspapers thus began to argue that American democracy did not serve to protect human rights; rather, it was fabricated to hide the systematic suffering and extermination of Black citizens. In 1939, *The Chicago Defender* criticized how President Franklin Roosevelt “expressed shock over the beating of Jews abroad, but not over the lynching of Negroes at home.”²²² Newspapers understood that the “conflict between the ideal of democracy...and the great qualifying fact of injustice and prejudice” in the United States did not expose the fragility of American democracy so much as its corrupt nature.²²³ *The Chicago Defender* explicitly warned of the hypocrisy of

²²¹ “Provident Hospital Women’s Auxiliary Board Members Contribute \$1,000.00 to Fund;” “Short Review of the Annual Report of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes. The Report Shows Year of Big Achievements,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL), December 22, 1917: 2, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Self Preservation,” *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition)* (Chicago, IL), February 13, 1915: 8, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); “Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams Talks On Preventative Measures First Aid Remedies Hygienics and Sanitation: Death Rate Falling.”

²²² “Dr. Emmett J. Scott Replies To Dean Kelley Miller On Vital Political Issues,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 16, 1939: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see Langston Hughes, “Message to the President,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), March 1, 1941: 3, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²²³ “Chicago GI Tells Horrors Of Nazi ‘Murder Factory’ Prison Camp.”

American democracy, invoking the biblical quote: “Thou hypocrite cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”²²⁴ In 1939, an editorial cartoon reiterated that the United States was acutely aware of its “own accusatory record in dealing with...racial minorities,” yet chose not to address it, thereby raising the question of genocidal intent (Fig. 8).²²⁵ In the wake of WWII and with the rise of human rights, newspapers argued that the United States could no longer “deceive the world” with its “so-called Democracy.”²²⁶ *The Chicago Defender* stressed that Nazi mass atrocities had shed light on the “acts of uncivility practiced against minority groups” in the United States, which also had “bloody hands in race relations.”²²⁷ American democracy’s public commitment to human rights could not be reconciled with its genocidal practices at home.

²²⁴ Ted LeBerethon, “Drippings From Other Pens: LeBerethon Thinks U.S. Should Correct Stand on Treatment of Negroes,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 7, 1939: 6, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); Rebecca Stiles Taylor, “Activities of Women’s National Organizations,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), December 27, 1941: 18, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²²⁵ Miller, “Views and Reviews: The Plight of the Jewish Minority—Can It Happen Here?,” Editorial cartoon, *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 7, 1939: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); also see Robert Redfield, “World Watches U.S. Handling Of Negro As Key To Future: When Peace Comes...What?,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 5, 1945: 1, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²²⁶ “Germany’s Rival,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), January 7, 1939: 16, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

Roosevelt Hits Drive On Jews, But--



Figure 8: Editorial cartoon.

The Chicago Black press saw the drafting of the Genocide Convention as an opportunity to demand justice and accountability for Black Americans on an international scale, sending journalists to the UN to present evidence of racial persecution in Chicago. In 1946, *The Chicago Defender* reported that the newly coined term *genocide* had at last registered racial persecution as a “crime against humanity.”²²⁸ Newspapers further stressed that the Convention would classify racial oppression “as an ‘official’ international crime under international law,” making it a “much needed weapon” to combat ongoing evils in the United States.²²⁹ While the *term* genocide allowed

²²⁸ John Robert Badger, “World View: The Nuremberg Trials,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 7, 1946: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

²²⁹ Willard Townsend, “The Other Side: Genocide: the World Is New But The Music Is Old,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), October 25, 1947: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspaper*, [URL](#); “Much-Needed New Word,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), September 21, 1946: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspaper*, [URL](#).

newspapers to more clearly communicate the nature and magnitude of Black suffering, the Convention enabled journalists to internationalize their demands and take legal action outside of U.S. jurisdiction.²³⁰ In 1946, an editor of *The Chicago Defender* presented columnist Earl Conrad's book *Jim Crow America* to the UN Human Rights Commission as "an act of international statesmanship" on behalf of Black Americans.²³¹ *The Chicago Defender* insisted that it was "the duty of Negro writers" to use the evidence they had gathered from decades of reporting on racial persecution in the United States "to reveal the international aspects of our problems at home."²³² This statement of purpose further suggested that the Chicago Black press *did* attempt to describe Black illness and death as economic genocide before it had the modern terminology to do so.

Following 1946, however, newspapers were quick to adopt the term *genocide* to describe racial persecution against Black Americans. *The Chicago Defender* saw genocide as a "Much-Needed New Word" to describe "the deliberate extermination of a race."²³³ That same year, it argued that American racism should "be covered by the definition of physical genocide set forth" in the Genocide Convention.²³⁴ The Chicago Black press often used the term *extermination* when describing Jewish suffering or raising the question of Black extinction. The synonymous use of *extermination* and *genocide* thus confirms that newspapers had begun developing a vocabulary of genocide decades ago. Journalists insisted that genocide could also target "economic...minorities," citing "the economic...plight of the oppressed Negro" and "the economic base of Jim Crow" as

²³⁰ Redfield, "World Watches U.S. Handling Of Negro As Key To Future: When Peace Comes...What?;" Earl Conrad, "Yesterday And Today: Sign That Petition," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), November 2, 1946: 15, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspaper*, [URL](#); "Demand United Nations Probe U.S. Race Prejudice: Negro Congress Appeals Issue To Tribunal," "Much-Needed New Word."

²³¹ "New Book Tells of Racial Oppression," *Chicago Bee* (Chicago, IL), December 8, 1946: 11, *Readex: African American Newspapers*, [URL](#); Conrad, "Yesterday And Today: Sign That Petition."

²³² "Klan Or Gestapo? Why Take Either: Foremost Negro Author Writes of Devil Hams, Dixie Drawls and Axis Dictators."

²³³ "Much-Needed New Word;" Townsend, "The Other Side: Genocide: the World Is New But The Music Is Old."

²³⁴ Conrad, "Yesterday And Today: Sign That Petition."

examples.²³⁵ Here, the Chicago Black press recognized that racism and economic oppression reinforced one another. On these grounds, the Black Chicagoan is a victim of genocide on two counts, as a member of both the Black race *and* the working class.

²³⁵ Walter White, "UN Nations Seem Eager To Retain Mass Murder," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), October 30, 1948: 7, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#); Conrad, "Yesterday And Today: Sign That Petition."

Conclusion

In 1947, the Chicago Black explicitly used the term *economic genocide* for the first time, arguing: “If it becomes a crime to destroy the cultural and spiritual life of a...group, by the very same means social and economic genocide cannot be less immoral or less barbaric.”²³⁶ This statement first and foremost forewarns the politization of the Genocide Convention. Written in the wake of the Nuremberg Trials, the article almost certainly intended for the *crime of destroying a group’s cultural and spiritual life* to invoke the Holocaust. It rightfully predicted that the Holocaust would become legally synonymous with the Convention, reminding readers that genocide can occur through numerous techniques and forms. This statement, however, does not reduce the significance of the Holocaust; rather, it compares economic genocide *with* the Holocaust to emphasize the magnitude of structural oppression. In using what Michael Rothberg calls a “multidirectional” approach to Holocaust memory, newspapers implicitly undermined Holocaust centrality by articulating “other histories of victimization.”²³⁷ Just as anti-Semitism and intolerance drove genocide against Jews in Nazi Germany, poverty, environmental injustice, and a broken healthcare system facilitated economic genocide against Black Americans in the United States.

The second part of the quote goes onto define economic genocide in terms of the Black public health crisis in Chicago, writing: “The deliberate practice of social and economic genocide against Negroes in America gets its result in disease-ridden communities, high mortality rates, and a collective group frustration that slowly destroys the spiritual and moral fibre of the victim.”²³⁸ The use of the word ‘result’ here brings to mind what Lemkin referred to as the ‘aftermath’ of genocide. Both Lemkin and *The Chicago Defender* saw widespread illness and death as markers

²³⁶ Townsend, “The Other Side: Genocide: the World Is New But The Music Is Old.”

²³⁷ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 6-7.

²³⁸ Townsend, “The Other Side: Genocide: the World Is New But The Music Is Old.”

of economic genocide, which takes its toll gradually by shortening life spans, increasing morbidity rates, and preventing births. Just five years earlier, however, *The Chicago Defender* had virtually described the same process:

“Extermination seems to catch momentum with any sign of progress that the Negro might embrace. When assumed to be criminal, defiant or objectionable he is murdered, lynched or executed. But this savage decorum is not the most devastating method. The denial of hospitalization, and of nearly all opportunities to promote health, create a mortality rate which threatens the Negro’s existence, untrained, improperly clothed and housed, and undernourished his extermination seems possible if not inevitable.”²³⁹

As with the previous quote, this statement recognizes that structural poverty and inaccessibility to proper healthcare drive Chicago’s Black public health crisis, which in turn facilitates genocide over time. The similarities between *The Chicago Defender’s* 1942 and 1947 explanation of economic genocide confirms that the Chicago Black press did more than engage in early human rights discourse; it explored the concept of genocide based on *unique lived experiences*.

Between 1910 and 1950, the Chicago Black press kept finding and reporting on the same old story: that economic oppression resulted in widespread unemployment and low wages, structural poverty forced Black residents into unsanitary living and working conditions, and segregation prevented Black patients from accessing the healthcare they needed to survive. To evaluate whether this scenario constituted genocide, scholars would likely analyze this situation at face value, perhaps by contrasting it with the Holocaust or rejecting it according to the Genocide Convention. Economic genocide, however, often goes unnoticed because it does not occur in the

²³⁹ German S. White, “Says South Hates Us,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), November 14, 1942: 14, *ProQuest: Historical Black Newspapers*, [URL](#).

form of marked, tragic events—it occurs as long-term health consequences. This research takes a historical approach to show that economic genocide is a gradual process which takes its toll by depleting Black health across generations. I intend for this research to serve as an example for future genocide case studies, as it speaks to the importance of evaluating cases individually within historical context. Since each instance of genocide is unprecedented and historically unique in its own right, scholars cannot evaluate case studies solely in terms of the Holocaust.

The long-term nature of economic genocide still holds true for Black Chicagoans today, who continue to suffer from structural poverty, health disparities, and widespread racial violence. Kamm Howard is a long-term Black resident of Chicago, where he works as a real estate investor and serves as the Co-Chair of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America.²⁴⁰ He has travelled around the world arguing that Black Chicagoans are victims of human rights abuses on three accounts: apartheid, plunder, *and* genocide. In 2016, he organized the UN Working Group of Experts for People of African Descent’s visit to Chicago and many other African American urban centers.²⁴¹ The subsequent UN report found that Chicago’s “poor black neighbourhoods” are prone to “fewer employment opportunities, environmental degradation and also low life expectancy rates.”²⁴² It further argued that the “persistent gap in almost all the human development indicators” between Black and white populations affirms that racial persecution “creates de facto barriers for people of African descent to fully exercise their human rights.”²⁴³ While this 2016 report did not mention genocide, it *did* observe and comment on many of the same structural forms of racism that local newspapers reported on over a century ago. The report also explicitly argued

²⁴⁰ “Kamm Howard, National Co-Chair, National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America,” *Library of Congress*, [URL](#).

²⁴¹ *Ibid*.

²⁴² United Nations General Assembly, “Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its mission to the United States of America,” August 18, 2016, A/HRC/33/61/Add.2, 17-18, [URL](#).

²⁴³ *Ibid*.

that the sheer *magnitude* of structural forms of racism facing Black Americans constituted a human rights issue that warranted nationwide redress and reparations. Like the Chicago Press, UN experts found the United States responsible for designing and maintaining systems that effectively depleted Black life chances.

This thesis seeks to center Black human rights discourse in history and genocide studies in order to support human rights demands within African Americans urban communities today. As a human rights student and professional, my passion for activism and justice shapes all of my work. I therefore strive to situate my historical research within ongoing, Black-led discussions of what redress should look like in the United States. As Black activists increasingly call for justice and accountability, it is my hope that this thesis generates innovative archival research that could be of use to Black-led reparations organizations in Chicago and across the country. This project also draws on Black voices and lived experiences to present a new interpretation of the Genocide Convention that pushes the boundaries of what legally constitutes genocide. As such, it is my hope that the legal side of my research will offer support to Black activists who seek to internationalize their human rights demands before the UN.

While studying at Columbia University, I have had the pleasure to work alongside and learn from Black reparations activists around the United States through the African American Redress Network. I feel very grateful to call Kamm Howard my colleague, teacher, and friend. At a conference, he once made a statement that left a lasting impression on me: “Justice has been delayed in Chicago for far too long.” These words remind me that studying histories of misery, oppression, and loss starts with remembrance that must be followed by tangible *action*. I therefore cannot tell the story of economic genocide in Chicago without acknowledging Black residents’

long-lasting dedication to historical justice. As much as racial persecution has persisted, so has African American perseverance.

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