

AT THE START OF 1983, JANE BYRNE WAS CHICAGO'S FIRST WOMAN mayor. By its end, Harold Washington, the city's first black mayor, occupied the chair. Between, it was decidedly not politics as usual in Chicago.

Helped by a bungled snow removal operation, Byrne had swept Michael Bilandic, mayor Richard J. Daley's successor, out of office in 1979. Her election presaged the rising discontent of many of the city's voters. Washington's candidacy activated the black community long neglected by and estranged from the regular Democratic organization to generate the excitement of a crusade among the city's reform groups.

On February 22, Washington narrowly beat Byrne and Richard M. Daley in

the Democratic primary. For years, a Democratic primary victory had ensured victory in Chicago's general election, but not in 1983. Long-time Democratic stalwarts, many who feared Washington's promise to disassemble the political machine, threw their support to Republican Bernard Epton.

Although Epton had a strong record on civil rights as a state legislator, his campaign slogan, "Epton . . . Before It's Too Late," was widely perceived as playing on racial fears. Prejudices erupted openly during the campaign. Washington narrowly won the April 12 election with 51.8 percent of the vote.

The existing Democratic organization, however, refused to let Mayor Washington run the city. A bitter division in City Council pitted 29 white aldermen

1983

January: Time names computer "Man of the Year"

March: President Reagan reveals Strategic Defense Initiative

April: Space shuttle *Challenger* makes initial voyage

June: Sally Ride becomes first American woman in space

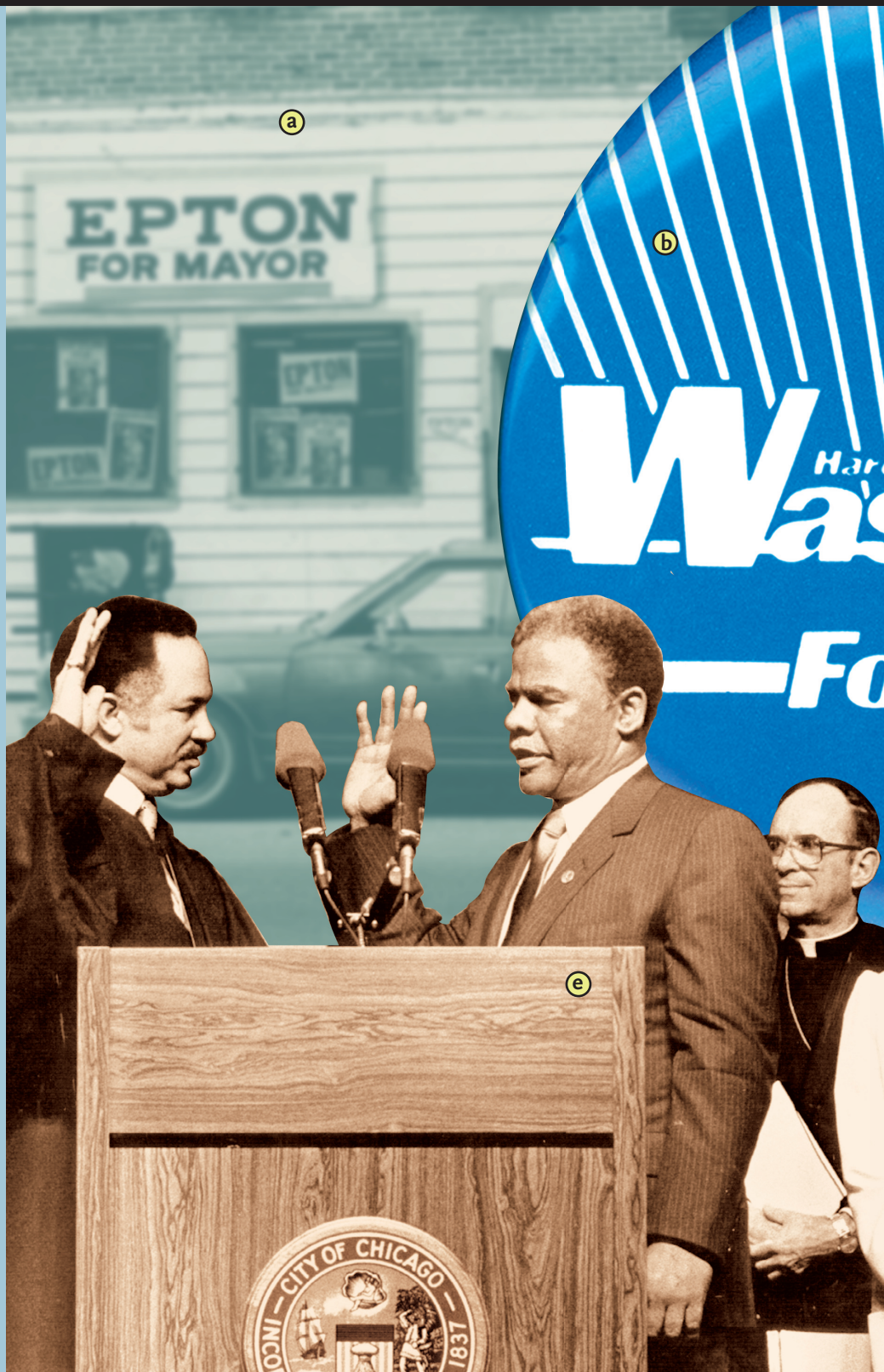
a Campaign headquarters like this one appeared all over the city in the months before the mayoral election. Election workers used these storefronts to coordinate campaign activities and as places where interested voters could come for information, campaign materials, and political conversation.

b The blue sunrise pictured on this campaign button served as the logo of the Harold Washington for Mayor campaign. Washington's campaign invigorated Chicago politics and attracted tens of thousands of new voters. Over 100,000 Chicagoans, many of whom were African American, registered to vote in the months before and after the primary and before the general election. These new voters were critical in the high-turnout, hotly contested elections.

c Map showing areas with substantial increase in poverty, 1970–1980. Tom Brune and Eduardo Camacho published *A Special Report: Race and Poverty in Chicago* in 1983 in which they documented that 1980 census data showed that one in five of Chicago's residents lived below the poverty line, an increase of 24 percent since 1970. This map, adapted from a more detailed presentation in their study, shows the parts of the city where the poverty rates increased by at least 10 percent. During the harsh winter of 1983–1984, public and private agencies were forced to address the problems of the city's homeless population, estimated then to be as many as 25,000.

d On May 2, 1983, 284 Roman Catholic bishops gathered in the Palmer House and adopted a pastoral letter calling for an immediate bilateral halt to the nuclear arms race. Entitled "The Challenge of Peace," its primary author was Chicago's archbishop Joseph Bernardin. Thousands of Chicagoans added their voices to the Catholic bishops' call with a Mother's Day Peace Festival in Grant Park on May 8. This action echoed mass demonstrations throughout Europe protesting the United States' deployment of nuclear weapons on the continent and President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative.

e On April 28, 1983, Judge Charles E. Freeman of the Cook County Circuit Court administered the oath of office to Harold Washington, who became Chicago's forty-second mayor. Breaking with tradition, Mayor Washington relocated the ceremony to Navy Pier from City Hall to include more Chicagoans in the festivities. Those who attended heard readings by Gwendolyn Brooks and Studs Terkel, performances by the Chicago Children's Choir and the Morris Ellis Orchestra, and Washington's rousing inaugural address.



against the 21 mostly black aldermen who supported Washington. The council, acquiescent to former mayor Daley, blocked administrative initiatives and undermined Mayor Washington's reform agenda. Chicago's "Council Wars" became infamous. Not until 1985 did Washington gain control of the council.

Political stalemate and continuing budget deficits led Standard & Poors to downgrade the city's bond rating. This was a blow to Chicago, still struggling to emerge from the national recession. The city experienced a steady loss of both middle-class residents and jobs. A June 12, 1983, *Chicago Tribune* article noted that the city had lost 123,500 jobs in the preceding decade. Polls showed that unemployment was the single greatest concern in all neighborhoods.

Although some suburban areas saw increases in corporate offices, population, and jobs in the early 1980s, in the city, political and economic realities stalled major projects. Elements of the business community were apprehensive about the Washington administration's commitment to balance downtown growth with neighborhood development. Yet measures such as a fee imposed on Loop construction to assist with neighborhood infrastructure improvements excited community and civic groups. They were delighted to be invited to the table and to have their ideas taken as seriously as those of business leaders.

Kathleen McCourt

September: KAL 007 shot down by Soviets

October: Bomb kills 241 U.S. soldiers in Beirut; U.S. invades Grenada; Chicago teachers go on 15-day strike

November: Jesse Jackson announces presidential candidacy

December: Lech Walesa awarded Nobel Peace Prize



old Washington or-Chicago

"We have a clear vision of what our people can become, and that vision goes beyond mere economic wealth, although that is a part of our hopes and expectations.

"In our ethnic and racial diversity, we are all brothers and sisters in a quest for greatness. Our creativity and energy are unequalled by any city anywhere in the world. We will not rest until the renewal of our city is done."

—Harold Washington
inaugural address,
April 28, 1983