

'Talk about a tough period in Chicago history, In one way it was very exciting, and in another way it was absolutely terrible.'

— Paul Green of Roosevelt University



Tribune file photos

Harold Washington and his longtime fiancée Mary Ella Smith at the McCormick Inn on Feb. 22, 1983, the night he won the Democratic mayoral primary. "It was a fear of the unknown," said Ald. Richard Mell of the opposition to Washington.

The race race

Looking back at Harold Washington's stunning mayoral primary victory 20 years ago

By John Owens
Tribune staff reporter

When Chicago holds its municipal elections for mayor next Tuesday, the topic of race probably won't be a major subject — even though incumbent Richard M. Daley faces three African-American candidates, Rev. Paul Jakes, Patricia McAllister and Rev. Joseph McAfee. There probably won't be any talk about Jakes and McAllister splitting the black vote, or candidates using racially coded language to whip voters into a frenzy, or angry protests if a black candidate visits a white ward. And there definitely won't be a record turnout of voters at the polls.

What a difference two decades makes.

Twenty years ago this Saturday, Harold Washington shocked the city by beating Daley and incumbent Jane Byrne in the 1983 Democratic mayoral primaries. That battle — which drew around 1.2 million voters to the polls — led to a bitter, racially divisive general election campaign against Republican candidate Bernard Epton, which Washington also won, making him the city's first African-American mayor.

"Talk about a tough period in Chicago history," recalled Paul Green, the director of Roosevelt University's School of Policy Studies. "In one way it was very exciting, and in another way it was absolutely terrible. Issues were irrelevant — no one talked about the budget — it was about race, and it got dirty."

Time heals most wounds, though. And as the 20th anniversary of Washington's Democratic primary victory approaches, colleagues and observers now have almost wistful memories about that controversial era in Chicago history. What still impresses most was the overwhelming interest in the primary and general elections from all sections of the city and how race played a key role in the vote Chicagoans cast.

Washington squeaked by to win the primary with only 36 percent of



Harold Washington squeaked by to win the primary with only 36 percent of the vote, compared with 34 percent for Jane Byrne (left) and 30 percent for Richard M. Daley (above). Washington, however, won 99 percent of the African-American vote.

the vote, compared with Byrne's 34 percent and Daley's 30 percent. But Washington won with 99 percent of the black vote, in addition to 75 percent of Hispanics and 12 percent of whites.

"The African-American voter was really galvanized," said Ald. Richard Mell (33rd). "And there were people in certain areas of the city who saw the race factor as a way of getting huge votes in the city, and they did."

"No one really anticipated the outpouring of black support that Harold got," added former Tribune City Hall reporter Robert Davis, now a journalism instructor at Columbia College. "It was an amazing

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The few, the proud, the crazy

By Kevin M. Williams
Tribune staff reporter

It's an "ugly cold" day in Chicago — a biting wind and 17-degree temperatures combine to give pedestrians that Hawk-induced grimace — and some psycho on a bicycle is riding down the road.

"Fool," seem to say the drivers' head-shakes as they crank the heat in sympathy. On this day that fool is me, but it could be any of the many cyclists who think that winter just means a different bike and more clothes.

"For me, it's sort of like a free winter sport," says Randy Neufeld, head of the Chicagoland Bicycle Federation, who uses an 18-inch-tall illuminated snowman for his taillight, believing that "they won't mow down Frosty."

"I have to go to work anyway, so why not ride?"

Neufeld has ridden when the actual air temperature was minus sanity, claiming that "the actual temperature is more important than the wind chill," as he swears by a balaclava-like contraption insulated with dog hair. Yes, dog hair.

"I got it from these cyclists in Winnipeg," Neufeld says with a chuckle. "The hair is like Holoofil fiber, but it comes from Husky dogs. It's so warm, I can't wear it unless it's 5 degrees or colder."

It takes a special sort of person to cycle through the winter. *Anyone* can ride when it's 80 and sunny. Winter riders are the few, the proud, the crazy — but also the dedicated. On days when no sane person should be on a bike, moving at a stately pace up Sheridan Road like a gawky apparition will be 53-year-old Al Stern.

Stern, the iconic cyclist, didn't miss a day of riding for years — including the odd blizzard — to the tune of more than 10,000 miles a year. Stern was struck by a car last year — in the fall however, not winter; his season to shine — and after a long rehab now says, "I won't ride in freezing rain or blizzards anymore. I'll go down to about zero, though."

"You just gotta put more clothes on," says Stern, who believes in layering, like every winter rider

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Oscar nominees, Oscar fugitives

By Maureen Ryan
Tribune staff reporter

Every year when the Academy Award nominations come out, we have a few questions — not of the "Why wasn't so-and-so nominated?" variety, but of the "This is weird, what's the deal?" variety. So we decided to do some digging and answer those nagging Oscar queries.

Q Isn't there a warrant out for Roman Polanski's arrest, and so what are the chances the best director nominee will attend the ceremony?

A After an incident with a 13-year-old girl in 1977, the then-43-year-old Polanski pleaded guilty to one count of unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor, but fled the country in 1978 before he was sentenced. Sandi Gibbons, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office spokeswoman, recently told the Associated Press that Polanski will be arrested if he enters the United States. "He's a convicted felon, and that's not going to go away," Gibbons said. "You don't get a pass for longevity."

So the Polish director, a previous nominee for "Rosemary's Baby," "Chinatown" and "Tess," will stay put in his Paris home, by most accounts. "He has been in Paris for 25 years, and there's no attempt to bring him back," Polanski's agent, Jeff Berg, told USA Today.

Q Is it true that Peter O'Toole turned down the honorary Oscar that the academy wanted to give him?

A Yes — sort of. After hearing that the academy wanted to give him an honorary award for his work in classics such as "Lawrence of Arabia," "The Lion in Winter" and "My Favorite Year," O'Toole asked Oscar organizers to put off the honor for a decade. Despite losing each of

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Seeking neutrality in the media's war of words

By Robert K. Elder
Tribune staff reporter

In recent months, magazines, TV news networks and newspapers — including the Chicago Tribune — have used the term "impending war" when referring to the U.S. position regarding Iraq.

The phrase's permeation in news culture raises questions about the media's word choice and objectivity, said Michael Josephson, president of the Josephson Institute of Ethics, a non-partisan, non-profit organization based in Marina del Rey, Calif.

"Used by politicians, [the phrase] may be part of the political negotiation that goes on ...," Josephson said. "But when the journalists do it, accepting it as a given, it creates the impression that, in fact, neutral or objective people are concluding that war is inevitable."

Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition, lists the definition of impending as "to be about to happen, be imminent" and the "now rare" definition of "to hang or be suspended." It is not a neutral word, says Josephson.

A database search of U.S. newspapers and wire services, excluding letters to the editor, in the last six months uncovered 725 mentions of "impending war" in reference to Iraq. Additional searches also found "imminent war" (214) and "upcoming war" (84) in frequent use.

The New York Times, Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today and Los Angeles Times used the phrase "impending war" in news section stories in January, as did the Chicago Tribune.

"I don't have the feeling it's risen to the status of an issue either with readers or internally," said

Michael Getler, Post ombudsman. "In today's situation, if I were an editor, I wouldn't take out the word 'impending' necessarily or find that it was not a reasonable word to use."

Post national copy desk chief Vince Rinehart added: "What we've been going with is 'looming' or 'potential' war, which seems pretty ludicrous to me. I suppose it seems ludicrous to me because everyone in the newsroom is convinced it's coming and it's coming soon."

The term "impending war" is an overstatement, says Allan M. Siegal, assistant managing editor of The New York Times.

"Potential war" would be more accurate than "imminent war" or "impending war" at this point," he said. "I agree that the two latter expressions, if

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INSIDE TEMPO

MUSIC



Beating the odds

Kinky brings rock's new world to the House of Blues. **PAGE 3**

MAYOR: Campaign in '83 was a revelation

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thing, you could almost feel it on the streets. Everyone who was African-American was wearing those famous 'blue sunrise' [Washington campaign] buttons on the CTA, on the 'L,' everywhere."

Washington, who died in office while serving his second term in 1987, had spent his prior 30 years in local, state and federal politics.

But his 1983 campaign was a revelation for many Chicagoans, who had never heard Washington's explosive, imaginative use of the English language.

One example — days before the 1983 primary election, Washington spoke of rival Edward Vrdolyak "impaling himself on his own petard," after the rival Chicago alderman publicly proclaimed race to be the defining campaign factor for most voters.

"I thought Harold was a very highly educated person," said Ald. Burton Natarus (42nd). "If there was anybody who knew the dictionary it was him."

"As a human being, you'd want him living next door to you," Mell said. "As a politician, he was tough as hell. And I think he was starting to come into his own as mayor."

Washington had been known as a political force in the African-American community for years, serving as a machine loyalist with independent tendencies. He had been raised in a political family, with his father, Roy, serving as a precinct captain in the city's 3rd Ward Democratic Organization.

And Harold Washington himself had what some would describe as patronage jobs during the 1950s and early '60s in Chicago, working as a 3rd Ward precinct captain and assistant corporation counsel.

Even while he was getting good reviews as a state senator and state representative in Springfield between 1965 and 1980, he was also tethered to the Democratic machine for at least part of that time.

"He wasn't free, not even when he was sitting in the House, you see," said Dempsey Travis, an African-American real estate mogul who also was a childhood friend of Washington. "The vote was a vote that came down [from the machine], it wasn't one he could make independently."

But Washington, who was elected as the U.S. representative serving the South Side's 1st Congressional District in 1980, found himself being drafted to run for mayor by black political activists such as Timuel Black, Conrad Worrill, Robert Lucas, Lu Palmer, Renault Robinson and Robert Starks. They spoke



Harold Washington greets supporters while campaigning only days after winning the Democratic nomination for mayor in 1983.

for a community that was unsatisfied with then-Mayor Jane Byrne. That community had helped put Byrne in office in 1979, then watched her make unpopular decisions such as replacing blacks with whites on the boards of the mostly minority public school and public housing systems.

Making demands

Washington only agreed to run in November 1982, after supporters met his requirements of at least 100,000 new registered African-American voters and \$100,000 in seed money for his campaign fund. Travis and Soft Sheen Products founder and CEO Edward Gardner were instrumental in raising money for Washington.

"When Harold decided to run and I decided to support him publicly, I had a \$500,000 contract to do appraisals with the city for the North Loop under Jane Byrne," Travis recalled. "Needless to say, that contract got ripped up, see. But that's the price you have to pay."

Washington encouraged the grass-roots activists on the South and West Sides to whip up support for him in the black community.

Those activists — like Starks, now an associate professor in the political science department at the Center for Inner-City Studies at Northeastern Illinois University — used all sorts of tactics to gain this support.

"We picketed [black] churches that supported Byrne or Daley," Starks said. "We highlighted the fact that several black ministers were supporting Byrne. And we asked young people in the churches to raise the question on Sunday morning — why weren't these ministers supporting Harold Washington and why were they supporting Jane Byrne?"

"Harold affectionately called us 'the Mau-Mau,'" Starks said. "But it was Washington's strong showing in a series of debates against Byrne and Daley that made him better-known in the non-black sections of the city and galvanized his supporters. For blacks and fence-sitting white liberals, the debates demonstrated that Washington was a serious and committed candidate around whom they could

rally and that this was not a symbolic campaign but one that could be won.

"In the debates, you could tell that [Washington] knew more about running the city than Byrne and Daley," said Mary Ella Smith, Washington's longtime fiancée. "By 1983, he had served for so long in local politics, and he knew what it took to run the city. And he let the people know that he knew what it took."

White support for Washington picked up slightly for his general election campaign against Epton. But despite an endorsement from then-Cook County Board President George Dunne, most high profile Chicago Democrats did not actively support Washington. Some in the party actually campaigned for Epton.

"I can say in all honesty that I didn't do a lot for Harold Washington in the general election like I should have," said Mell, now in his 28th year as the alderman for his Northwest Side ward. "I just let the people in the community vote the way they wanted to vote."

Democratic reservations

Like many other aldermen serving wards on the then-predominantly white ethnic Northwest and Southwest Sides of the city, Mell had reservations about Washington, even though they shared Democratic Party affiliations.

"It was a fear of the unknown," Mell recalled. "I think Harold was an unknown quantity to a lot of people who thought, where's this guy coming from and is he going to dismantle the Democratic Party as we know it? It would be less than candid to say that race didn't play a role — of course it did."

After losing the primary race, Daley returned to his role as Cook County state's attorney. He visited Washington in the mayor's office shortly after he was elected in 1983.

Daley still laughs about how one of Washington's first tasks as mayor was cleaning off longtime Mayor Richard J. Daley's desk in the fifth floor office at City Hall.

"He invited me over to the office as one of the first visitors," Daley remembered. "He told me he found my father's desk, and

how he cleaned it off. He said he hoped everything about it rubbed off on him."

Twenty years after his stunning primary victory, most people remember him most for his reform policies in city government.

The Washington administration created the city's first-ever ethics ordinance; issued an executive order which mandated additional minority set asides for government contracts; issued a "Freedom of Information" executive order that made it easier for the public to get access governmental information; opened the city's budget process for public input and participation; and encouraged increased funding for neighborhood infrastructure improvement programs.

Observers wonder what might have been with if Washington had lived on, who spent his first three years in office fighting with a majority of 29 aldermen in the 50-member council who were opposed to the mayor.

"The great tragedy of Harold Washington," said Paul Green, "is that he only had only a little more than a year to enjoy the notion of being a mayor who could start pushing programs."

A 30-minute special, "Here's Harold — The Election of Harold Washington," appears on CLTV at 4:30 p.m. Saturday and at 6 p.m. Tuesday. It's also on WGN-Ch. 9 at 6:30 a.m. Saturday.

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WAR: The power of words

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used, should ideally be attributed to someone. Haste results in imprecision sometimes in daily journalism. I am confident that no departure from neutral reporting was intended, or would be knowingly tolerated in our news columns."

Susan Miller, copy desk chief in the news department of USA Today, said her paper uses the terms "possible war" or "conflict," adding that language use in this instance "hasn't been an issue."

The Tribune's associate managing editor in charge of foreign news, Tim McNulty, stresses similar caution.

"We've been very careful to write about what we know, not about what will happen," McNulty said. "We're very careful about the word 'war' itself, as compared to an attack or launch. If there is conflict, no one knows what kind of action there will be. That's a constant concern when you're writing about foreign policy."

Still, most publications and many news outlets started using "impending war" and synonymous terms as far back as last September when the Bush administration was calling for a "regime change" in Iraq.

There are two repercussions of using such language, Joseph said.

"One, the journalistic community all of a sudden becomes part of the political rhetoric, and the political system, which is always dangerous," he said. "[Two], it may literally change the climate and translate nego-

tiating positions or tentative positions into much firmer positions, just by creating momentum."

He continues: "We as a country have said that we will subject this process to at least a serious investigation by the inspectors and like. The more we use the term 'impending war' and the earlier we start using it — we started using it pretty early — the more it makes us look disingenuous and insincere about following the regulations."

In journalism, reporters have to be both accurate and authentic in their language choice, said Aly Colón, part of the ethics faculty at Poynter Institute, a school for working journalists in St. Petersburg, Fla.

"Accurate means you are using the word that it means," Colón said. "Authentic means you're conveying the whole concept, that you're true to what is going on. As journalists we have an ethical responsibility in the kinds of words we use. What words we use help create that reality."

Cable news channels such as CNN, Fox News and MSNBC operate on much the same level, Colón said, although the proximity of commentators to "hard news" reporting can create some confusing perceptions. Talk radio, online news and even late-night comedy shows, he said, add new elements to the news stream.

"All of that becomes a plethora, because ideas and commentary and news can meld into a bucket of news that can make it difficult for viewers, readers and users to separate them," Colón said.

"The need by the cable news channels to continuously feed that air space [results in] news shows that have less news and more show, making it difficult gaining credibility in the long run."

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