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## **“Contrary to Our Way of Thinking”: The Struggle for an American Indian Center in Chicago, 1946-1953**

**GRANT ARNDT**

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When Chicago's American Indian Center opened in 1953, it had a small core of dedicated leaders, but little support in the city. The Center's board of directors had applied for funding to Chicago's Metropolitan Welfare Council, the main clearinghouse of philanthropic funding in the city, only to be told that the Center's existence was "contrary to our way of thinking."<sup>1</sup> It was not the first time that Native Americans seeking to create urban organizations had encountered rejection. For years, local Native American activists had found that urban Indians and Native American urban organizations were contrary to the way of thinking of many people in the city. What follows is a narrative history of activities which led to the American Indian Center's creation, reconstructed from archival sources and expanding upon existing accounts of Chicago's American Indian Center by Merwyn Garbarino and Janusz Mucha.<sup>2</sup> It is intended as a counterpoint to the tendency of even recent scholarly work to use external forces to understand and explain urban Indian life. We tend to focus on the effects of life in the city upon Native Americans, rather than on the active way some Native Americans have attempted to effect changes in their urban life. In Chicago, as an example, archival docu-

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ments show that Native American activists both instigated and sustained the struggle to create Native American organizations. They proposed such organizations as innovative solutions to the problems they perceived in urban life years before anyone else in Chicago recognized any need for such organizations. The following narrative demonstrates that in the years between 1946 and 1953 Native Americans in Chicago began to reshape local "ways of thinking" about Native American urban life and urban organizations.

### CREATING INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS IN POSTWAR CHICAGO

#### **The North American Indian Council and Mission**

There have been prominent Native American activists and organizations in Chicago since the early decades of the century.<sup>3</sup> The combination, however, of the Great Depression and the second World War produced a lull in local urban Indian activities in the late 1930s and throughout much of the 1940s. After the war, the local Indian community soon entered a period of marked activity, fueled by a population increase that began during the war years.<sup>4</sup> The earliest documented postwar Native American social club in Chicago was the North American Indian Council (NAIC), founded in 1946 by Willard LaMere (Winnebago), Scott Thundercloud (Ottawa), Benjamin Bearskin (Winnebago-Sioux), and Russell Minea (non-Indian).<sup>5</sup> According to a tape-recorded oral history by LaMere, the Council was founded because Indians in Chicago lacked a "place to get together and have ... Saturday evening social activities." The Council's founders also felt that the city's existing organization for Indian people, the Indian Council Fire, had "grown away" from the needs of most Chicago Indians, especially those new to the city. Plans for the new group faced opposition from Council Fire founder Marion Gridley (a non-Indian). According to Willard LaMere, she told the North American Indian Council's leaders, "we've got everything set up for you Indians, all you have to do is come over here and be involved." But he recalled that the leaders of the NAIC wanted a place to have social activities away from any "caretakers," and went ahead with their plans by renting a hall on Halsted Street in which they gathered on weekend evenings.<sup>6</sup>

By 1947 the North American Indian Council had renamed

itself the North American Indian Mission and presented itself in a local newspaper article as a Native American attempt to supply social welfare services to American Indian veterans of World War II living in Chicago.<sup>7</sup> Scott ThunderCloud explained in the article that Chicago was “jumping with Indians. Especially since the war. Lots of green young punks fresh off the reservation come here when the Army discharges them.”<sup>8</sup> Because Chicago had no place where “Indians could meet Indians,” Native Americans without family in the city often gravitated to “Clark Street honky tonks,” according to ThunderCloud.<sup>9</sup> Some slept in an abandoned Methodist church that came to be known as the “Indian League Hotel.”<sup>10</sup> The North American Indian Mission planned to provide these new residents with food, alcohol counseling, and employment assistance, as well as classes in Indian cultures and arts.<sup>11</sup> Such programming prefigures the activities of later organizations and demonstrates that Native Americans recognized and attempted to address the problems of newcomers to the city years before outside agencies became involved.

For all the ambitious plans of its founders, the North American Indian Mission closed within a year for lack of funds. Willard LaMere recalled that after the Mission closed Ben Bearskin went on to start an “Inter-Tribal Council,” which attracted most of the participants in the North American Indian Council. It avoided social welfare issues, focusing instead on socializing and Native American ceremonial dancing in a rented hall on Chicago’s west side.<sup>12</sup>

The mission was an early example of the major obstacle facing Native American organizations—funding. The leaders of the Mission planned to meet expenses from the profits of a salvage and repair operation, rather than through the support of existing social service institutions.<sup>13</sup> Other Native American activists would attempt to find solutions to the financial obstacles facing autonomous Native American organizations in the coming years by seeking out the support of established social welfare organizations. However, these activists quickly found out that non-Indians in Chicago only reluctantly acknowledged the need for Indian organizations and that it would take persistent effort to secure any support for Native American organizations from them.

### **Theresa Robbins and the Welfare Council**

In 1949, Theresa Robbins contacted Louis Wirth, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago. Robbins was a Sioux

student at Roosevelt College who had come to Chicago during World War II as an employee of the BIA supply depot. She told Wirth that Native Americans in Chicago "were pretty much disorganized" and that many of them were, for want of anything better to do, drifting to West Madison Street (Chicago's main "skid row" area) and becoming "problems to themselves and to the community."<sup>14</sup> Wirth wrote to Lucy Carner, the executive secretary of the Metropolitan Welfare Council's division of Education and Recreation, and suggested that she try to get one of the local settlement houses "to offer the group hospital-ity and facilities for self-organization."<sup>15</sup>

On Wirth's advice, Robbins made contact with Carner. At their first meeting, she explained that she wanted to (in the words of Carner's notes on the meeting):

bring some Indian people together in an organization of their own to try to counteract some of the bad influences they are under in Chicago and also to gradually reduce the suspicions that this group holds toward "white people" and white institutions.<sup>16</sup>

Robbins echoed the Council's leaders' dissatisfaction with the Indian Council Fire, finding that its "condescending" attitude toward Native Americans drove away the Indians most in need of social contacts.<sup>17</sup> She noted that she had collected the names of twenty-five Indians interested in a social meeting and the possible formation of a group. She made it clear in her meeting with Carner that Native Americans she knew avoided white organizations and would resist any attempt by non-Indians to lead or control their activities.<sup>18</sup>

Carner agreed to support Robbins' attempt to organize a small group, which she arranged to have meet in rooms at a local community center, "where they would be left alone for a time, but where there would be resources and persons available."<sup>19</sup> She also set about creating the American Indian Welfare Council (AIWC), a quasi-official attempt to address the needs of Chicago's Native American residents that would supply Robbins' group with advice and financial assistance. Carner's constitution for the AIWC disregarded many of Robbins' ideas about how such groups should be organized. According to its stated objectives, "deserving individuals and families of Native American descent" would receive "social service and material aid," as well as "educational and counseling process-

es ... to facilitate mastery of the economic trends of modern technological industrialized society."<sup>20</sup> The constitution for the AIWC made it clear that, while it was intended as an agency for Native Americans, it was not envisioned as an agency run by them.

The archival records of the meetings between Robbins and Carner allow us a glimpse at an important moment in the history of Chicago's Indian community. Through their meetings, Native Americans and Chicago's social service community first came together to work on the challenges facing Native Americans in the city. Robbins' and Carner's plans also exemplify the enduring tensions over the idea of American Indian urban organizations. Conflict caused by the incompatibility of Native Americans' determination to control their own urban organizations and the belief among social service workers that Native Americans needed non-Indians to lead them during their adaptation to urban life has reoccurred throughout the history of Chicago Native American activities.

Although the interaction between Native Americans and social service agencies established by Robbins and Carner endured, the organizations they created did not. Robbins' group met several times at a local community center, but soon disbanded for lack of attendance, according to Carner's records of her consultations with Robbins. The AIWC expired just as quickly, holding only one meeting. At this meeting, in December of 1949, Robbins and Carner discussed the needs of Native Americans in Chicago with a group of representatives of various community organizations.<sup>21</sup> Theresa Robbins explained to the assembled community officials that Native Americans in Chicago (numbering between 1,000 and 1,500, according to Robbins' estimates) were united as a group mainly by a common alienation from white society. They resented the history of mistreatment of Native Americans and were determined to avoid involvement in white institutions. She suggested that the best way to help the Native Americans in Chicago would be to create a small Indian center near the city's main "skid row" on West Madison.<sup>22</sup> The officials opposed the idea of a separate center and pushed for the use of existing social service centers. They also suggested that "the need for jobs might offer an approach" to the problem that would not require Native-run organizations.<sup>23</sup> This last suggestion proved partially prophetic; although the American Indian Welfare Council seems to have lapsed into oblivion after just one meet-

ing, the urban employment of Native Americans would spark its revival in just under two years. By then, Robbins had disappeared from the archival record, but other Native American activists appeared to take her place. These new activists were fortunate to meet with a new group of outsiders ready to take an interest in their projects, thanks in large part to the ongoing transformation of federal Indian policy.

## TOWARDS THE AMERICAN INDIAN CENTER

### **The Rise of the Relocation Program**

After the end of World War II, federal policy towards American Indians shifted from the "Indian New Deal" of the pre-war years to a period of legislative activity known as "termination." As Donald Fixico and others have described, in this period the federal government's previous attempt to reorganize tribal governments under the terms of the Indian Reorganization Act was replaced by an interest in ending the special legislative status of tribes where possible and encouraging assimilation into American society.<sup>24</sup> This general shift in policy was coupled with an attempt to encourage and facilitate Native American relocation to urban areas. A relocation program first designed to move "surplus population" from the Navajo reservation as part of follow-up relief efforts to the blizzard of 1947 was expanded into a national relocation program for all Native Americans in late 1951, concentrating first on test programs in Los Angeles, Denver, and Chicago.<sup>25</sup> The relocation program brought new voices and interests to the debate over the creation of urban Indian institutions in Chicago. Soon meetings resumed at the Welfare Council, where representatives of the BIA constituted a new lobbying force on the side of Chicago's Indian leaders.

Months before the Bureau of Indian Affairs opened an office for the relocation program in Chicago, representatives of the BIA approached the Welfare Council to discuss plans for relocation. According to minutes of meetings at the Welfare Council, BIA representative Kent FitzGerald revealed the BIA's interest in relocating Native Americans to Chicago. He reported that the BIA had been told by Albert Cobe (Chippewa), an employee of the Sears-Roebuck YMCA, and Robert Gillespie of Hull House that Native Americans in Chicago suffered from poor housing, a "sense of being lost," and general social isola-

tion.<sup>26</sup> Through such arguments, Cobe and Gillespie apparently convinced the BIA that Chicago Indians needed a center where they would “find acceptance and a chance for social contacts.”<sup>27</sup> As earlier with Robbins, the Welfare Council resisted the idea of an autonomous Indian organization and tried to dissuade the BIA from its relocation plans, pointing out that Chicago was in the midst of a housing shortage.<sup>28</sup> Despite this warning, the Department of the Interior continued with plans for Chicago relocation.

In June 1951, FitzGerald returned to Chicago for another meeting at the Welfare Council. He discussed the prospects of a BIA relocation program with a large group of community representatives similar in composition to those who had participated in the American Indian Welfare Council meetings, once again including Cobe and Gillespie.<sup>29</sup> Cobe used the meeting as an opportunity to describe the hopes he and others had of creating a small social center for Native Americans. As at the previous meeting, Lucy Carner resisted the notion of an autonomous Indian center and suggested that any Native American group should be part of a preexisting social service or recreational agency “so that the Indian people must move on from their own activities to participation in more general community affairs.”<sup>30</sup>

The BIA’s Chicago field office (CFO) became an important source of support for local Indian organizations. Both the success or failure of the relocation program and the Chicago Relocation Office’s staff effectiveness were evaluated mainly in terms of their ability to get relocatees to remain in the city. Although the BIA shared the Welfare Council’s way of thinking concerning the need for Native American assimilation into urban society, its own institutional interests facilitated an informal alliance with Chicago Indians in the attempt to create an Indian center. Later narrative reports from the Chicago Office to Washington headquarters show that the BIA office hoped that by supporting local efforts to create community organizations, it could assist in the establishment of needed recreational opportunities and social contacts to help keep relocatees in the city.<sup>31</sup>

By the time the first relocatees began arriving in Chicago in February of 1952, the Chicago Relocation Field Office had begun to express its support for their organizational goals in meetings at the Welfare Council and in private consultation



with local Native American community activists. Among the local Indian leaders with whom the BIA worked most closely were Eli Powless (Oneida), president of the Indian Council Fire, and Albert Cobe, who had recently started the Indians' Service League, which met in a church every other Saturday for programs of "sports, sociability and a chance to talk."<sup>32</sup>

In April, Lucy Carner, encouraged by Albert Cobe and Kurt Dreifuss (head of the Chicago BIA office), organized an "exploratory group" for investigating "the possibility of community center services" for Native Americans living in Chicago.<sup>33</sup> The group's first meeting began with presentations from the leaders of the existing Indian groups. Albert Cobe explained that his group, the Indians' Service League, had no formal organization and depended mostly upon individual contributions (mainly from Cobe himself) for its financial support.<sup>34</sup> Even with this lack of resources, he had accumulated the names of more than one hundred Indian families and three hundred individuals living in the Chicago area (although few of these actually participated in League activities).<sup>35</sup> Cleo La Pearl, the head of another new Indian group, the American Indian Lodge, a group of twenty-three Native Americans that met at Hull House, expressed her interest in the idea of a community center and stated a belief that Indians needed each other, but needed to associate with whites as well.<sup>36</sup>

After these presentations, Kurt Dreifuss reported that the Chicago Relocation Office had brought one hundred families to Chicago since November.<sup>37</sup> He reassured the group that the integration of the Indians was the ultimate goal of the program, but he voiced support for the idea of an Indian center, stating that "although the purpose of any service should be integration into the total community, there is an immediate need of some center which Indians can feel is their own."<sup>38</sup>

Dreifuss suggested that a committee be established to oversee the creation of such a center, leading to the appointment of a "Committee on Community Center Services," headed by La Pearl and including Eli Powless, Cobe, Dreifuss, and John Willard, the representative of the American Friends Service Committee. The group released a list of recommendations, including the creation of a center in downtown Chicago, but the continued resistance of the Chicago social service community to the funding of independent organizations for Native Americans inhibited any further action.<sup>39</sup> As with previous groups, the Committee on Community Center Services soon

fell apart. Still, the BIA's conceptual appropriation of Native American ideas about an Indian center and its budding alliance with local Native American leaders provided crucial support for continuing Native American efforts to organize themselves in the city.

### **The Citizens' Committee and the American Indian Club**

By the summer of 1952, problems with the relocation test program, including a mid-June "exodus" of relocatees back to their home reservations, convinced the BIA office in Chicago that, as they reported to Washington, there was "an urgent need to activate community leaders and agencies in behalf of relocatees."<sup>40</sup> Forgoing Welfare Council mediation, they formed yet another group, the Citizens' Advisory Board, composed of business leaders, social welfare workers, and interested Chicago citizens, many of whom had served on similar groups organized by the Welfare Council.<sup>41</sup> The advisory board formed several subcommittees, most importantly a subcommittee on the "leisure-time preoccupations" of Chicago Native Americans, which included Powless and Cobe as members.<sup>42</sup> Unlike previous meetings at the Welfare Council, people interested in Native American community organizations now met under the auspices of an organization that encouraged, rather than inhibited, action.

By fall, members of the Leisure-Time Subcommittee had finished plans to set up recreation centers in cooperation with the Chicago Park District.<sup>43</sup> These BIA recreation centers came to be known as the American Indian Club and met in the Park District Field Houses on the north and south sides of the city. The Welfare Council, still resistant to the creation of new Indian organizations, continued to consult with the existing Indian groups, the Indians' Service League and the American Indian Lodge. The BIA office, noting in its monthly report that these groups seemed unable to attract members to their individual events and showed little sign of becoming any more cooperative with each other, began to focus its attentions on the American Indian Club.<sup>44</sup>

The American Indian Club started its activities in early October, gaining notice through a Halloween powwow at the Park District Field House in Eckhart Park attended by three hundred people.<sup>45</sup> The powwow featured a display of ceremonial dancing coordinated by Benjamin Bearskin who had, as

mentioned above, engaged in such activities with his own group, the Inter-Tribal Council for a number of years.<sup>46</sup> The Relocation Office reported with pleasure that longtime Indian residents of Chicago who had attended the powwow expressed interest in joining the American Indian Club.<sup>47</sup> Many of these “old-timers” quickly became part of the club leadership. Shortly after the powwow, the Southside club elected Benjamin Bearskin its president, while the Northside club chose Ernst Naquayouma (Hopi).<sup>48</sup> Although the BIA office saw this as a sign that they were winning Native Americans over to their side, the electoral result seemed to be a clear indication that Native Americans were exerting more control over the group by placing already established community leaders in charge.<sup>49</sup>

By the beginning of 1953, the Chicago Relocation Field Office noted that “growing pains” were leading to changes in the club’s leadership structure.<sup>50</sup> In its February report the Relocation Office explained that because of rivalry between leaders of the neighborhood groups serving on the governing board, club members had decided that the club should have its policy and business functions consolidated in one set of officers, leaving the neighborhood groups only recreational functions.<sup>51</sup> The consolidation of the club officers was carried out at a business meeting on March 8 after a vote of the members.<sup>52</sup>

### THE CREATION OF THE ALL-TRIBES AMERICAN INDIAN CENTER

Despite the leadership turmoil, American Indian Club events were a success. However, their reliance on the Park District for meeting places began to cause difficulties by occasionally leaving club activities without accommodation.<sup>53</sup> This was frustrating not only for the participants, but also for the BIA field office, which had come to see the club as crucial to the success of its program. By spring, the BIA office reported to its main office in Washington that at the March 8 club business meeting the club’s leadership had decided to consider the need for a social and recreational center. The CFO concurred with this development, writing in its March narrative report that “The value of such a center in facilitating the process of community integration would be considerable.”<sup>54</sup>

“Community integration” was a concept of great value to

the CFO. After analyzing the statistics from the relocation program's first year, CFO staff found a decrease in return rates for relocatees, from 40 percent in early 1952 to 25 percent by June of 1953.<sup>55</sup> They interpreted the decrease as "largely due to growth of an Indian community in Chicago and the greater feeling of security on the part of the individual which comes from group identification."<sup>56</sup> They predicted more successful adjustment as the field staff gained experience and "an Indian community takes normal roots here."<sup>57</sup>

Preparations for the American Indian Center got underway by early June. The advisory committee's Leisure-Time Subcommittee officially changed its name to the "Citizen's Committee for an All-Tribes American Indian Center," becoming the Center's first governing body.<sup>58</sup> Chaired by John Willard of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), with Toni Omen (Sioux) as secretary and Ernst Naquayouma as financial secretary, the committee's membership was comprised of club members, BIA officials, and "concerned Chicago residents" (almost all of whom were Native Americans).<sup>59</sup>

At its first meeting on July 7, 1953, the committee decided to "seek the stewardship" of the American Friends Service Committee for finances and "general guidance."<sup>60</sup> By the end of the month, the Citizens' Committee had drawn up the Center's first budget, 8,500 dollars, half of it for the rental of a location and the remainder for the salary of an executive director. Prodded by the BIA office, many local businesses employing relocatees, including the Sante Fe Railroad and International Harvester, pledged to make large contributions. As the summer progressed, however, fundraising proceeded slowly. By September, despite the pledges of 4,000 dollars, fundraising efforts had raised just 500 dollars in cash.<sup>61</sup>

By September, the committee had chosen a location for the Center. The site was on the near north side of the city, comprising the top two floors of a small, four-story building at the corner of LaSalle and Kinzie. The Center's location is very close to the area suggested by Theresa Robbins in 1949, lying just one block west of the north Clark skid row and approximately eight blocks north of the West Madison "main-stem."

Organizational progress towards the Center was impeded in September by a disagreement over the issue of financial responsibility. The AFSC resisted signing a three-year lease on behalf of the Center, forcing the committee to attempt to renegotiate the lease with the rental company. Despite this setback,

the committee voted on the first of September to draw up a constitution and prepare the needed paperwork to obtain incorporation as a not-for-profit organization. By the end of September, the committee had successfully renegotiated a one-year lease for the chosen site, and the American Friends Service Committee agreed to underwrite the rent for one year, should the Center's finances fail.<sup>62</sup>

At the end of September, the committee also elected a nine-member board of directors for the Center. John Willard of the AFSC was chosen as the first president of the board, with Babe Begay (Navajo) as vice president, Eli Powless as treasurer, and Joan Schmitz (Sioux) as secretary. The other members of the board included Hiawatha Hood (Yavapai), Ernst Naquayouma (Hopi), Thomas Segundo (Papago), Daniel Gloyne (Cherokee), Felix Chico (Papago), and Mrs. Elmer Luchow (non-Indian). Thomas Segundo became the Center's acting director, while the committee searched for a permanent director.<sup>63</sup> The committee adopted a constitution for the Center at an open general membership meeting on October 1 and issued to the public on October 28.<sup>64</sup>

As the finishing touches were being placed on its internal organization, the Center approached the Welfare Council seeking funding for a one-person staff and a small operating budget. The Welfare Council balked at supporting the Center, even with its BIA and AFSC support. Echoing earlier pronouncements, the Committee on the Extension of Services wrote that the Center's existence was "contrary to our way of thinking; an attempt should be made to interest already existing agencies in providing these services, or if more advisable, one existing agency to take leadership."<sup>65</sup> Despite the Welfare Council's disapproval, the All-Tribes American Indian Center officially opened on November 1, 1953, with a grand opening party for more than two hundred guests.<sup>66</sup> It was still a work-in-progress, open only four days each week. It had no paid, full-time staff, which hindered the development of its own special program of events. In fact, all that the Citizens' Advisory Board had managed to do at this point was help Chicago Indians rent a space in which to hold events and meetings that represented already existing social connections and organizational efforts; the Center was as yet a framework, waiting to be filled in by others. The American Indian Club provided most of the Center's programming. As originally intended, it moved its existing roster of socials, dances, and sports events from Park

District facilities to the Center. It, however, retained a separate set of officers, headed by Center board member Naquayouma as president.<sup>67</sup>

Even as a meeting place, the new Center did not attract all of Chicago's Indian residents or monopolize all Indian organizational activities. Albert Cobe's group, the Indians' Service League, remained independent from the Center. This was an ironic situation, since Cobe was perhaps the Native American most directly responsible for first convincing the BIA of the need for an Indian center in Chicago, precipitating the events which made the Center a reality. The relocation office reported in November that the Center had been making many "friendly overtures" to Cobe's group, without official response, though some League officers and "rank and file members" had been seen at Center activities. The CFO concluded in its report, "it is hoped that better relationships between the Indians' Service League and other Indian organizations will grow out of the common interest in the Indian Center."<sup>68</sup>

With the exception of the Indians' Service League, most of the other groups whose leaders participated in the Center's creation were more willing to consolidate their programs. In December of 1953, the CFO held "significant meetings" with both the Indian Council Fire and the American Indian Club "to decide whether or not these organizations should disband in order that their members and leaders can give full and undivided support to the activities of the Indian Center."<sup>69</sup> The American Indian Club eventually disbanded, and the Indian Council Fire soon scaled back its activities to include only the awarding of the annual Indian Achievement award. Although Cobe remained aloof and created an autonomous series of Indian organizations throughout the 1950s, the still skeletal American Indian Center had become the major organizational site of Chicago's Native American community within a year.

## CONCLUSION

Archival documents show that a number of individual Native Americans raised the idea of an Indian center, and created their own unique urban organizations, in the years preceding the opening of the American Indian Center. They eventually succeeded despite the fact that groups like the Welfare Council found them contrary to way of thinking about life in the city.

The American Indian Center should be seen, in large part, as the successful fulfillment of Native American efforts, rather than as primarily the result of external forces. Native American activists were able to create the American Indian Center through an uneasy, but mutually beneficial, collaboration with the BIA Chicago Relocation Office. Native American activists themselves, in the person of Albert Cobe, had inaugurated this collaboration, just as, in the person of Teresa Robbins, they had set up a less immediately productive relationship with the Welfare Council. Through these interactions, Chicago Natives finally made real an idea which they, individually and collectively, had been developing and advocating for years: the creation of an Indian center run "for Indians, by Indians."

To emphasize the agency of Native American activists in the struggle for Indian organizations in Chicago is not to deny totally the influence of external forces on their endeavors. There is, however, no reason to assume that Native Americans are any more, or less, subject to the determinations of external forces than any other group of human beings. Our analysis must always try to balance a focus on "objective" forms of determination with attention to "subjective" moments of agency.

Now, with the American Indian Center one of the oldest urban Indian organizations in the country, the achievements of its creators continue to challenge our way of thinking about Native American life in cities. Without early activists such as the leaders of the North American Indian Mission, Theresa Robbins, Al Cobe, and others, urban Indian organizations may not have existed in Chicago. Left to their own inclinations, the Chicago social service institutions may never have recognized the presence of Native Americans in Chicago or undertaken any special efforts to improve their life in the city. The struggle by Native American activists to create an organization like the American Indian Center confronted a mindset that could conceive little place for Native Americans in Chicago. Contrary to many of our ways of thinking about urbanization, Native Americans were agents, not just objects, of their own lives in the city.

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## NOTES

1. "Minutes of the executive committee, division III," October 15, 1953 (Welfare Council Papers, Chicago Historical Society [henceforth abbreviated WCP], Box 246: Folder 13).

2. Merwyn Garbarino, "The Chicago American Indian Center: Two Decades," in *American Indian Urbanization*, eds. Jack O. Waddell and O. Michael Watson (Purdue: Purdue University Monograph Series, 1973). Janusz Mucha, "From Prairie to the City: Transformation of the Chicago American Indian Community," *Urban Anthropology* 12 (1983): 3-4. A new source on the Chicago Native American community that was completed too late to be consulted for this account is James B. LaGrand, "Indian Metropolis: Native Americans in Chicago, 1945-1965," Ph.D. diss. (Indiana University, 1997). Archival sources are catalogued in David Beck, *The Chicago American Indian Community 1893-1988: Annotated Bibliography and Guide to Sources in Chicago* (Chicago: NAES College Press, 1988).

3. Hazel W. Hertzberg, *Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 231-233; Rosalyn La Pier and David Beck, "Linking the Past to the Present: A Commentary on Virgil Vogel's 'Chicago's Native Americans'," in *Indians of the Chicago Area*, ed. Terry Straus (Chicago: NAES College Press, 1990).

4. Garbarino, op. cit.; Mucha, op. cit.

5. In this paper I give tribal affiliations as they appear in archival materials. Although a number of these have been replaced by more accurate or acceptable names in recent years, I feel the best option for present purposes is to retain the identification used by each person during the time period under discussion.

6. All quotations from Willard LaMere, "History of Indians in Chicago," October 16, 1979, a transcript of audio tape recording at the NAES College Tribal Research Center.

7. "War Drums on North Halsted Street," *The Chicago Sun-Times* November 18, 1947.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.



12. On the closing of the Mission and the creation of the Inter-Tribal Council, see LaMere, "History."

13. Ibid.

14. See Louis Wirth to Lucy Carner, October 5, 1949 (WCP 146:1). Note the parallels between Robbins' description to Wirth and ThunderCloud's earlier description; both used the powerful image of Indians on skid row to gain attention for their plans for an American Indian organization in the city.

15. Louis Wirth to Lucy Carner, loc. cit.

16. Lucy Carner, "Letter to Files from Lucy Carner. Re: Conference on American Indians in Chicago with Theresa Robbins," December 8, 1949 (WCP 146:1).

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Lucy Carner, "Constitution of the American Indian Welfare Council," n.d. (WCP 146:1).

21. Lucy Carner, "Minutes of meeting regarding American Indians in Chicago," December 28, 1949 (WCP 146:1).

22. Since the late 1940s, observers had noted the presence of a growing population of Indian men living on skid row year-round, just as the North American Indian Mission had warned. See Howard G. Bain, "A Sociological Analysis of the Chicago Skid-Row Lifeway," M.A. thesis (The University of Chicago, 1950). For an excellent discussion of Native American life on Chicago's skid row by a relocatee who lived there during the 1950s and 1960s, see Edward Goodvoice, "Indian Life on Skid Row in Chicago," in *Native Chicago*, eds. Terry Straus and Grant Arndt (Chicago: McNaughton & Gunn, Inc., 1998).

23. Lucy Carner, "Minutes of meeting regarding American Indians in Chicago," December 28, 1949 (WCP 146:1).

24. The history of federal Indian policy in this period lies outside the scope of this paper. See Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Larry Burt, *Tribalism in Crisis: Federal Indian Policy, 1953-1961* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982). On the relocation program, see also Elaine M. Neils, *Reservation to City, Indian Migration and Federal Relocation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Geography, Research Paper No. 131, 1971).

25. See Neils, op. cit.; Fixico, op. cit., 134-157, passim. Burt, op. cit., 6-7, 56-58, passim.

26. Lucy Carner, "Memorandum: Conference with Mr. Kent FitzGerald," April 23, 1951 (WCP 146:1).

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Lucy Carner, "Minutes of the meeting with Mr. Kent FitzGerald, Area Placement Officer," June 6, 1951 (WCP 146:1).

30. Ibid.

31. The CFO concluded in its November 1952 report: "As we see it, social expression and integration remain the key to the success of the relocation program here and will be a decisive factor in making job and resettlement plans truly permanent." CFO Narrative Report, BIA, November 1952.

32. Lucy Carner, "Minutes of meeting to discuss community center services for Indians in Chicago," April 28, 1952 (WCP 146:1).

33. *Ibid.* The complete guest list included representatives from the American Friends Service Committee, the Unitarian Service Committee, the Federation of Illinois Women's Clubs, the PTA, and the Chicago Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers. Also attending were Marion Gridley of the Indian Council Fire; Albert Cobe representing the Indians' Service League; Cleo La Pearl and Merville Powless of the American Indian Lodge; and Kurt Dreifuss, Kent FitzGerald, and Mary Nan Gamble of the BIA.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. Lucy Carner, "Minutes: Meeting of Committee on Community Services for Indians in Chicago," May 8, 1952 (WCP 146:1).

40. CFO Narrative Report, July 1952, in RG 75, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Chicago Relocation Office, National Archives, Great Lakes Branch (henceforth abbreviated BIA).

41. CFO Narrative Report, August 1952, BIA.

42. *Ibid.*

43. CFO Narrative Report, October 1952, BIA.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*

48. Christmas Party Program, December 1952, BIA.

49. CFO Narrative Report, November 1952, BIA.

50. CFO Narrative Report, February 1953, BIA.

51. *Ibid.*

52. CFO Narrative Report, March 1953, BIA.

53. For difficulties with the American Indian Club, see CFO Narrative Reports for April and March 1953, BIA; Garbarino, *op. cit.*, 78.

54. CFO Narrative Report, March 1953, BIA. The next month the Relocation Office reported that the Chicago police had informed the Relocation Office that Native Americans they arrested complained of a lack of "a place of their own" and that they felt "strange and unwanted" at existing community facilities. Concluding this report, the Relocation Office reiterated that "Some kind of club headquarters or cultural center sponsored and managed by Indians could serve a useful purpose in promoting social adjustment and integration." CFO Narrative Report, April 1953, BIA.

55. CFO Narrative Report, June 1953, BIA.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. The complete citizens committee membership as of July 7, 1953 also included Wade Kootswatewa (Hopi), Dinah Gloyne (Cherokee), Daniel Gloyne (Cherokee), James Hood (Apache), Martha Hood (Apache), Hollis Vick (Welfare Council), Marion Oas (Baha'i Cultural Center), Ione Jeunesse (Chippewa), Rev. Jitsuo Morikawa (First Baptist Church of Chicago), and Kurt Dreifuss (BIA). "Minutes of meeting of citizen's committee for the Establishment of an All-Tribes American Indian Center," July 7, 1953 (WCP 146:1).
60. Ibid.
61. A fragmentary document in the NAES College Archives, entitled "Chapter Two: The History of the American Indian Center" (no author known, see Beck, *op. cit.*, item #740) contains a fairly complete description of this period, although many of the dates given do not coincide with dates in archival material. In this account I have used the chronology indicated in the archival material.
62. See CFO Narrative Reports for August 1953 and September 1953, BIA.
63. CFO Narrative Report, September 1953, BIA.
64. Ibid.
65. "Minutes of the executive committee, division III," October 15, 1953 (WCP 246:13).
66. Garbarino, *op. cit.*
67. CFO Narrative Report, November 1953, BIA.
68. Ibid.
69. CFO Narrative Report, December 1953, BIA.