

Chicago Cops Beat Heads at Malcolm Park Memorial

Fifth Estate Collective

1967

Chicago (UNS)—A meeting called to rename a southside Chicago park in honor of slain leader Malcolm X Shabazz was turned into a scene of police violence, complete with billy clubs and riot guns, Sunday, May 21.

The occasion started out on a joyous note, with speeches, Afro-American music and dance, but friction developed when two young women attempted to join the crowd of between 250 and 300 black people. When the women were asked to leave and refused to do so, they were set upon by two young women from the group, who pushed and shoved them away.

Within minutes, the meeting was surrounded by uniformed and plainclothes policemen with guns drawn. Heated arguments ensued as police attempted to disperse the crowd. When the group, which remained generally calm, refused to leave, the police themselves left, or seemed to leave, and the meeting continued.

As the program ended, an announcement was made that a black and gold sign bearing the name, Malcolm Shabazz Park, would be posted at the northern entrance to the park (about two blocks away from the meeting place) and the people were asked to reconvene at that point. Unaware that the police were waiting for them, the crowd walked toward the old Washington Park sign, intending to replace it.

Violence erupted when a photographer, Bill Wallace, was beaten to the street by a police sergeant as Wallace attempted to photograph the old sign as it was being taken down. Angered by this act, members of the crowd retaliated by throwing sticks, stones and bottles and physically threatening members of the police force who had drawn their pistols and aimed them at members of the crowd.

As more police arrived, the crowd was forced back into the park. At this time, according to those closest to the action, police began firing into the air, then lowered their weapons and fired toward the men, women and children, but managed not to hit anyone. A 13 year old girl was arrested after allegedly being clubbed by police. Of the more than 30 arrested, several were injured either during the arrest or after. Photographer Wallace sustained several broken ribs. Another photographer said that the police seemed to have a special interest in persons photographing the events in the park.

The idea for renaming Washington Park, which constitutes a barrier between Chicago's vast southside black community, on the one hand, and the predominantly white middle-class Hyde Park-University of Chicago area, on the other originated with the Afro-American Student Association, headed by 23 year old Jim Harvey. The dedication commemorated the birthday of Malcolm X Shabazz (May 19th).

Speakers at the May 21st meeting were agreed that members of the surrounding black community had every right to rename the park for one of their own heroes, with or without the consent of City Hall. "They didn't ask our permission to name it Washington Park," one person commented.

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Fifth Estate #32, June 15-30, 1967

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