

# Protests, Battles, Riots, Strikes: The Civil Unrest that Shaped Chicago History

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Too often, history is boiled down to the achievements of individuals: presidents, kings, and “people of the year” whose actions supposedly shaped the world we live in. But is focusing on individuals the best way to understand history? In his 1980 book *A People’s History of the United States*, Howard Zinn wrote:

*The history of any country, presented as the history of a family, conceals fierce conflicts of interest (sometimes exploding, most often repressed) between conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, capitalists and workers, dominators and dominated in race and sex. And in such a world of conflict, a world of victims and executioners, it is the job of thinking people, as Albert Camus suggested, not to be on the side of the executioners.*

According to Zinn, history that aligns itself with powerful individuals overlooks the vast majority of people and implies that only the exceptional among us can change the world. In reality, the turning points of history have overwhelmingly been dictated by mass movements of everyday people demanding change.

The timeline below covers ten moments of civil unrest that shaped Chicago, moments when, for better or worse, masses of people took history into their own hands.

As you read, consider the similarities and differences between these moments of civil unrest. Which actions do you agree with? Which do you oppose? What protests do you feel are missing from this abbreviated history?

Click the image below to begin.



*“Non-violent resistance during the No NATO protests, Chicago, May 20, 2012” by Bartosz Brzezinski is licensed under CC BY 2.0. This image has been cropped and edited to include a timeline.*

For a printable version of this timeline, [click here](#).