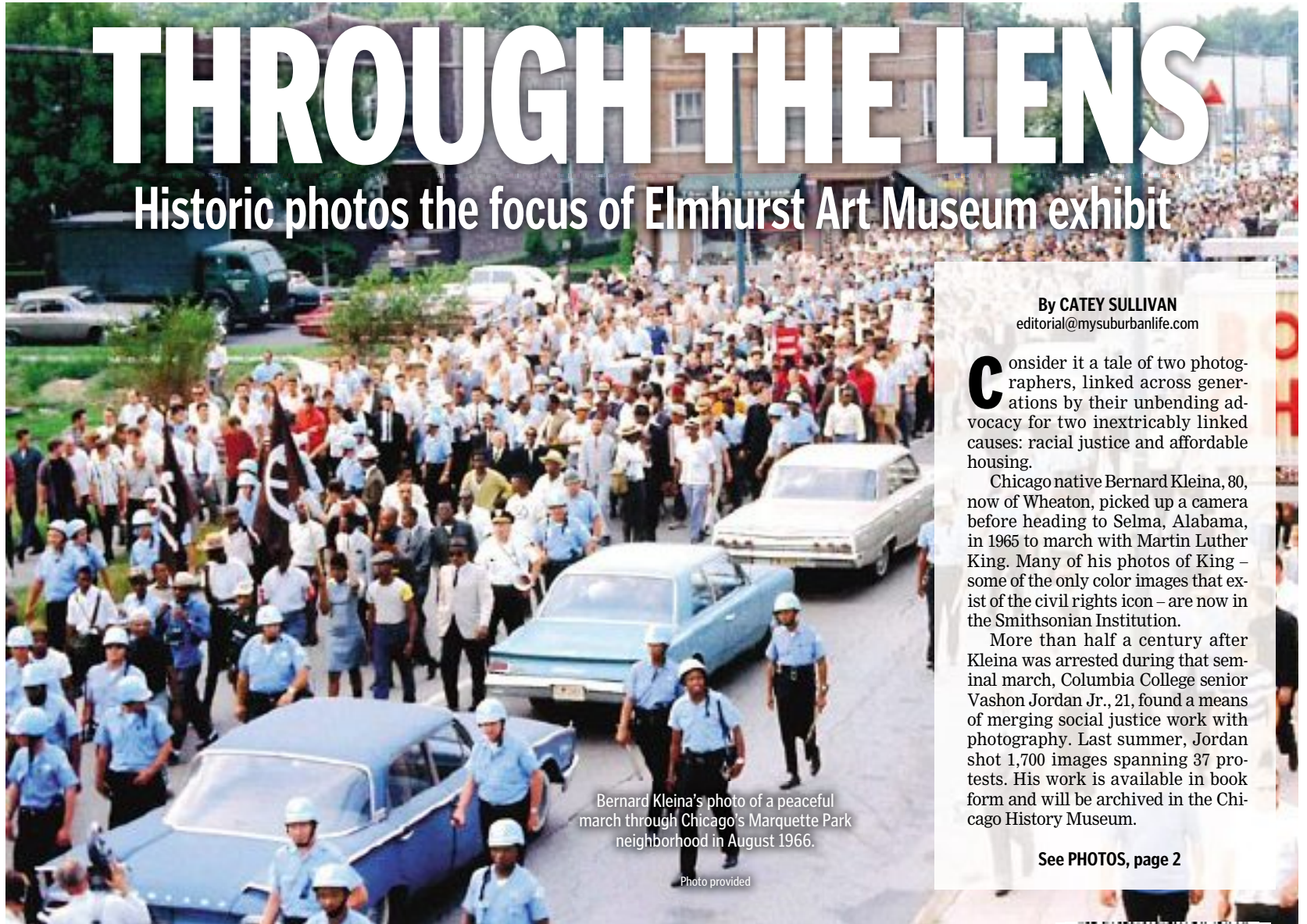


ELMHURST

# Suburban Life

## THROUGH THE LENS

Historic photos the focus of Elmhurst Art Museum exhibit



Bernard Kleina's photo of a peaceful march through Chicago's Marquette Park neighborhood in August 1966.

Photo provided

By CATEY SULLIVAN

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Consider it a tale of two photographers, linked across generations by their unbending advocacy for two inextricably linked causes: racial justice and affordable housing.

Chicago native Bernard Kleina, 80, now of Wheaton, picked up a camera before heading to Selma, Alabama, in 1965 to march with Martin Luther King. Many of his photos of King – some of the only color images that exist of the civil rights icon – are now in the Smithsonian Institution.

More than half a century after Kleina was arrested during that seminal march, Columbia College senior Vashon Jordan Jr., 21, found a means of merging social justice work with photography. Last summer, Jordan shot 1,700 images spanning 37 protests. His work is available in book form and will be archived in the Chicago History Museum.

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Source: National Weather Service



Friday  
**High: 43**  
**Low: 27**

Sunny



Saturday  
**High: 45**  
**Low: 30**

Mostly sunny



Sunday  
**High: 52**  
**Low: 39**

Mostly sunny

# ELMHURST Suburban Life

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## • PHOTOS

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Photographs by both men – Kleina’s extraordinary images of King and Jordan’s vividly kinetic portraits of the protests – are the centerpiece of the Elmhurst Art Museum’s exhibit “In Focus: The Chicago Freedom Movement and the Fight for Fair Housing.” The exhibit runs March 4 to June 20. It includes works by Jordan documenting protests by affordable housing advocates in Daley Plaza last summer and images by Kleina.

A related exhibit, “There is Black Housing in the Future,” is on display at the museum’s McCormick House, which was designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Tickets are required and COVID-19 protocols are in place, so call ahead before visiting.

Kleina left for Selma after seeing coverage of the 1965 march on TV. He was a born and bred Chicagoan, attending Our Lady of Angels grammar school and going to high school on the North Side.

“It’s kind of sad,” Kleina said. “My grammar school was 99% white. I wasn’t even aware of the segregation. But when I saw the Selma march on television, I knew I had to go.”

Kleina was arrested in Selma and said the experience began to open his eyes to racial injustice. Still, he was convinced King would be welcomed in the North.

“When Dr. King came here, I thought Chicago would be more receptive to his message,” Kleina said. “I thought he’d be more warmly received.”

Kleina quickly was disabused of that belief.

“I have never seen, even in Mississippi and Alabama, mobs as hateful as I’ve seen here in Chicago,” King said in 1966.

“Many of the city officials were putting the blame on the violence on Dr. King,” Kleina recalled of King’s stay in Chicago. “I wanted to document what was really going on. Why I thought I could do that, I’m not sure. But if you wait until you think you’re fully qualified to do something, maybe the moment will pass you by.”

Kleina has since devoted his life to advocating for affordable housing in upscale, conservative DuPage County. Despite being reviled in the press (he was called “The Most Disliked Man in DuPage County” in one memorable

headline), Kleina spent 40 years as director of HOPE Fair Housing Center in Wheaton, taking on cases involving housing and lending discrimination.

“Housing is a fundamental social justice issue,” he said. “It determines where you can go to school, whether you have access to grocery stores, to parks, to hospitals, part-time jobs in high school, to health care. If you don’t have stable housing, good housing, everything else in your life is impacted.”

Jordan exhibits the same passion in talking about his work. Like Kleina, Jordan wasn’t an officially accredited professional photographer when he started documenting history. He was largely self-taught, first documenting summer camps and family outings as a preteen with disposable cameras and later using increasingly sophisticated equipment.

While a student at Chicago’s Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy, he became the high school’s official photographer. He started volunteering to cover Chicago events – the Mag Mile Lights Fest, Arts in the Dark and Chicagoween among them.

“I have a really strong love of all things Chicago,” Jordan said. “Protests are part of the fabric of the city. I’ve been shooting them for years, but in 2020, what we saw was unprecedented. Back to back to back to back protests. I knew it was important to capture them. I’d usually be one of the first to arrive and the very last to leave, so I was able to get images the mainstream media missed.”

Jordan included in his book the images from protests commonly seen in the media: broken glass, boarded up storefronts, police in riot gear, protesters cowering under toxic sprays. But his photos also document joy: protests that included dance troupes performing in the streets, drag queens lined up in their finery, children creating chalk murals, musicians playing open-air concerts, teenagers linking arms and singing with an ebullience the lens makes palpable.

“I knew how I was seeing the protests depicted was not the full story. That’s what prompted me to create the book,” he said. “I think if you can capture the joy, you can start to bridge barriers.”

“If you look at our country’s history, Black trauma has always been at the forefront. Slavery. Jim Crow. Our heroes: Malcolm X, assassinated. Dr. King, assassinated. Fred Hampton, as-

sassinated. It takes a toll on morale.

“What we don’t learn about is the joy Black people have always been able to find, even in moments of despair. We struggle. We fight. We resist. We also come together in light and love and community. I’ve had Twitter followers come out and join protests because they saw my images being posted in real time. Black joy is revolutionary,” Jordan said.

Both men found themselves advocating against words as well as actions. Kleina reads Chicago Tribune coverage of the riots that ensued during King’s stay here: “Civil rights hecklers burned cars. Two were pushed into the lagoon. Cherry bombs, bottles and bricks flew through the air.”

“Thugs burn cars. Not hecklers,” Kleina pointed out.

“Of the 37 demonstrations I’ve covered, there was only one that turned to violence, and that violence was initiated by the police,” Jordan said. “That was the one time I was pepper-sprayed. I have it on video. The SWAT team sprayed the crowd.”

“What I felt then in that moment was the strength and the power of the community,” he said. “The people who were there to serve and protect us were the people who pepper-sprayed and harmed us. The people who came to our aid – it was the community. It was the protesters. It wasn’t the first responders.”

Housing, both in Kleina’s day and now, remains a fundamentally intertwined issue with civil rights. Jordan captures its importance in a photo of the Lift the Ban Coalition during its weeklong “Stop the Eviction Avalanche – Occupation of Eviction Court” in Daley Plaza. It’s one of the only posed photos Vashon took for his book, and it features a multigenerational group of activists in an Aug. 18, 2020, temporary encampment that includes a massive bed used as a billboard demanding “Rent Control Now.”

“Those people who want to use a camera should have something in mind. There’s something they want to show, something they want to say,” Kleina said. “I picked up a camera because it was my choice of weapons against what I hated most about the universe: racism, intolerance, poverty.”

Jordan, who is finishing his degree with a major in directing and television, said he’s only just getting started.

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