

Preface





The *Chicago Studies 2009* annual of undergraduate research on the Chicago region returns for its second year to showcase the original work of University of Chicago students. A product of the College Chicago Studies Program, the essays in this volume demonstrate the early success of this initiative. In its first full year, Chicago Studies brought together courses from across the College and supported lectures and events that engaged the history, culture, and politics of metropolitan Chicago. The students took it from there. They explored the city's unique neighborhoods. They researched the region's economic and cultural development, its political and social dynamics, and its continuous efforts to redevelop, renew, and revive its built environment. Chicago was both the subject of and setting for academic inquiries into policies and processes in modern society.

Reflecting the expansion of the Chicago Studies initiative, this year's volume exhibits a breadth of topics and disciplines. The essays in *Chicago Studies 2009* are drawn from five different departments, and the authors pose and address questions from a wide range of perspectives. They employ their accrued knowledge in anthropology, sociology, Latin American studies, public policy, and geography. With Chicago's resources

and rich history at their fingertips, they asked how a local accent became nationally famous and representative of an entire city; how gentrification operates in Chicago—why people move into specific neighborhoods and what they expect from them, the economic incentives and social impact, the effect that public policy has on the process; how young people juggle and meld multiple identities as they navigate Chicago's social and cultural geography and attempt to form meaningful political coalitions; and, how a once thriving neighborhood chooses to or resists preserving a particular grand past and inscribes it on the landscape. All of these studies and many more were carried out as components and extensions of University of Chicago College courses. These students have added to our knowledge of this great city.

Claire Elderkin (AB 08) considers gentrification in the mid-South Side. This senior paper in public policy takes a close look at the effects of the Chicago Housing Authority's Plan For Transformation. Elderkin examines CHA's official policy to change the form and perception of public housing in Chicago, first exploring the historical and intellectual origins of its emphasis on mixed-income housing, and then analyzing the impact this new housing has on mid-South Side neighborhoods. Employing quantitative analysis techniques to dissect a combination of property-transfer and building-permit data, Elderkin convincingly argues that the CHA's mixed income housing developments disproport-

tionately increased property values in immediate and surrounding neighborhoods. This steep uptick threatened to displace not only the CHA residents, but also many longtime mid-South Side renters and property owners. The CHA mixed-income housing, and the private residential and commercial developments they spur, are designed for and marketed to middle- and upper-class buyers. In rents, sale prices, property taxes, and commercial options, the mid-South Side was pricing out its residents. Rather than condemning the entire Plan For Transformation and the notion of mixed-income housing, the essay points out their virtues, asks for reasonable safeguards for lower-income residents, and offers alternatives for developing the mid-South Side while maintaining its social and architectural character.

The next two essays use Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, the city's largest Mexican enclave, as the setting for investigations into youth culture and identity formation. Rather than inquire into its existing physical or social structure, these essays portray actors who maintain particular perceptions of the neighborhood, and construct, to varying degrees, their own identities in relation to this imagined Pilsen. In the first, Anh-Thu Huynh (AB 08) asks young, well-educated recent arrivals to Pilsen about the appeal of the neighborhood. The answers are surprising. She weaves interview data into theoretical discussions about production and consumption-side gentrification and the relationship between broadly

conceived consumption, including housing and neighborhood choice, and identity formation. Her interviewees moved to the Mexican enclave as part of a steady stream of young, educated, artistic residents, but they did not see themselves as gentrifiers. They fashioned themselves as reactionaries in search of an authentic, organic urban experience in an age of conformity. Set against condo life and chain stores on the North Side, Pilsen — its people, its grittiness, its architecture, its commercial options — offered an alternative to the perceived monotony and alienation of modern life. Or, at least the idea of Pilsen did. Ironically, the new residents never fully integrated into or felt comfortable in the neighborhood. Their notions of authenticity resided in the ideas they projected onto Pilsen rather than in a sense of community or belonging. Living in the neighborhood allowed others to perceive them, and them to perceive themselves, as different from their contemporaries.

Angel Ochoa (AB 08) stays in Pilsen for his ethnographic and theoretical exploration of Chicago's largest queer prom, *Noche de Arco Iris* (Rainbow Night). Queer proms occur annually in many large cities around the country, but *Noche de Arco Iris* is organized by *Homofrecuencia*, a queer Latino radio program, and takes place in the National Museum of Mexican Art, both located in the heart of Pilsen. Ochoa interviewed the organizers and attended this event that attracts queer and Latino youth from across the city. The prom challenges common

perceptions of youth culture, Latino culture, the Pilsen neighborhood, and Chicago's social and sexual geography. Mixing a wide range of queer and feminist theory with personal interviews and observations, the essay and the prom shed light on how Latino youth construct, express, and negotiate their Latino and queer identities. Such events, according to the prom's organizers and the author, can spread resources, awareness, and tolerance, unify groups across the city, and serve as the basis for effective political action.

Jacob Barney (AB 08) scrutinizes the built environment in Chicago's historic Pullman district on the far South Side of the city. The buildings—their initial architecture, their renovations, and their rehabilitations—tell a story of the neighborhood's grand distant past and troubled recent past, present, and future. As an historic neighborhood, preservation laws and policies privilege and favor restoring Pullman's famous industrial past. But over the years, residents have modified their homes in ways that speak to Pullman's varied and shifting past. In this geography thesis, Barney conducted his own housing survey of the neighborhood in order to track this history and to see how Pullman and its residents have chosen to preserve and express their past architecturally. His deft reading of the layers of history in the buildings reveals a geographic and social logic to organic preservation, and he argues that this form of neighborhood evolution, along with the relics of the turn-

of-the-century model industrial town, can and should be preserved. The policies that seek to preserve a snapshot of the neighborhood's past can be adapted to value the evolution of what was and is Pullman.

In the final essay, Darian Gier (AB 08) turned a paper written for an upper-level anthropology course about the origins of the local "Chicagoan accent" into an extended discussion of its linguistic, social, and cultural place in America. In one of the most diverse cities in the world, in which residents speak hundreds of languages, a single, distinct, "Chicagoan accent" emerged over the course of a century and a half. Gier asks why, among such linguistic diversity, this particular dialect became an emblem of the city and its people. It did not happen without an odd mix of promotion and steady resistance. The essay traces debates in local media about the evils of dialectical speech and the virtues of Standard English, and examines how institutional and public opinions divided along class and geographical lines over time. But, as Gier points out, that this specific dialect ascended was far from predetermined or even logical. This accent won out because of its linguistic proximity to Standard and the power and pride of the city's South Side white working-class population. The "Chicagoan accent" lampooned on *Saturday Night Live* and known across the nation is spoken by a very specific segment of the city's people, geography, and history. Though emblematic and famous, Chicagoans remain divided about the accent's

representation of the city. Some take pride in it while others disown it.

Reading a text or learning in class about some aspect of Chicago, or an exchange on the street, or a trip to a regional event, landmark, or eatery, all served as inspiration to uncover a hidden piece of this city's history and culture. The College introduced these students to Chicago and fostered academic and experiential connections to the city they explored. The Chicago Studies initiative will deepen these connections. The long tradition of University of Chicago College students producing original research about Chicago will continue to flourish as Chicago Studies grows. As we enjoy the insights in this volume, we look forward to the Chicago stories that next year will bring.

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