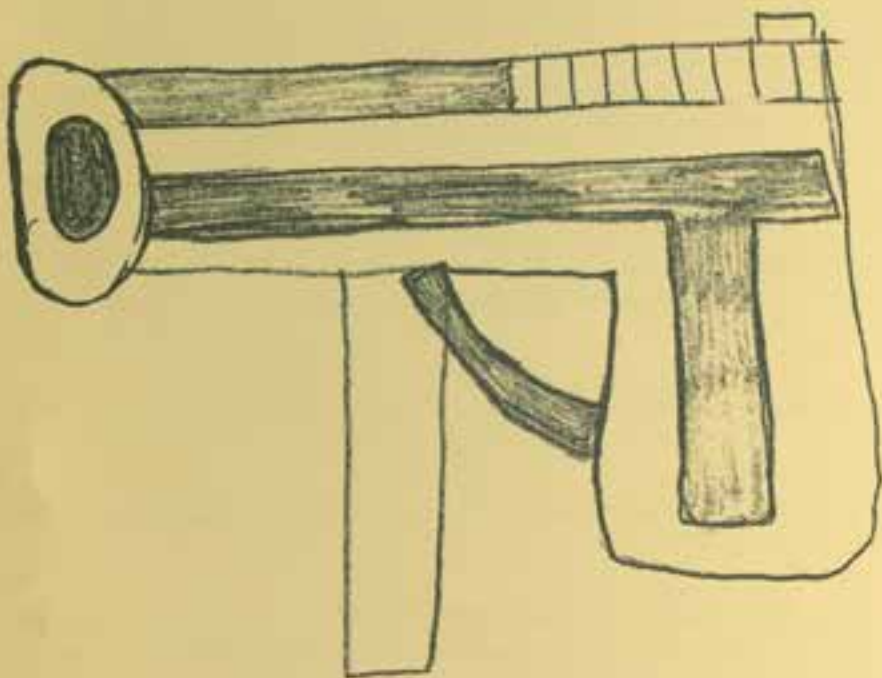


CHIRAQ AND ITS MEANING(S)



PROJECT NIA

Chiraq and Its Meaning(s) - Introduction

This is a publication that captures a particular historical moment in the Windy City. It is part of an ongoing project that has been a few years in the making. About four years ago, I began to hear Chicago referred to as "Chiraq" by some of the young people with whom I work. The term was coined in 2009 by rapper King Louie who also invented "Drillinois." Some young people picked it up as shorthand to characterize what they felt was rampant and perhaps even indiscriminate violence in their communities. During a 2010 press conference, the former police superintendent, Jody Weis, felt the need to proclaim: "We are not Chi-raq. We are Chicago."¹

In the last couple of years, "Chiraq" seems to have migrated from youth lexicon into general popular culture. This summer, Nikki Minaj released a song called "Chiraq" to some criticism. A number of people have expressed consternation at this moniker. They worry that it glamorizes violence and recently the term has engendered pushback² with some expressing their displeasure through social media hashtags like #antichiraq. Blogger Randall Irwin has lamented:

"We were happy to be called "The Chi" (yet we still had that gangster reputation). We were proud of our style, the way we dressed, the way we danced, our neighborhoods, our food and our music. Not how dangerous it was to walk the streets. But it seems nowadays being the murder capital is a badge of honor. What happened, how did it come to this?"³

While Chicago is not in fact the murder capital of the U.S. (it is actually far from it), Irwin expressed the feelings of many in his post.

Recently, journalist Sam Charles vented his frustrations about labeling Chicago as Chiraq:

"The term 'Chiraq' is a fucked-up point of pride for too many people in the city," Sam says. "It's disrespectful to our city as a whole and to the people of Iraq. Too many out-of-town stupid media outlets—VICE included, frankly—have parroted the term to give it undeserved credibility and staying power."⁴

Everyone, however, does not share Irwin and Charles's views. Many people, especially youth, defend the use of the term and contend that Chiraq accurately describes the experiences of some Chicago residents.

Quite apart from the meanings that individual Chicagoans attribute to the term,

as Sam Charles alluded to, Chiraq is being used for commercial purposes by rappers and other media people. Last year, an edition of HBO's "Vice Episode #9 Chiraq" likened the South Side of Chicago to a failed state within U.S. borders: The lethal combination of gangs and guns has turned Chicago into a war zone. To see why the Windy City, now dubbed "Chiraq," had the country's highest homicide rate in 2012, *VICE* visits Chicago's most dangerous areas, where handguns are plentiful and the police and community leaders are fighting a losing battle against gang violence. In the neighborhood of Englewood, we patrol with police, visit with religious leaders, and hang out with members of gangs—soldiers in a turf war that has spread into new communities as projects are destroyed and residents are forced to move elsewhere.⁵

The sensational nature of these words is mirrored in the lyrics of many songs by Chicago rapper Chief Keef who has popularized the use of Chiraq in his music. In Bo Deal's song "Murda" for example, Chief Keef is heard rapping: "My young niggas wilding in Chiraq catching bodies."⁶

According to a recent *Tribune* article, Chicago police call a 2-block by 4-block patch of South Shore where apparent gang conflicts have erupted into three mass shootings in a little over two years: "Terror Town."⁷ What are the material and psychological consequences of law enforcement using such terms to describe communities? Does Chiraq bring us closer to legitimizing forms of state violence like those deployed against some people in Ferguson, Missouri this summer?

Project NIA has embarked on a yearlong journey⁸ to re-think and re-imagine community safety.⁹ We launched this project with an interactive and intergenerational discussion at the Hull House Museum in August that included writing, art making, and storytelling. Some of the ideas discussed and art created at the gathering are included in this publication. We envision the publication as a kind of workbook to engage our fellow Chicagoans in more thinking and discussion about the meaning(s) of violence and community safety in our city and beyond. We issued a call for submissions that was publicized on social media; some of those are included here. We also invited our friend Mauricio Pineda to create art that reflects his ideas about the meanings of Chiraq. Finally, we created a curriculum unit that can be used by educators and organizers to engage people in discussion about experiences and impacts of violence. This publication is a cacophony of voices and doesn't provide answers or a single definition of the meaning(s) of violence and safety in Chicago. Instead, it is an invitation for others, for you, to add your ideas and thoughts to the larger conversations that we are having in this city in our local communities, workplaces, and families. Add your voice by submitting your own thoughts and ideas about the meaning(s) of Chiraq. Email us at

projectnia@hotmail.com and we will post your responses at <http://chiraqmeanings.tumblr.com>. Throughout the next few months, Project NIA will continue to convene discussions and to organize events that help us to better understand, and hopefully to impact, violence in Chicago.

We are grateful to our comrades at Temporary Services for their support and partnership in creating this publication. We also thank all of the people who submitted their art and words.

In peace always,

Mariame Kaba, Director of Project NIA
www.project-nia.org

Notes

¹ "Weis: "We are Not Chi-raq. We Are Chicago." NBC Chicago, Friday, April 16, 2010. www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-violence-91128449.html

² "Attack on Chiraq: Activists want the word to die," By Adrienne Samuels Gibbs, Chicago Sun Times, May 30, 2014. www.suntimes.com/27541587-761/attack-on-chiraq-activists-want-the-word-to-die.html

³ "A Chiraq Summer," By Randall Irwin The First, Everything About Chicago Music, April 3, 2013. www.chicagonow.com/everything-about-chicago-music/2013/04/a-chiraq-summer, accessed 10/14/14

⁴ "Photographing Shootings in Chicago on a Long, Hot Summer Night," By Justin Glawe, VICE, September 8, 2014. www.vice.com/read/fresh-scenes-0000437-v21n9

⁵ "Chiraq/Nigeria's Oil Pirates," VICE, Season 1, Episode 9, June 7, 2013.

⁶ <http://rapgenius.com/Bo-deal-murda-lyrics#note-814192>

⁷ "Another mass shooting in "Terror Town," By Adam Sege, Rosemary Regina Sobol, Jeremy Gerner and Michelle Manchir, The Chicago Tribune, June 3, 2014. www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/chi-6-shot-in-south-shore-we-cant-even-go-to-the-laundromat-20140602,0,7652690.story

⁸ <http://chiraqmeanings.tumblr.com>

⁹ <http://communitysafetychicago.tumblr.com/>

Meanings of Chiraq

Marquis Rutues, age 17, Roseland

Chicago...oh, I'm sorry, I mean "Chiraq." Chicago used to be a place that everyone wanted to visit. Festivals, parades, a beautiful skyline. But now it's called Chiraq, full of gangs, guns, and drugs. Children can't even go outside anymore without the risk of getting shot. Parents see their children in caskets before they've had a chance to live. How will it ever change?

Diamond Moore, age 14, Roseland

What does "Chi-raq" mean to me? Well, I say it means growing up in constant danger, having to always watch your back and your surroundings and having to worry about not making it home to your family and not being able to see them again. It means not being able to feed them because Chi-raq means poverty. But Chi-raq doesn't always have to be bad. There are people trying to make a change so that we don't have to worry about losing our lives. Chi-raq is our families and our communities, so Chi-raq can also be hope."

Darrick Savage, age 16, Roseland

"Chiraq" gives a name to the ignorance of people in my city. How they take pride in killing each other and hold no remorse for anyone of any age. The term angers me each and every time I hear it. It allows the worst parts of our city to define who we are. My home is not Chiraq. My home is Chicago.

Nicholaus Butler, age 18, Roseland

"Chiraq"—where you have to watch your back everywhere you go; it's kill or be killed. In Chiraq, if you're young and you're black, it's assumed that you're a gangbanger. Chiraq is motivation to prove them wrong. It makes me strive for greatness. We may be from Chiraq, but people don't know that we're trying to make it out. Alive.

Jacob Lesniewski

I'm a Chicago resident, I live in Galewood on the West Side with our four kids (3 of them in CPS).

Here's what "Chi-raq" means to me:

When I hear Chi-raq I think occupation. I think of people struggling under the weight of occupation by forces that want to overwhelm and overrun their resistance; that want to run riot over our hopes and dreams; that colonize and occupy everything, down to our minds, calling us insurgents and the problem as they rush through our neighborhoods in their darkened cars.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

EVERY PERSON
YOU SEE ^{& meet}, HAS YOUR
BEST INTEREST IN MIND.

YOU HAVE EVERY PERSON YOU
SEE & MEET BEST INTEREST
IN MIND.

WE TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER.
!

Sarah Colomé, Age 28, Edgewater

"Chiraq" is a word that does not belong to me. In a city wrought with violence, stemming from segregation, police brutality, and imposed poverty, Chiraq is the lived reality of too many citizens to make it a word used so freely. This word, is a 12 year-old girl catching a bullet because of a fight that is not her own. And yet, "Chiraq" is not a word that belongs to me, to the media, or the masses. This word belongs to the mothers, brother, and abuelas burying what was supposed to be their lineage, to use as they see fit.

Clifton "Booney" McFlower

Ex-gang member in Chicago and current community organizer at BUILD Inc., Clifton "Booney" McFlower, recently spoke with Rolling Out to reveal his thoughts on the term "Chiraq."

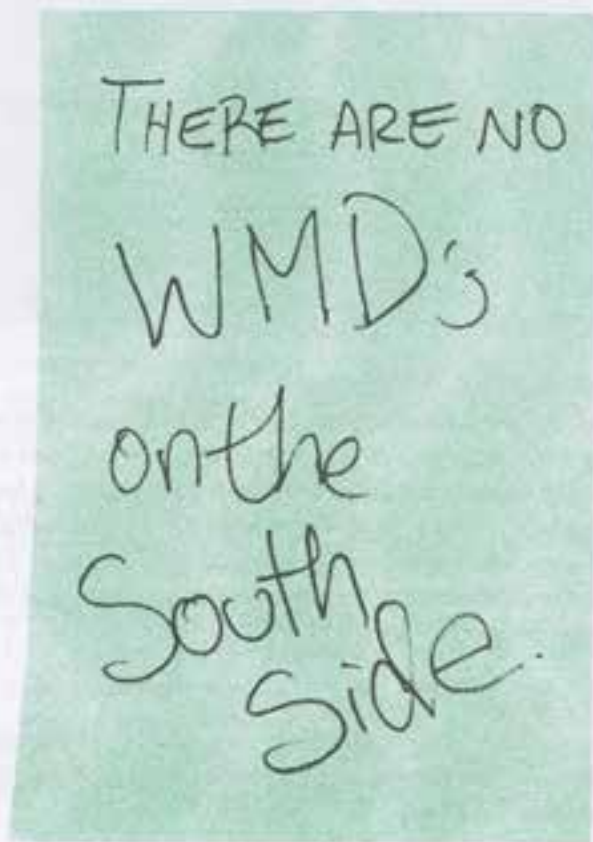
"Chiraq" is another way to promote violence so that more money can be allocated for law enforcement instead of social needs. When you talk about violence, it calls for more police or jails. But that doesn't solve the problems.

You have the Cook County jail that holds 11,000 people. There are 46 prisons in Illinois and all of the jails are full. We know locking people up is not the key. Police are around here all day.

So they come with the term "Chiraq" and they'll throw the violence rates in your face so that they can keep feeding money into the wrong areas. We don't need more money in law enforcement. We have some of the baddest law enforcement in the world.

The police shoot and kill as much as the guys on the street. The key is economic control in our community. We have to bring the neighbor back into the hood. We have to stop being the hood and become the neighborhood. We have to care about each other. We can't look for people to do for us what we can do for ourselves

Source: http://rollingout.com/criminal-behavior/ex-gang-leader-chicago-clifton-booney-mcflower-reveals-truth-chiraq/#_



THERE ARE NO
WMD's
on the
South
Side.

People
live
south of
Roosevelt
Road.

-Not Chiraq.

Kelly Hayes, 33, Rogers Park

When we use words like "Chiraq," we are basically referring to members of our own communities as enemy combatants. We dehumanize "enemies" abroad to such an extent that most Americans barely react when we send in drones that drop bombs on their children and wedding parties. That's disturbing enough, but when we begin to apply that same dehumanization to our own young people, we take that horror to the next level. We diminish our own humanity, and perpetuate indifference to state sanctioned murder.

My humanity demands more of me than that.

Bradwell School of Excellence, Ms. Linsey Rose's 5th grade students

This is Us

We saw your news trucks and cameras here and we read the articles, "Six Shot in South Shore Laundromat" and "Another Mass Shooting in Terror Town."

We saw the reporters with fancy suits in front of our laundromat. You spent 24 hours here, but you don't really know us. Those who don't know us think this is a poor neighborhood, with those abandoned buildings everywhere with wood covering the windows and broken doors. Those who don't know us see the police on the corner and think that we're all violence and drugs. They see the candy wrappers and empty juice bottles, and think that we don't care. Uneducated, jobless, and thieves. You will be scared of these heartless people. When you see us coming, you might hurry and get in your car and lock the doors. Then speed through these streets at 60 mph like you're on the highway, trying to get out of this ghetto.

We want you to know us. We aren't afraid. We know that man on the corner, he works at the store and gives us free Lemonheads. Those girls jumping rope are Precious, Aniya, and Nivia. The people in the suits are people not going to funerals, but to church. That little, creepy dog is Saianis, Lamaur's dog. We are the kids who find crates so we can shoot hoops. When the sun shines here, it's not God saying he wants to burn us, but he sees us all with bright futures. Those who know us look at the ones who want to go to college, not the ones who dropped out. If you listen, you'll hear the laughter and the chattering from the group of girls on the corner who are best friends and really care about each other. Do you see the smile on the cashier's face when the kids walk in? Why? Because this neighborhood is filled with love. This isn't Chi-raq. This is home. This is us.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

LOVE,
NOT
COPS.

LOOKOUT
FOR
EACHOTHER







CHIRAQ

Erica Meiners, 43, Rogers Park

What to say? First, it should be impossible to speak of "youth violence" without talking about decades of targeted structural forces—neighborhood disinvestment, punishing poverty, hyper-surveillance—engineered racial conflict as Dave Stovall likes to say.

Comparisons like "ChirAQ" not only over-simplify for affect, but in these attempts to say something about violence in Chicago, meanings about Iraq are also, potentially devastatingly, reshaped.

For example, how many times have you heard comparisons to chattel slavery? Lately, I overheard both that prison and being an adjunct is "like slavery." While potentially galvanizing to some, these comparisons are unhelpful in illuminating the complexities of this particular political moment in our prison nation or in its bedmate—the corporate university. And, perhaps unwittingly, these comparisons also remake, mutate, shift the object of comparison.

I know this is what artists do sometimes—juxtapose for affect—but it makes me nervous.

At the very least we owe the people of Iraq (and the too numerous other nations conscripted into the US's permanent war economy) an accurate and rigorous accounting for our nation's role in the eradication of lives, institutions, land and more.

Gwenn-Aël Lynn, 42, Pilsen

Yes I have heard the term before. I have seen the documentaries and I have met people familiar with Chicago gun violence. I have listened to Chief Keef, though I am not necessarily a fan. I understand where he, and the Glory Boys, come from. Unless I am mistaken, Chicago's violence has now claimed more lives than the entire Iraq conflict has claimed US GIs. The US brings waste and death to countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in its own home: returning veterans and urban youths. Meanwhile the mayor is closing down schools.

Terrell Wright, 23 years old, Bronzeville

This energy, this aura it's always been in effect, this hate, this jealousy has always been in effect. Long before the days of these and the days of those, Al Capone, Larry Hoover, John Wayne Gacy gone? We could sit here and discuss their wrongs, a trivial cycle cloned. But finally after years of this enigma to the world it finally was delivered a name. For me it's not a surprise, on daily occasions without the death I'd witness it with my own two eyes. Finally they could see what we saw, finally they could see what we see. So when I say this term, and when we embrace this term it simply means "Truth."

Ruben McGowan, 18, Chicago

I think what goes on in Chiraq is killing people fight each other in talk about people. If it is about killing people I want to know why did they even make a rap song about Chiraq.

Kaitlyn Echols, 17, Roseland

Chiraq aint no place for me I swear to god I'm tired of these streets cop sirens gun shots firing blood stains on every corner we stay more strapped then a soldier the public not safe the violence is deeper than the color of your face you can't even walk the streets it aint safe nor no place to play.

Ash Stephens, 25, Logan Square/Avondale

Definition: To me, Chiraq is a loaded term taken from rap and street culture as a braggadocio's attempt to explain the severity of violence (by individuals and the State) in Chicago's south side and west side neighborhoods, in relation to violence perpetuated by the U.S. State in Iraq. I think the original use of the word chiraq (to give Chicago drill music a type of street credibility) versus the news media's usage (to invoke images of the "black on black crime" myth and "gang violence" in Chicago) mostly literally allows for justifications of racism, mass incarceration, police militarization, gentrification, neighborhood segregation, and school closures.

Curriculum Unit: Defining & Discussing Violence in Chicago

Objectives

- I. Participants will discuss the meaning(s) of violence.
- II. Participants will express their own ideas about how violence impacts their lives.

Materials

Magazines and newspapers
Posterboard, scissors and glue
Ability to play audio from the internet

Activity

Appropriate for middle school and up.
Time: One class period (45 minutes)

The Uproar Chicago audio collage documents a particular moment in time in a city called Chicago.

It consists of the voices, feelings, and hopes of a diverse group of Chicagoans who left voicemail messages on a hotline from February 11-17, 2013.

It is many things...

a collective mourning song
a collective call for more justice
a collective call for more healing
and a collective call for action.

1. Invite participants to listen to the Uproar Chicago audio collage (<http://uproarchicago.wordpress.com/>). Then hand out the transcript (which can be downloaded at the Uproar Chicago site) of the audio collage and have participants listen to it again while reading along.
2. After the second listen, ask the following questions:
 - a. What surprised you about the audio collage?
 - b. Why do you think the organizers of the project made it?

- c. Who did you most identify with? Did you notice any differences between the way that younger people discussed violence vs. older people? What were the similarities between the descriptions?
- d. Why do you think people called the hotline to share their thoughts about violence in Chicago?
- e. Based on what you heard, how would you define violence? What does it mean? What are its effects?

3. Found Poem: A found poem is made up of words or phrases from something you read. It uses someone else's words, but in a new way. Find words in newspapers, magazines, or other pieces of literature.

- a. Guide participants in creating Found Poems that address their own feelings and/or definitions of violence in Chicago.
- b. Invite participants to flip through magazines, newspapers, other literature that are provided and cut out words that catch their eye.
- c. Tell them to choose 10 main words or phrases that describe how they would describe or have experienced violence in Chicago.
- d. Ask them to arrange these words or phrases in a meaningful way to make a poem. They can write or use the pieces they've ripped from magazines, newspapers, etc.
- e. They should write/glue the words on posterboard.
- f. They can illustrate their posterboards with images too if they'd like.
- g. Encourage participants to share their Found Poems by reading them out loud or passing them around to others for review and comment.



Transcript (from Uproar Chicago)

Chicagoans left messages about violence in their city on an open voicemail. This is what they had to say...

beep

My name is Elijah. I am 8. Violence makes me feel scared, because once a bullet hole was in my aunt's car.

My name is Markquita, and my age is 29 years old. I live in Chicago, Illinois on the West Side. I lost a cousin last year, December 27th. He got shot and killed on Laverne and Augusta. This stuff gotta stop. Then in 2005, I lost another cousin—he got killed in gun violence. This stuff needs to stop. Then, my boyfriend's younger brother got killed, September 21st, 2011. His name was Nathan. They shot him in the head and in the back. And my cousin, he got killed last year. December 27th. He got shot in the head and the back. And I'm tired of all this gun violence because it's making me real sad right now.

Maria, 32, Rogers Park. Sometimes it's like you can't function, or think of anything else, unless you can actually shut out the violence.

My name is Heather, I'm 43, and I live in Andersonville. I feel worried that people I care about are getting hurt by people who say they love them. And I feel panicked that things are spiraling out of control.

My name is Megan, I'm 25. I'm from East Village in Chicago. And simply: I am sick of it. I'm sick of being scared. I'm sick of worrying that I'm going to be raped, mugged, or hurt in my own home in my own city in my own neighborhood. I'm over it. I'm sick of it.

beep

My name is LaShawn. I'm 22 years old. I live in the Woodlawn community. I am angry, saddened, and tired of the violence that is taking place in the city of Chicago.

My name is Deborah, I'm 56 years old, and I live in the Tri-Taylor district in Chicago. I feel overwhelmed at the violence that's going on in my city.

My name is Miguel, I am 39 years old, and I live in the Little Village community.

Building Peaceful Communities

Launched in 2009, Project NIA is an advocacy, organizing, popular education, research, and capacity-building center with the long-term goal of ending youth incarceration. We believe that several simultaneous approaches are necessary in order to develop and sustain community-based alternatives to the system of policing and incarceration. Our mission is to dramatically reduce the reliance on arrest, detention, and incarceration for addressing youth crime and to instead promote the use of restorative and transformative practices, a concept that relies on community-based alternatives.

Project NIA facilitates the creation of community-focused responses to youth violence and crime.

Our goals are:

To empower diverse community members to take leadership in addressing issues faced by youth impacted by the juvenile justice system.

To develop effective community-based (rather than criminal legal) means of accountability for violence and crime—using a restorative and transformational justice approach.

To eradicate youth incarceration.

Project NIA supports youth in trouble with the law as well as those victimized by violence and crime, through community-based alternatives to the criminal legal process, and we partner with numerous stakeholders to create such alternatives. We advocate for redirecting resources from youth incarceration to youth opportunities.

In Swahili, NIA means “with purpose.” Ultimately, the main purpose for Project NIA is to prepare communities to get involved in creating an effective strategy to address violence and crime.

www.project-nia.org

The first part of the paper discusses the general theory of the firm, focusing on the role of the entrepreneur and the importance of the firm's internal structure. It is argued that the firm is a collection of individuals who are organized in a way that allows them to coordinate their activities and to make decisions that are in the best interests of the firm as a whole. The entrepreneur is the individual who is responsible for the firm's success or failure, and it is his or her decisions that determine the firm's future. The firm's internal structure is also important, as it determines how the firm's resources are allocated and how the firm's activities are coordinated.

The second part of the paper discusses the theory of the firm in the context of the market. It is argued that the firm's internal structure is determined by the market conditions in which it operates. In a competitive market, the firm must be organized in a way that allows it to coordinate its activities and to make decisions that are in the best interests of the firm as a whole. In a market with imperfect information, the firm must be organized in a way that allows it to coordinate its activities and to make decisions that are in the best interests of the firm as a whole.

The third part of the paper discusses the theory of the firm in the context of the firm's internal structure. It is argued that the firm's internal structure is determined by the firm's internal structure. In a firm with a flat structure, the firm must be organized in a way that allows it to coordinate its activities and to make decisions that are in the best interests of the firm as a whole. In a firm with a hierarchical structure, the firm must be organized in a way that allows it to coordinate its activities and to make decisions that are in the best interests of the firm as a whole.

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ON **YOUTH**
DIE in
CHICAGO **THE**

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October 2014