

Can Washington's victory point the way forward for the next Chicago mayor?

By Ben Joravsky and Tom Brune | March 10, 2015

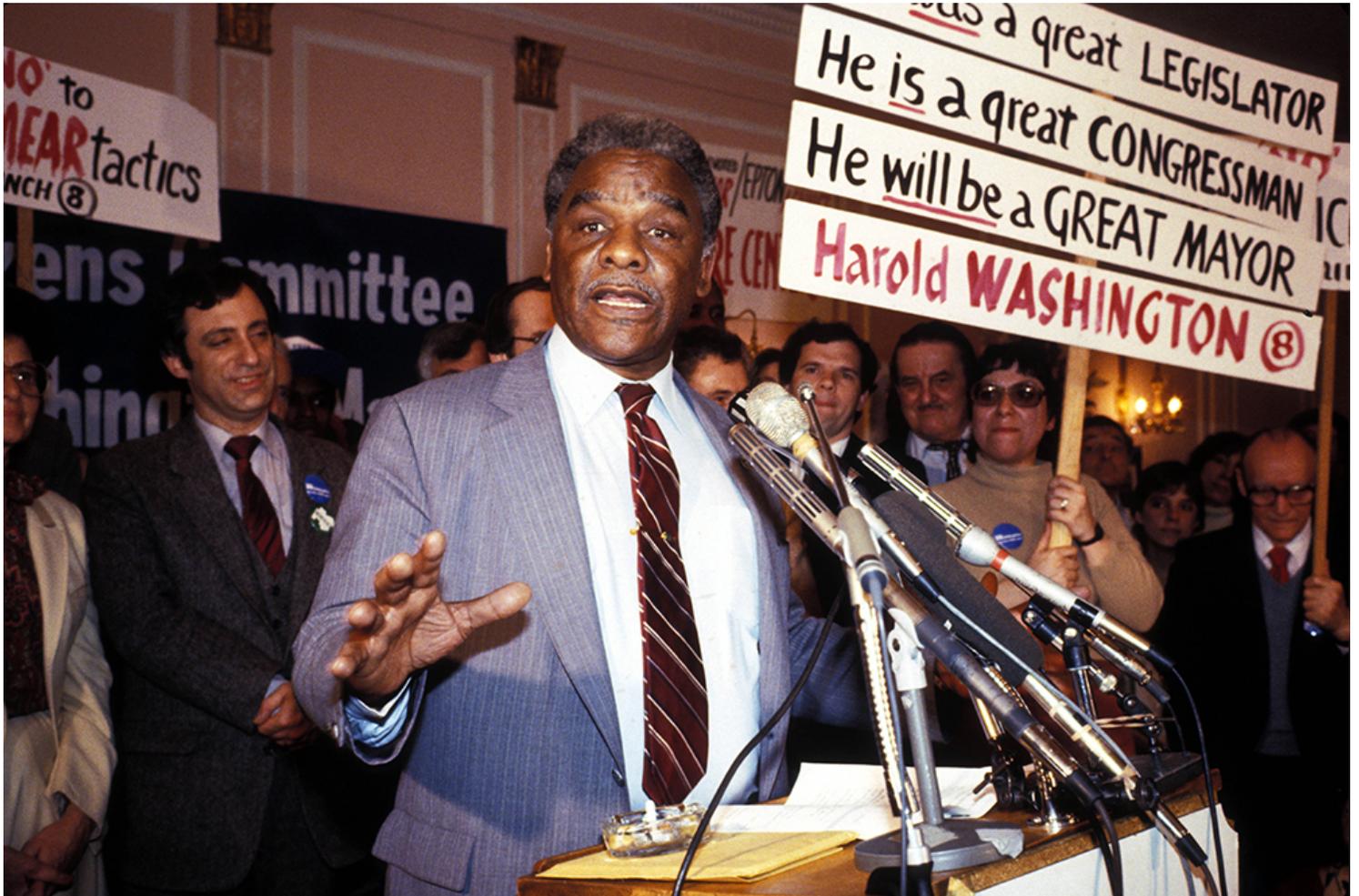


Photo by Arthur Grace/ZUMAPRESS.com

Harold Washington became mayor of Chicago in 1983 with a broad coalition of voters.

NOTE: This analysis of Harold Washington's 1983 general-election win over Republican Bernard E. Epton was published in *The Chicago Reporter* in May that year.

Harold Washington needed only 12 percent of Chicago's white vote to win the April 12 mayoral election.

He actually got 17 percent of that vote, icing his victory over Republican Bernard E. Epton. But it was the surge in black and Latino votes that pushed him over the top of an election scarred by racial divisiveness.

Black voters alone garnered him some 84,000 votes more than his total of 424,146 in the primary. And he won five times more votes from Latinos in April than he did in the primary.

The Chicago Reporter analyzed voting results by precinct totals and the 1980 U.S. Census, giving the best estimates available with this data.

Washington won about 508,000 black votes in the general election, or more than 98 percent of a record high black turnout. Blacks gave Washington about 76 percent of his winning total, the analysis found.

Twelve percent of the total black vote came from communities outside the 19 predominantly black wards on the South and West sides. Black support provided Washington with a rock-solid hold on at least 38 percent of the city's voters.

An examination of the precincts that are 50 percent or more Latino indicates that Washington also was bolstered by the support of at least half of the 95,000 Latino registered voters.

His strongest Latino boost came from precincts in the predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhoods of the 31st, 32nd and 33rd wards on the near Northwest Side. In the primary, Mayor Jane M. Byrne won in these areas and Washington generated only 1,656 votes, or 10 percent of the total. In the general election, his vote in those precincts shot up to 8,241, or 56.7 percent of the total.

The six wards with the largest proportion of registered Latino voters gave Washington 43,082 votes in April, up 31,815 from the primary. Latino votes throughout the city comprised about 7 percent of Washington's total vote.

Except for the Latino wards, where voter participation actually dropped slightly, voter turnout was higher than usual throughout the city – 82 percent, a modern-day record.

More whites voted for Washington in the general election than in the primary. But the increase in voter turnout offset his gains among white voters in the Northwest and Southwest Side wards. There the net effect was that Epton garnered more votes than Byrne and Cook County State's Attorney Richard M. Daley did together in the primary.

For example, in the 41st Ward, Byrne and Daley captured a total of 30,287 votes, while Epton polled 32,733. As a result, Epton's increase offset Washington's gain of 1,837 votes over the primary. This was true for five other wards, giving Epton a total of 7,235 votes more than Byrne and Daley in those wards.

White voters bolted from the Democratic Party in record numbers, giving Epton 82 percent of their vote. In some predominantly white wards, Epton's vote soared to 95 percent.

Even on the North Side lakefront, an area known for its liberal politics, Epton overwhelmingly downed Washington among white voters, winning 72 percent of the white vote.

The only communities where white voters as a group gave Washington a majority were racially integrated Hyde Park and Kenwood, which straddle the 4th and 5th wards on the South Side. About 70 percent of white voters in those community areas cast ballots for Washington.

Every precinct that gave Washington a plurality had a sizable number of black or Hispanic voters.

Contrasts in voting patterns were most striking in those wards which encompass sharply segregated black and white neighborhoods.

In the predominantly black 29th Ward on the West Side, the three white precincts in the white area known as the "island" voted almost 11-to-1 for Epton. Overall, the ward vote was 90 percent for Washington.

Conversely, black voters in the predominantly white 12th Ward voted 12-to-1 for Washington, even though the ward as a whole went 12-to-1 for Epton.

Some observers were startled to learn that the 11th Ward, a white bastion, gave 25 percent of its vote to Washington. But a closer examination reveals that 18 percent of the ward's residents are black, most of whom live in tightly segregated precincts separated from Bridgeport and Canaryville by railroad tracks. Those precincts delivered 78 percent of Washington's 11th Ward vote.

Most illustrative of the black-white voting split was the 15th Ward. Washington won that Southwest Side ward with 57 percent of the vote. But 95 percent of his total came from black precincts east of the Western Avenue boundary that separates white from black communities. And about 98 percent of Epton's 10,168 votes came from whites on the west side of Western Avenue.

Washington won white votes primarily from the North Side lakefront wards, where he got 45,364, or 44 percent, of his white vote. All totaled, Washington won 63,520 votes from those wards, but the North Side is one of Chicago's few integrated areas, and more than a quarter of Washington's votes there were cast by blacks, the Reporter found.

About 20 percent of Washington's white vote came from whites who live in predominantly black wards on the South Side, most notably the 4th and 5th wards. The remainder of Washington's 38,000 white votes were scattered throughout the city.

The massive jump in black turnout provided Washington with a solid base. Had Epton been able to win but 5 percent of the black vote, he might have tipped the scales to his victory. Instead, he only managed to win slightly less than 2 percent of the black vote.

How Blacks, Latinos, Whites Voted

	February 22 Primary Election		April 12 General Election		Washington's Net Gain(+) or Loss (-)
	Votes For Washington	Votes Against Washington	Votes For Washington	Votes Against Washington	
Black Wards	252,813	81,889	369,340	23,289	+175,127
Latino Wards	12,798	84,077	43,082	52,262	+62,099
N. Lakefront Wards	30,319	116,626	63,520	92,338	+57,489
White Wards	4,540	240,605	19,252	245,845	+9,472

Black Wards—Wards 90% or more black: 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 27, 28, 29 and 34

Latino Wards—Wards 20% or more Latino: 22, 25, 26, 31, 32 and 33

N. Lakefront Wards—Wards on North Side lakefront: 42, 43, 44, 46, 48, and 49

White Wards—Wards 90% or more white: 13, 23, 36, 38, 39, 41, 45 and 50

Source: Chicago Board of Election Commissioners; analyzed by *The Chicago Reporter*