The passage of the “Reparations for Burge Torture Victims” Ordinance by the Chicago City Council on May 6, 2015 marked a landmark win in the long history of grassroots organizing and activism by and on behalf of the over 100 victims of Chicago police Commander Jon Burge’s torture ring. The reparations package included an admission of guilt and apology by the City of Chicago for the torture that occurred, the creation of a center on the Southside dedicated to supporting survivors with services like trauma counseling, and no-cost access to City Colleges for torture survivors.\(^1\) While these aspects of the ordinance provide material resources for torture survivors and their families, the organizers who developed and fought on behalf of the reparations package made certain to defend the citywide memory of torture committed by Burge’s “midnight crew” through the creation of an 8th and 10th grade required curriculum on torture for all Chicago Public Schools’ students and, notably, the creation of a permanent public memorial to the survivors of police torture. Joey Mogul, lawyer for multiple Burge torture survivors and author of the original reparations ordinance, says of these inclusions, “[t]he hope is that by inscribing these cases both figuratively and literally into the collective memory, generations to come will ensure torture is never again committed in our name.”\(^2\)

Nearly five years after the passage of the reparations ordinance, these measures of maintaining collective, institutional memory have faced staunch opposition, while often falling prey to the perils of Chicago’s unnavigable bureaucracy and machine politics. The legally mandated public school curriculum has faced strong backlash from many parents, community

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\(^2\) Ibid.
members, as well as the Chicago Fraternal Order of Police\(^3\); the mandated public monument, whose proposal was submitted to the city in 2019, has yet to be allocated funding by Mayor Lori Lightfoot.\(^4\) In spite of the legal mandate of the reparations ordinance, these measures of ensuring and building a collective memory of the violence committed by Jon Burge, the Chicago Police Department, and the City of Chicago have fallen prey to Chicago’s tradition of dishonoring and willfully ignoring the legacies of police violence and the contemporary impacts that it has.

The history of police violence in Chicago cannot be confined to one single site—violence at the hands of the Chicago Police Department is one that permeates the city. I am interested in how the city functions as a living archive of police violence and torture. The decades of ongoing violence and torture at the hands of the police are ingrained in the fibers of Chicago. In the wake of the passage of the Reparations Ordinance and the concurrent admission of guilt and apology by the city for the acts of torture committed against mostly Black and Latinx people, how has the city accounted for the histories of police violence that blanket Chicago, living in it’s architecture, public institutions, and perpetuated by Chicago police to this day?

When broadening our understanding of memorialization to be contributive to a project of restorative justice, a project permeated throughout abolitionist movements, it is evident that memorials become sites of radical change and imagination. In their chapter “Memorials in Times of Transition,” Susanne Buckley-Zistel and Stefanie Schäfer highlight the inherently discursive and imaginative nature of memorials and memorialization by “not simply looking back but also looking forward towards the future for it is here where change is anticipated. The performative

function of memorials thus actualises the linkage between past and future.”

Memorials do not simply reflect on events that occurred as finished and relegated to a remembered past. Rather, memorials become sites where the past becomes operative in discerning the future that an individual or a community imagines for themselves. The product of this discursivity is reminiscent of the call of abolition to engage in radical imagination. Writer and public scholar Walidah Imarisha explains this to be the primary challenge of movements working towards true liberation: “we critique and fight against what exists, but we take on the responsibility of stretching beyond the now, beyond what we have seen and felt and heard, to root in a shared vision of true liberation.” Thus, memorials become an active part of the justice process not just for those who experienced harm, but in preventing and imagining a world where the conditions that allow harm are mitigated.

Community organizations have already begun to lay the groundwork for modeling how memorialization can occur to pay tribute to those who experienced violence and harm on individual and community levels. The Equal Justice Initiative, an organization that works to end mass incarceration, began the “Community Remembrance Project,” a series of community based projects with the goal to “memorialize documented victims of racial violence and foster meaningful dialogue about race and justice.” Community projects supported by the Community Remembrance Project include the “Community Soil Collection Project,” which collects soil from sites of lynchings to display in an exhibit honoring the victims, as well as the “Historical Marker Project,” which illuminates dishonored sites of racial violence in public locations by erecting

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6Imarisha, Walidah. “To Build a Future Without Police and Prisons, We Have to Imagine It First.” OneZero.
markers of the violence. These projects are notable for their community centered approach, one that prioritizes the memory that the community members want to see maintained. These projects, and the others under the Community Remembrance Project, take the process of justice outside of the bureaucracy of municipalities and the state. Rather, they put into action a vision of a world where memories of violence are institutionalized and the stories of the victims are honored, so as not to be forgotten.

Following the lead of The Community Remembrance Project, this photo essay is concerned with the ways that the histories of police violence and torture are dishonored in the living archive that is the City of Chicago. The violence of policing, the criminal legal system, and the municipal government in Chicago is not something that can simply be relegated to a bygone era. The myriad sites stained by the legacies and present continuations of police violence must be understood as contributing to the collective memory of not only violence in Chicago, but also the community building, organizing, radical imagining, and power that grew from this violence. Perhaps this is a practice of remembering the past and imagining a more just future that leads Chicago towards a horizon of abolition.
Many of the stories of torture at the hands of Jon Burge and his underlings began at the old Area 2 Police Headquarters at 9059 S. Cottage Grove Avenue, better known as 91st and Cottage Grove. Screams could be heard coming from the second floor as Black and brown people were beaten, assaulted, locked to hot radiators, and tortured by officers, and neglected by
conspiring prosecutors. Area 2 Police Headquarters has since moved to a much bigger facility at 727 E. 111th Street. The old headquarters building was converted into a Cook County State’s Attorney “Justice Center,” founded on the principle that “prosecutors have a responsibility to not only to prosecute cases but to solve public safety problems, prevent crime and improve the quality of life for communities.”

The “Justice Center” has since closed; a sign remains showing the building’s one time designation as property of the State’s Attorney. The building now sits empty.

**Cook County Criminal Courts and Cook County Jail - 26th and California**

_Facing the Cook County Criminal Courthouse at 26th and California feels like facing a behemoth in presence and impact. The building hosts 31 courtrooms, where more than 22,000 cases are decided each year. It is likely that all of the victims of the Burge torture cases passed through the halls of this courthouse, as well as the adjacent Cook County Jail. Ronald Kitchen speaks of Cook County Jail’s “bullpen,” the ubiquitous point of entry for all of the tortured into__

8“Community Justice Program.” Cook County State's Attorney. April 24, 2017.
the system of incarceration. The courthouse steps have become a site of activism and agony for those faced with the realities of interacting with Chicago’s criminal legal system.

Visiting 26th and California is a return for me; I have worked with men in Cook County Jail for multiple years, until the COVID-19 pandemic ceased all jail programming. A study from June 2020 says that the cycle of people through Cook County Jail alone was associated with 15.7 percent of COVID-19 cases in Illinois and 15.9 percent of cases in Chicago by April 19, 2020.⁹ The flags fly at half-mast honoring the victims of COVID-19 at the order of the Governor of Illinois. Still, 5400 people sit detained in Cook County Jail as of February 26, 2021,¹⁰ many of whom will never be convicted of the crime they sit in jail accused of. The legacies of the Burge torture cases seem forgotten at the jailhouse doors.

Old Chicago Police Headquarters - 11th and State

March 2021

¹⁰"Update on COVID-19 Cases at Cook County Jail." Cook County Sheriff. February 26, 2021.
Growing up in Chicago has offered me an inside glimpse into the development and gentrification of many Chicago neighborhoods. The South Loop is one neighborhood that I remember as littered with cranes and construction, a nexus of skyward growth in Chicago during my early years. Returning to the South Loop meant seeing another skyrise or condo building that hadn’t been there a few months prior. Still, Roosevelt was still as far South as plenty of my Northsider peers in high school would travel. This area was always an in-between place, one where tepidness amounts and the anxieties of development are abundant.

When the new Chicago Police Headquarters opened June 3, 2000, any trace of the old headquarters at 11th and State vanished. Now, there lies “Shops at State Place,” a shopping center with tenants like Fitness Formula Club and European Wax Center, and a leasing brochure that touts an “average household income of $128,000 within just 1 mile.” Gone are the memories of the Task Force to Confront Police Violence's actions on the sidewalk in front of police headquarters supporting the dismissal proceedings of Burge and his underlings, and those of countless other grassroots actions targeting police violence and torture. Standing on 11th and State they feel pushed out, making space for six-figure salaries and real estate giants.

11 https://www.pinetree.com/portfolio/shops-at-state-place/
The reign of the Daley’s father-to-son mayoral dynasty is one that indelibly buttressed a particular culture of policing in Chicago, one deeply tied up with Democratic machine politics and the fear of retribution from someone higher than you on the political food chain. Mayor
Richard J. Daley, Old Man Daley to many, was born and raised at this bungalow on 35th and Lowe in Bridgeport. His son, future mayor Richard M. Daley was born and raised in this same home. The cop heavy neighborhood that Bridgeport is now, it is easy to wonder if the Daley dynasty cushioned itself with familiarity and support, surrounded by cops, dirty and otherwise, who the mayoral duo would ceaselessly support.

35th and Lowe became a site of advocating on behalf of victims of police torture when the Task Force to Confront Police Violence staged a march and protest at Daley’s front steps on April 27, 1991. Today, the home is still in the Daley family, owned by the younger Daley’s nephew, Patrick Daley Thompson. Driving around the city, you will find countless sites dedicated to the mayoral dynasty: the Richard J. Daley Branch and the Richard M. Daley Branch of the Chicago Public Library, the Daley Center, Daley Plaza, Maggie Daley Park. The legally mandated memorial to survivors of Chicago police torture has yet to be allocated funding.

City of Chicago Public Safety Headquarters - 3510 S. Michigan Avenue

March 2021
Driving southbound on Michigan Avenue approaching 35th Street, there is an obvious uptick in CPD squad cars roaming the area. As you near the intersection of those two streets, an imposing, modern-looking building comes into view. On a bright day the sun reflects off of the City of Chicago Public Safety Headquarters, headquarters to both the Chicago Police and Chicago Fire Departments. The new CPD headquarters were allocated $65 million by Mayor Richard M. Daley in 1997, ultimately completed in 2000; the reparations package given to torture survivors was less than one-tenth of that amount, at $5.5 million.

This stretch of 35th Street proved to become hallowed grounds following the race riots of Chicago’s “Red Summer” of 1919, riots where police cordoned off Black people and supported white rioters in their attack on Black Chicagoans. A young Richard J. Daley is alleged to have partaken in the racist violence of that deadly week. 101 summers later during the uprisings for Black lives, Chicago Police replicated this same service to white supremacy, brutalizing mostly Black protestors in defense of the institutions that have protected policing, no matter its harm.

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12"Mapping the 1919 Chicago Riot |." Mapping the 1919 Chicago Riot.
Like many other sites of police violence, 35th and State has become a breeding ground for activism and grassroots organizing against the terror of policing in Chicago. Organizers often fill the sidewalks outside of the glass doors to make their numbers seen, each act of resistance a provenance to a justice-centered future. Activism that isn’t limited to justice for survivors of police torture, but that follows in this illustrious tradition. Building a future where the conditions for police torture and violence can’t exist— perhaps a future where we don’t need police.

**Conclusion**

Visiting these sites of the Chicago police torture cases, while only a handful of the many important sites of harm, struggle, and organizing, reminds me that while the roots of police violence run deep in Chicago, so do the roots of solidarity and radical organizing. Interacting with Chicago’s living archive is an exercise in acknowledging harm and violence while choosing to privilege community responses to this harm. Undoubtedly, this practice is not one that is supported by the same systems that cause harm; Chicago has yet to financially nor functionally support the legally mandated memorial to survivors of police torture, let alone memorials to the organizing, meetings, rallies, protests, marches, and strikes that worked towards justice for police torture survivors. Until this sort of memorialization is institutionalized or, aspirationally, a remnant of pre-abolition times, I am interested in the ways in which community members undertake their own clandestine, indelibly important projects of memorialization.

While in the throes of advocating for the passage of the Reparations Ordinance, abolitionist community organizations Project NIA and Chicago PIC Teaching Collective created a zine entitled “Jon Burge and Chicago Police Torture” published in March 2013 as a part of their series *Historical Moments of Policing, Violence, and Resistance*.13 This zine is

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multipurpose—it acts as an educational tool in the relatively anemic corpus of literature on the Burge torture cases; it destructs hierarchies of information sharing, subverting traditional modes of knowledge sharing, like the news and scholarly study, that have often failed to generously tell the stories of police torture survivors; and it contributed to a living memory of the Burge torture cases by helping develop an archive of knowledge, one that is easily and publically accessible even today.

Poet and educator Quaraysh Ali Lansana’s poem “kill box” stitches together art and activism in Johns Hopkins’ *African American Review*. His poem, subtle in its approach and brief, is a tribute to the victims and to the memory of police violence. The subtitle of the poem, “after jon burge,” invites the reader to think of this poem as contributing to the collective memory of this violence, as well as acting as an attempt or insertion into the tradition of maintaining this memory. Like Project NIA’s zine before it, Lansana’s poem is another instance of memory and memorialization outside of what the city is willing to concede. Perhaps this empowered, willful form of memorialization is itself denying the city, the government, the police their say in how these victims and their experiences with police violence are remembered.

Lansana’s poem ends, “chicago considers all threats/ just don’t leave any marks,” a reference to the marks left on Burge’s victims of torture by the clips from the electric shock box. These marks and scars on the victims, each one a bodily memory of violence, were categorically ignored by judges, doctors, and jail personnel as tell-tale signs of abuse. The marks of the Burge torture cases and police violence at large have been made on Chicago; memorialization is a critical step in ensuring the pain and violence of policing in Chicago, and everywhere, is not forgotten. With abolition as the ultimate goal, each step along the way is a

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15 Ibid.
tribute to the resilience of those who have felt the pain of policing. This is not a futile step, either.

It is this remembering that will push us forward.
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