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## Removal of the "African Dip" dunk tank game from Riverview Amusement Park in Chicago, Illinois

Nationally, in August of 1963, over 200,000 blacks and whites had marched on Washington, D.C., and heard Martin Luther King, Jr.'s stirring "I Have a Dream" speech. President John F. Kennedy promised sweeping new civil rights legislation, but was assassinated in Dallas that November. The new president, Lyndon Johnson, however, made good on Kennedy's promise; the most comprehensive civil rights act in U.S. history was pushed through Congress in the first half of 1964.



via: [LivingHistoryOfIllinois.org](#)

*Riverview Amusement Park, Chicago, Illinois*



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Locally, 1963 had been the year the civil rights movement 'came home' to Chicago. Independent black aldermanic candidates challenged the Daley machine in the February elections. The Mayor himself was booed off the stage at an NAACP rally in Grant Park. A "brush-fire" of sit-in demonstrations erupted at South Side classrooms in protest of school segregation, culminating in a one-day school boycott, when virtually every black student in the system stayed home and thousands of protesters marched on City Hall.

These events had particular resonance at Riverview. Six days after the start of the 1964 season, Chicago Daily News columnist Mike Royko reported that-- after 55 years -- "The Dip" game had been removed from the park. [Daily News, 5/21/64]



*Forest Park Amusement Park, Forest Park, Illinois*

This sideshow dunk tank game was once reportedly called, "Dunk the N\*\*\*\*," later "The African Dip," and finally "The Dip." The black men would tease, provoke and otherwise try to disrupt the pitcher's aim. The Blacks were careful not to say anything too insulting, lest they stir up the racism (and provoke violence) that was at the heart of the game. But



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they would and could get away with belittling their adversaries' athletic skill or throwing ability in a way that was amusing. If their comments (i.e. If you were heavy, they'd call you "meatball." If you were with a girl, they might have said something like, "Hey fella, that ain't the same girl you were with yesterday!") distracted the player, got them to laugh, or the crowd to laugh at the player, or caused the hurler's to lose concentration, chances were the player would pony-up more money for another go at the game.

Park publicist Dorothy Strong told Royko: "...the man who had that concession was elderly. He just wanted to give it up and retire. He said he had had it and was tired. I think he said something about going to Florida." But Royko found the concessionaire, George F. Starr, at home in suburban Algonquin, and Starr said that Riverview had asked him to take out the Dip. "They were afraid of a boycott.... afraid we'd have trouble.... They claim they were getting letters from people who objected to the game." (In later years, this would be exaggerated into one of the major 'old wives' tales' of Riverview lore; that there were actual picket lines-- organized by the NAACP, no less-- protesting at the park till the Dip was removed. Nothing of the sort ever happened.)

To the end, Starr-- whose father-in-law, Adolph Doerr, had started the concession at Riverview in 1909-- didn't see anything wrong with the game, even claiming it was 'integrated': "We had white men working the counter... and colored boys working in the traps." When asked by Royko why he didn't fully integrate the Dips, using black and white men in the three cages, Starr replied he would have, but had only one dressing room. "You can't have whites and Negroes using the same dressing room," he said.