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Black History on Chicago's West Side: North Lawndale, Austin, and Garfield Park—A Shared Legacy of Strength



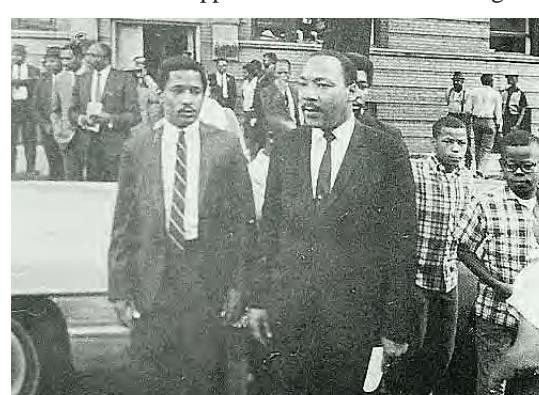
A West Side church and storefronts from decades past, part of the neighborhood's everyday life in the 1970s.



A scene from the aftermath of unrest in North Lawndale during the late 1960s, reflecting the deep impact of systemic disinvestment and urban turmoil.

Chicago's West Side holds one of the most powerful and enduring chapters of Black history in America. Neighborhoods like North Lawndale, Austin, and Garfield Park are deeply connected by migration, culture, struggle, and resilience. Together, they tell a story of how Black communities built opportunity, confronted injustice, and continue to shape Chicago's future.

During the early and mid-20th century, tens of thousands of Black families migrated from the South to Chicago, escaping racial terror and searching for better economic opportunities. As overcrowding and



Martin Luther King Jr. exiting the building at 1550 South Hamlin where he and his family lived to protest discriminatory housing, now the site of the MLK Legacy Apartments.

segregation tightened on the South Side, the West Side became a vital destination.

North Lawndale, Austin, and Garfield Park rapidly transformed into thriving Black communities. Factories, rail yards, and nearby industrial corridors provided jobs, while churches, social clubs, and neighborhood businesses anchored community life. These neighborhoods were not just places of residence—they were places of belonging.

By the 1950s and 1960s, North Lawndale was one of the most densely populated Black neighborhoods in the nation. Black-owned businesses lined Roosevelt Road and 16th Street. Families invested in homes, education, and civic life, even as redlining and predatory housing practices limited opportunity.

In 1966, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. brought national attention to North Lawndale when he moved into the neighborhood during the Chicago Freedom Movement. Marches through North Lawndale exposed housing discrimination in the North and made the community a national symbol in the fight for fair housing.

Austin, long known as Chicago's largest community area, became a major center of Black life by the mid-20th century. Middle-class Black families, educators, union workers, and professionals settled in Austin, building strong institutions that supported generations. Austin became known for its strong churches, vibrant music scene, and political engagement. It produced educators, artists, and organizers who influenced not only the West Side but the entire city. Despite decades of disinvestment and economic decline, Austin remains a cultural anchor where community pride runs deep.

Reduced ICE operations in Chicago still prompting continued community concern

By Todd Thomas

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has once again increased enforcement activity in the Chicago area, with renewed operations reported in the neighborhoods of Little Village and Evanston. The heightened presence has reignited debate across communities already grappling with fear, uncertainty, and differing views on public safety and immigration enforcement.

Earlier this year, ICE carried out Operation Midway Blitz, an initiative that drew widespread criticism from immigrant advocates, civil rights organizations, and community residents. Critics raised concerns about enforcement tactics, the justification for arrests, and the detention of undocumented immigrants, alleging that the operation relied heavily on racial profiling and disproportionately targeted vulnerable populations.

At the center of that earlier controversy was Border Patrol Commander Gregory Bovino, whose leadership came under scrutiny following reports about

conditions at the Bridgeport detention facility. Advocates and former detainees described overcrowding, poor living conditions, and, in some cases, treatment they characterized as inhumane. Those reports intensified calls for greater oversight, transparency, and accountability from federal authorities.

The renewed ICE activity has sparked fresh protests in both Little Village and Evanston. Residents and local organizers have voiced concerns about disruptions to daily life and what they describe as a lack of respect for long-standing, law-abiding community members. Demonstrators argue that the presence of federal agents creates fear and instability, even among families with no criminal history, leading some residents to avoid work, school, and public spaces.

However, others within and outside the affected neighborhoods have expressed support for ICE's actions. Supporters argue that enforcement efforts aimed at detaining and deporting individuals with criminal records are necessary to protect



ICE protests increase after Minnesota

public safety. Some activists and residents contend that individuals who are in the country illegally and have committed crimes should be held accountable for their actions, emphasizing the need for lawful immigration processes.

ICE officials maintain that their enforcement actions are targeted and focused on individuals with criminal records or those deemed threats to public safety. Federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, have reiterated that public safety remains their primary objective. Over the

course of recent ICE operations, thousands of individuals have reportedly been detained across the region. Court filings indicate that more than 4,000 arrests have been made in connection with recent enforcement efforts. While federal officials have not released updated totals specific to the most recent week, local reporting confirms arrests in both Little Village and Evanston.

In Little Village, resident-recorded footage showed at least two arrests during a midday

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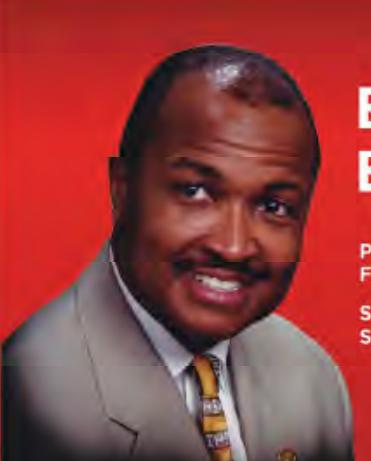
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Author Helen M. Clark gives faith-filled message at book signing for her new book *Survival Strategies, Victory is Mine, Vengeance is the Lord's*

By Todd Thomas

Community members gathered at Spill the Beans Coffee Shop, located at 5300 W Chicago Ave., for an emotional and inspiring event as author Helen M. Clark delivered a lecture and book signing centered on faith, forgiveness, and survival in the face of violence. The event featured an interview-style discussion, audience questions, and extended applause as Clark spoke candidly about her spiritual awakening and the life experiences that shaped her new book.

Clark's book chronicles a journey she describes as "from trauma to triumph," rooted in her unwavering belief in God's promises. Throughout her lecture, she emphasized the power of faith and personal accountability.

"I'm going to believe God's word and stand on His promise until it manifests," Clark told the audience. "God's word never fails, and when you trust it, you can expect supernatural results."

She encouraged listeners to reflect inwardly when life feels stalled. "If something is not working in your life, you have to look within and ask, 'What's wrong with me?'" she said. "He can't lie. If He said it and you believe it, it's coming to pass. You've just got to stand on it."

Clark explained that her book is divided into sections that include prophetic visions, spiritual lessons, and resources. One section details a prophetic dream

that inspired her to begin writing the book.

A significant portion of Clark's talk focused on relationships, forgiveness, and stewardship. She cited honoring parents as the Bible's first promise and urged reconciliation over resentment. "Just forgive and learn the lesson," she said. "Forgive them and pray for them. God wants you to have peace."

North Lawndale Newspaper publisher Isaac Lewis asked Clark about survival strategies

mentioned in the book. Clark recounted a violent attack she endured as a teenager while attending Lane Tech High School—an experience that left her with severe injuries and forever altered her life.

"When I was attacked, the first thing that came out of my mouth was, 'Jesus, take care of me,'"

Clark said, describing how she fled for help after falling from a three-story building. "The first thing I said to my mom was, 'Jesus took care of me.'" She noted that although her family was not regularly attending church at the time, her faith emerged in the moment of crisis. Additional stories, she said, are explored throughout the book.

Lewis also asked Clark about the timeline of the book and Clarke explained that she began writing it while still a teenager in high school and I actually had to miss the first month



Author, Helen M. Clark (seated) and supporters getting their books signed after she gave a heartfelt talk at "Spill the Beans Cafe" located at 5300 W Chicago Ave. on her book.

of school.

"And we didn't have any e-learning then," she said. When asked about forgiveness from the audience, Clark described moments when retaliation seemed justified but ultimately chose a different path. "It wasn't personal against me," she explained. "I asked myself what in his life made him do this."

In response to a comment supporting "an eye for an eye," Clark urged reflection over revenge.

"You have to ask yourself, is it worth it?" she said. "God will take care of it. You're going to reap what you sow." Clark revealed she began writing the book shortly after the attack in high school and has been shaping it ever since. "This is the journey," she told readers. "It might be hard, and you might have to put it down—but pick it back up. I'm going to show you how to walk with Him."

The book is available for purchase online, visit: www.Helenmclark.com

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Richard Boykin visits Living Fresh Market Campaigning for Cong. Davis Seat

By Ms. Chevette M. Conley
Writer/ Photojournalist

As the new year begins, Illinois voters are preparing for a significant political moment in 2026. With several long-held political seats opening up due to retirements and long-time officials choosing not to seek reelection, this election cycle is shaping up to be one of the most consequential in years.

One of the most notable changes comes from The Honorable Congressman Danny K. Davis, who has represented the district for decades, has announced that he will not seek reelection. His decision marks the end of a historic era of leadership. Congressman Davis has endorsed State Representative La Shawn K. Ford, signaling what he describes as the importance of passing the torch to the next generation of leadership.

However, Representative Ford is not the only candidate seeking this prestigious seat. Chicago City Treasurer Melissa Conyears-Ervin and 10 other candidates have entered the race and have been actively campaigning throughout Illinois, building visibility and support across the district.

Candidate former Cook County Commissioner (1st district) who represented the 1st District from December 2014 to November 2018. Boykin has formally launched his campaign and recently hosted a community meet-and-greet to introduce voters to his platform.

The event was held at Living Fresh Market, the largest African American-owned grocery store in the region, located at 7620 Roosevelt Road in Forest Park. The modern, spacious grocery store—known for offering fresh produce and a wide selection of household staples—served as a fitting backdrop for a community-focused gathering.

Residents attended the event to meet Boykin, hear his vision, and ask questions about his campaign for Illinois' 7th Congressional District. During his remarks, Boykin emphasized plans to introduce legislation aimed at lowering taxes, providing greater support for seniors struggling with rising grocery and housing costs, and improving public safety in local neighborhoods.

Guests were invited to enjoy brunch while networking and engaging in conversation. The afternoon concluded with a speech outlining Boykin's priorities and commitment to serving constituents across the district. Video footage from the event can be found on his Facebook page, Richard Boykin for Congress.

Some of the statements made by Boykin were, "You've come to support the largest black owned grocery store in the United States of America, which I believe is important. I like this grocery store and I encourage everyone to please come. They have great food, they have fresh food and it's owned by African Americans. So we have to support these types of grocery stores."

I'm running for Congress to disrupt the status quo. Too many of our fellow citizens are finding it more difficult to live to achieve the American dream. Too many of our citizens are finding it difficult to get an education they can't afford it. Most college tuition is going up. So I'm running basically to lower costs in housing, health care, and childcare, groceries, gasoline. We want to lower those costs. I want to make sure that we create more jobs for everybody. The West side of Chicago has lost thousands of jobs. So has the South Side. We have to put people in jobs so that they can support their families and support their communities. Job

creation is a way to stabilize our communities.

I also want to make sure that every neighborhood is safe. People deserve public safety. Grandparents. Senior citizens walking down the street shouldn't have to fear about being robbed or being killed by gun violence. I want to make sure that we have safe places for our children. One of the initiatives that I said that I will introduce, one of the first in the 90 days, the first 90 days of Congress, is that I'll make sure that senior citizens will be exempted from paying property taxes.

That's an important bill. Our senior citizens have paved the way for us. They worked hard all of their lives. They've been invested into their house and into their property. And they shouldn't have fear of losing their property because some tax buyer comes along and buys the house from under them. Seniors live on fixed incomes. We got to make sure that we meet their needs. This is one bill that I'm going to champion. I'm going to do it in the first 90 days that I'm in Congress.

See Boykin page 7



Richard Boykin hosting meet and greet at Living Fresh Market

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Boykin from page 4

Seniors, I value you.

You judge the greatness of the nation. But how will you treat your senior citizens, and how will you treat your children and the most vulnerable among us. Right now, the United States is failing that test. Because we're failing our kids whenever we pass them and they graduate and they can't even read or write or do math, that's wrong. We've got to change that. I want to make sure that we do it. I want to reverse the cuts to Medicaid because we got poor people that are going to be kicked off their health care.

I want to extend the Obamacare subsidies so that people don't have to face 100% increase in their health care premiums. I want to make sure that we protect Medicare and we protect Social Security. We expand Social Security so that people can get more money than what they're currently getting. These are the things that I want to do. I'm Richard Boykin and I'm asking for your support.

With multiple candidates and fresh leadership on the horizon, the 2026 election promises to be an important and competitive race. Voters are encouraged to study the candidates, attend community events, and make informed choices about the future they want for Illinois and the 7th Congressional District.

ICE from front page

operation near West 27th Street. In Evanston, federal vehicles and Border Patrol agents were seen circulating through neighborhoods, prompting criticism from local officials and community members. Evanston Mayor Daniel Biss publicly confronted Commander Bovino over the enforcement activity, describing the raids as "abusive, racist, and violent," and questioning their necessity. In Little Village, advocates report that the operations have spread fear among families, prompting some residents to remain indoors during school and work hours.

Despite assurances from ICE and DHS, community groups and some reporting suggest that many detained individuals do not have serious criminal histories. This discrepancy has become a central point of contention, fueling legal challenges, public demonstrations, and continued calls for transparency.

As of now, it remains unclear how long the increased ICE presence will continue. Authorities have not disclosed how many individuals have been arrested, detained, released, or the overall cost of the ongoing operations. Community leaders continue to demand clearer answers as residents across Chicago-area neighborhoods navigate heightened enforcement activity and growing tension.

Remembering Our Black History

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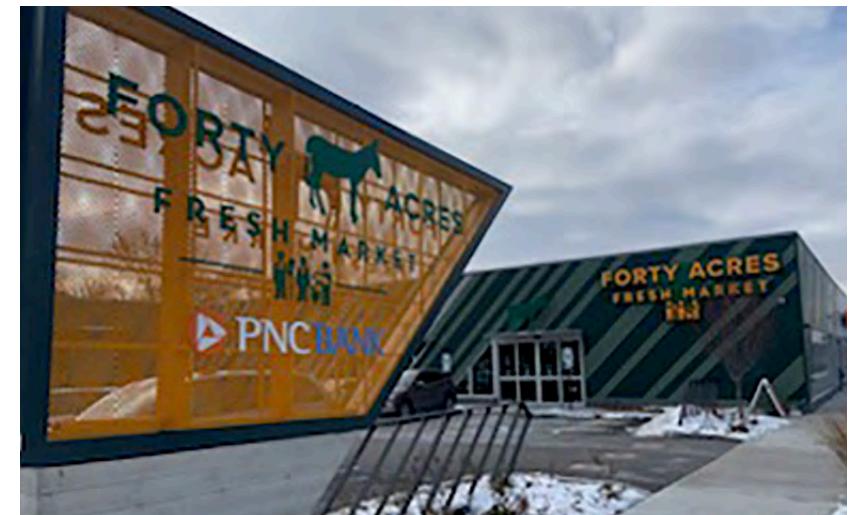
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Forty Acres Fresh Market

By Todd Thomas

For years, entrepreneur Liz Abunaw has worked to bring high-quality, affordable food to Chicago's West Side. As founder and owner of Forty Acres Fresh Market, she began with a neighborhood-focused produce delivery service, bringing fresh food directly to residents long before opening a storefront. Just months ago, that vision expanded with the opening of her first brick-and-mortar grocery store in the heart of the Austin community. Committed to serving Black neighborhoods that have long lacked reliable access to fresh food, Abunaw has built more than a grocery store—she has built a community-centered food ecosystem. In this interview with the North Lawndale Community News, she reflects on the journey, the challenges, and what Forty Acres Fresh Market means for Austin. NLCN: Can you talk about the importance of being a Black-owned grocery store in Austin? Liz Abunaw: What's most important is being the right grocery store for the Austin community. That means quality, value, the right product assortment, and excellent customer service. Those are the basics customers expect anywhere. Being Black-owned is the cherry on top. Every business reflects its owner, and Forty Acres does too. You see it in the name, the logo with the mule, the hot food department—Mabel's Meals—named after my great-grandmother, and in the artwork and music throughout the store. One customer told me it feels like home, and I think that feeling comes from the store being Black-owned and rooted in the community. NLCN: What have been the biggest rewards so far? Liz: One of the biggest rewards is building grocery industry knowledge right here in Austin. Our staff is learning merchandising, inventory, pricing, supply chain, and customer service. Grocery is complex, and without experience, stores fail quickly. About 70% of our employees live in nearby ZIP codes—60644, 60651, 60639, and 60624. Together, we're learning how to be strong grocery operators. That's how you eventually see more Black-owned grocery stores in our neighborhoods. Another reward is customer loyalty. Seeing the same customers return week after week tells us we're doing something right and building a store that can last. NLCN: How do the delivery service, farmers market, and store work together? Liz: It's all Forty Acres Fresh Market. The store wouldn't exist without first building the business through pop-up markets, the Austin Town Hall Farmers Market, and our produce box delivery service. Those efforts built our brand and customer base. Each service shares the same promise: Eat Fresher, Live Better. Customers experience the same quality whether they shop at the market, order delivery, or visit the store. Many use all three—starting with a produce box and then filling in the rest of their groceries in-store. It creates a seamless weekly shopping experience. NLCN: How many employees do you have, and are they from the community? Liz: We currently have 20 employees. Twelve live in Austin, and when you include Garfield Park and Lawndale, that number rises to 14—about 70% of our team. NLCN: Do you source from local suppliers? Liz: We've sourced locally since day one. Our produce and meat wholesalers are Chicago-based. During the growing season, we work with local farms like Windy City Harvest, Urban Growers Collective, and Sol de Chicago. For the store, we partner with suppliers that can keep shelves stocked year-round. We also butcher meat in-house, sourcing a half hog and a whole lamb weekly from Slagel Farm in Fairbury, Illinois. We run a program called Stack Your Impact, highlighting Black-owned, woman-owned, and

locally owned brands so customers can shop intentionally. Local products include Kribi Coffee, Ms. P's Gluten-Free Granola, El Milagro tortillas, Lock's BBQ sauce, and Bee Love Honey. NLCN: Why should people shop at Forty Acres? Liz: Our Google reviews say a lot—4.9 stars with more than 150 reviews. Customers consistently mention fresh food, fair prices, and friendly service. Two favorites are Mabel's Meals and The Butcher Block. Our butchers customize cuts, answer questions, and even shuck oysters. Our hot food is made from scratch daily, with options for everyone—including SNAP customers through our grab-and-go section. NLCN: Any standout products? Liz: Lamb meatballs, turkey chops, fried chicken, the 7Up cake, and our fresh-squeezed juices—especially the 24 Carrot Gold. NLCN: Anything else you'd like to add? Liz: We're located at 5713 W. Chicago Ave. and open daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Whether it's breakfast, lunch, dinner, or your weekly groceries, we look forward to seeing you.



40 Acres Fresh Market located at 5713 W. Chicago Ave.

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West Siders show frustration over rising property tax bills



Ald. Monique Scott 24th Ward sat with westside residents listening to Cook County Assessor Fritz Kaegi explain the extreme rise in property taxes on the westside.

A packed town hall meeting at Collins High School brought together West Side residents, local leaders, and county officials to confront growing frustration over rising property tax bills and what many described as an unfair system that disproportionately burdens Black, Brown and working-class communities. Political leaders included Cook County Assessor Fritz Kaegi, Board of Review Commissioner Larry Rogers, Cook County Commissioner Michael Scott Jr., and Alderwoman Monique Scott, and Alderman Jason Ervin.

The meeting quickly turned into an emotional and, at times, tense exchange as homeowners, landlords, and seniors shared stories of dramatic increases in their tax bills—some rising by thousands of dollars in a single year. Residents questioned why tax relief seemed elusive for neighborhoods like North Lawndale and Austin while large downtown commercial properties and corporations received significant reductions.

Downtown Cuts, Neighborhood Burdens

Officials explained that one major driver of higher bills is the shifting of tax responsibility from downtown commercial properties to homeowners across the city. According to officials, hundreds of millions of dollars in tax reductions granted to large commercial properties—such as hotels, office towers, and data centers—were effectively passed on to residential taxpayers citywide. That shift translated to an average of about \$700 more per homeowner, with even higher increases in West Side neighborhoods where home values have risen sharply since the pandemic.

Residents challenged the fairness of that system, pointing out that many local homeowners face stagnant wages, rising insurance and utility costs, and limited economic opportunity.

“It’s an incredible injustice,” one resident said, noting that some local building owners struggle to keep units affordable while downtown properties owned by major corporations see their bills drop by millions.

Rising Home Values, Rising Bills

Officials also pointed to post-pandemic housing market changes as another factor. As more people seek homeownership and larger living spaces, demand has pushed up prices for lower-cost homes in neighborhoods like North Lawndale, Austin, and Garfield Park. While rising values reflect long-term investment and stability, they also result in higher assessments—and higher taxes.

Residents pushed back, arguing that increased paper value does not mean increased ability to pay. “People are going to lose their homes,” one speaker warned, drawing applause from the audience.

Appeals, Exemptions, and Relief Options

Much of the discussion focused on what residents can do now. Officials and staff outlined several options available to homeowners:

- Property tax appeals through the assessor’s office or the Board of Review
- Certificates of Error for factual mistakes, such as incorrect square footage or property condition
- Exemptions, including homeowner, senior, senior freeze, and long-term homeowner exemptions

Staff members were stationed on-site to help residents review bills, check exemption status, and begin paperwork. Officials emphasized that homeowners should carefully review the estimated market value on their bill and appeal if it exceeds what they believe their home could realistically sell for.

Beyond immediate relief, residents and elected officials agreed the current property tax system is broken. Several speakers called for state-level reforms, including a property tax circuit breaker—a program used in many other states that limits taxes based on income—and more equitable school funding to reduce reliance

on property taxes.

Others raised concerns about Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts, calling them a “backdoor tax increase” that prevents falling rates even as property values rise.



Cook County Assessor Fritz Kaegi



Cook County Commissioner Michael Scott Jr and Ald Jason Ervin

The meeting concluded with a shared acknowledgment that while appeals and exemptions may help in the short term, long-term solutions must come from Springfield.

“This can’t be fixed one household at a time,” one local leader said. “We need structural change before more families are priced out of the communities they fought to stay in.”

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