

Washington (Harold) Park

5200 S Hyde Park Blvd, Chicago, IL 60615

Short Introduction:

The Harold Washington Park, located at 5200 S Hyde Park Boulevard, is a neighborhood park providing bridge access to Promontory Point and the Michigan Lakefront. The park houses tennis courts, a model yacht basin, a playground for children, and multiple parking lots for visitors. With trails for running and walking and easy access to the Museum of Science and Industry, the park provides the Hyde Park Neighborhood a space for recreation and relaxation. It was named after Mayor Harold Washington after his death in 1987, as a neighborhood commemoration for him.

Local History/Background for Teachers' Prep:

The Harold Washington Park was half underwater before the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. It was still a great location for community gatherings, as it hosted music festivals and Light Artillery shows in the late 1800s. The park did fall into ruins eventually, which Jen Jensen had to salvage in 1906 by creating new paths and placing new trees and benches. In the 1910s, Harold Sisson built six apartment buildings and four hotels lining the park. Seeing westward from the park, one can see the architectural luxury style that Chicago is known for around the world. In the 1930s, the tennis courts and model yacht basin were added to the park. Though both facilities seem to be empty on a regular visit to the park now, they were immensely popular when yacht competitions and tennis tournaments took place in the park. The park was so popular that the neighborhood gave a strong fight to the Mayor in the 1950s when he tried to make the park into a highway. The current expressway east of the park was built instead. The expressway is unavoidable to in any part of the park, effectively intruding the purpose of having green spaces in a neighborhood. In the 1980s, Monk Parakeets appeared in the park, eventually becoming Mayor Harold Washington's mascots. Unfortunately, due to the ash tree their nest was on splitting into two, the parakeets fled. Volunteers did try to save nestlings, but to no avail. Now, the park functions as a recreational space for the neighborhood, with its tennis courts, play area, and ample space for playing games and relaxation, the park is often filled on sunny days.

Videos (Pre-Field Trip Prep):

Obama Foundation: Remembering Mayor Harold Washington on his 100th birthday
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skZoiz4u3D4>

Images:

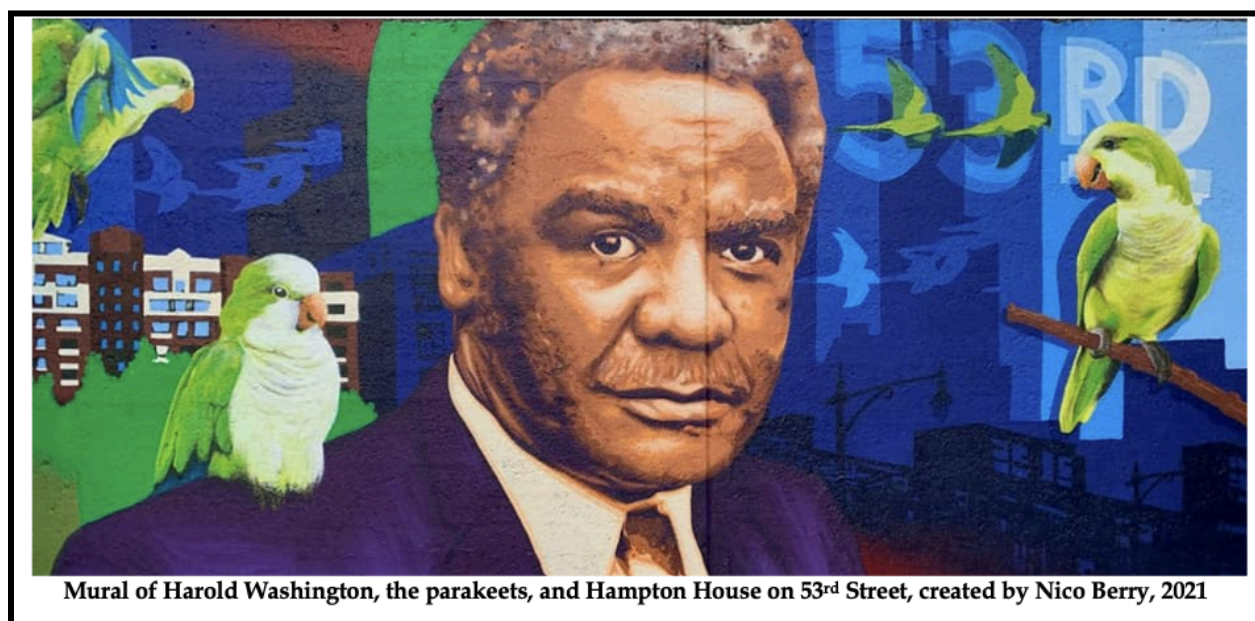


Image sourced from the Hyde Park Historical Society.

<https://www.hydeparkhistory.org/blog/hyde-park-stories-harold-washington-park>.

Walking Tour Script:

- The Harold Washington Park was half underwater before the Great Chicago Fire of 1871.
- The corner of 53rd & South Shore: from here to north, the park was underwater.
- It was a great location for community gatherings, as it hosted music festivals and Light Artillery shows in the late 1800s.
- The park did fall into ruins eventually, which Jen Jensen had to salvage in 1906 by creating new paths and placing new trees and benches.
- In the 1910s, Harold Sisson built six apartment buildings and four hotels lining the park. Seeing westward from the park, one can see the architectural luxury style that Chicago is known for around the world.
- In the 1930s, the tennis courts and model yacht basin were added to the park. Though both facilities seem to be empty on a regular visit to the park now, they were immensely popular when yacht competitions and tennis tournaments took place in the park.
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Questions for Discussion:

- Why do we name places after people? [*students can be introduced to the topic of memorialization here*]
- Why is it important to remember Harold Washington?
- What is the purpose and significance of a public park?
- What is the impact of having an expressway east of the park? Does it hinder the park experience? [*students can be introduced to the concept of "quiet" recreation spaces here and how city planning determines that*]

Suggested Activities:

- **Game Time!**
The park is most famously used for chess, tennis courts, and soccer. Students can vote on which activity they would like to engage in, or split up into three groups and have free play time for 20-30 minutes.
- **Biographies!**
Since this park is named after Harold Washington, this would be a good place to discuss his life with students. Each student can get a notecard with facts about his life, which they can read out loud to the class and discuss with each other. A fact list is available on CPL's website:
<https://www.chipublib.org/mayor-harold-washington-biography/>.
Students can also try to put the notecards in chronological order, allowing them to understand the cause and effect in a politician and civic leader's life.
- **A Visit to the Lake! (time permitting)**
Since the bridge connects to the Michigan Lakefront, the class can also take a small trip to the Lakefront and discuss the views of Downtown, the location of **Promontory Point**, and which other states (Wisconsin, Michigan, and Indiana) have access to the Michigan Lake. Students can learn about the local geography in this manner and understand the importance of the water source.

Further Resources:

Chicago Public Library: “Harold Washington: Selected Speeches Digital Collection”

<https://www.chipublic.org/harold-washington-speeches-digital-collection/>

Hyde Park Herald: “Hyde Park Stories: Harold Washington Park.”

https://www.hpherald.com/news/local/hyde-park-stories-harold-washington-park/article_83f2c61e-774e-11ec-979f-3f4f19b107eb.html