



**Comment**

*That astonishing Chicago—a city where they are always rubbing the lamp, and  
fetching up the genii, and contriving and achieving new impossibilities.*

Mark Twain, 1883

*Chicago is like a man whose skin has been peeled off  
and whose entrails one sees at work.*

Max Weber, 1904

*Chicago was a town where nobody could ever forget how the money was made.  
It was picked up from floors still slippery with blood.*

Norman Mailer, 1968

*The past collapsed about them—decayed, bulldozed, obliterated. . . .  
Things were gone they couldn't remember but missed,  
and things were gone they weren't sure ever were there.*

Stuart Dybeck, *The Coast of Chicago*, 1981

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**Split-Level Bedlam**  
**Chicago at the End of the**  
**Twentieth Century**

*Nick De Genova*





*I felt that this world, despite its massiveness, was  
somehow dangerously fragile.*

Richard Wright  
*American Hunger*, 1944





The Cabrini Green public housing project consists of 23 high-rise buildings and a series of two-story row houses. From here it is a short walk to the Gold Coast, Chicago's wealthiest neighborhood.

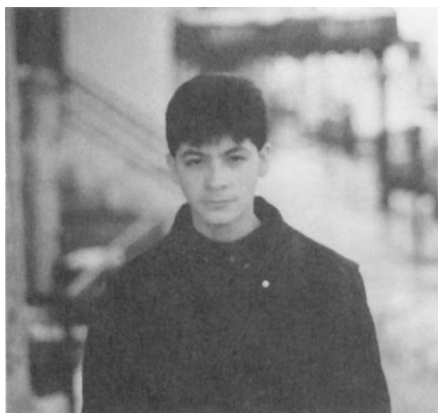


*where everything looks so old yet the people look so young*

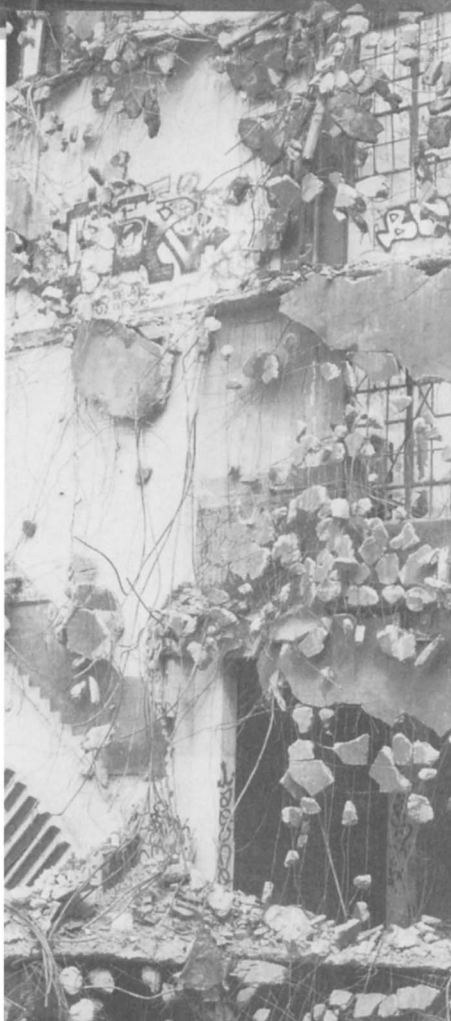
Nelson Algren, *Chicago: City on the Make*, 1951

*maybe the whole town went to work too young*

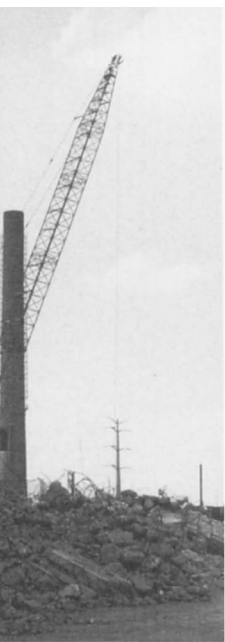
Nelson Algren, 1951

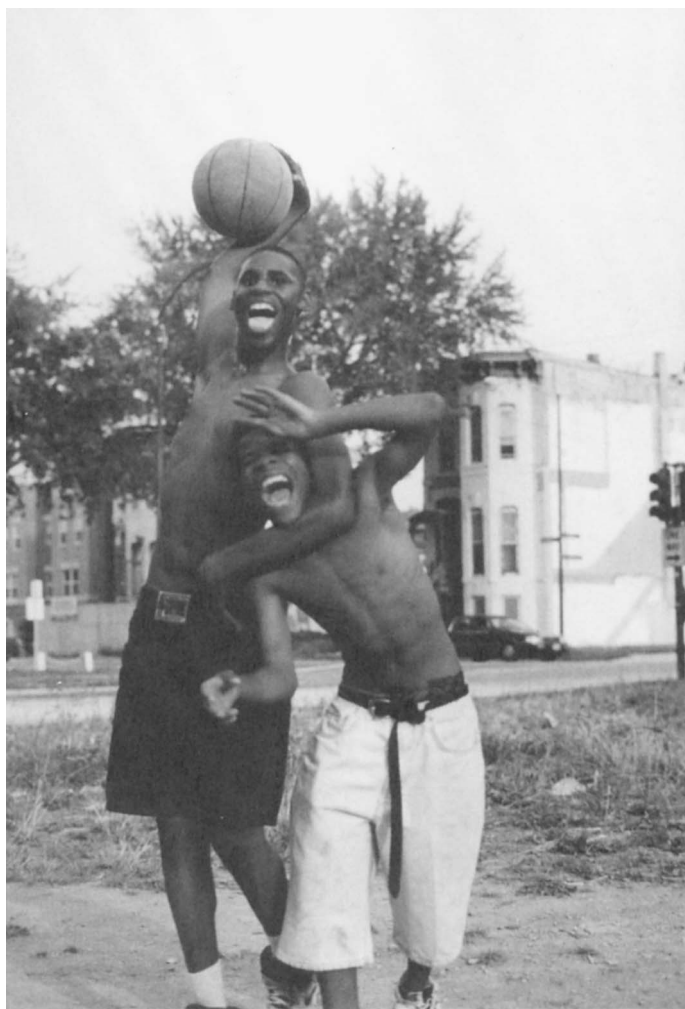


César at fourteen.  
Since his family  
migrated to Chicago  
from rural Mexico  
a few years ago, he has  
been selling chewing  
gum along 18th Street  
in Pilsen, a large  
Mexican neighborhood.











*Blight, in fact, could be considered a kind of official recognition, a grudging admission that among blocks of factories, railroad tracks, truck docks, industrial dumps, scrapyards, expressways, and the drainage canal, people had managed to wedge in their everyday lives.*

Stuart Dybeck, *The Coast of Chicago*, 1981



*The 36 high-rise buildings of the Robert Taylor Homes and the adjacent Stateway Gardens stretch for two miles on Chicago's South Side. Built on the site of an earlier segregated Black ghetto, some say that the 40,000 residents of the Homes and Gardens make this the largest public housing complex in the world. One year after completion, Mayor Richard J. Daley declared to the 1963 NAACP National Convention: "There are no ghettos in Chicago." The audience booed him off the stage.*

*Our split-level bedlam . . .  
top-heavy, bleeding, and blind*

Nelson Algren, 1951



*Streetwise* vendor (newspaper sold by homeless people) on North Michigan Avenue, Chicago's Magnificent Mile of exclusive hotels and stores.

*There is one kind of prison  
where the man is behind bars,  
and everything he desires is  
outside; and there is another  
kind where the things are  
behind the bars and the  
man is outside.*

Upton Sinclair  
*The Jungle*, 1906

**Nick De Genova** is working on a Ph.D. in anthropology at the University of Chicago. His research focuses on Mexican migration to Chicago, factory work, racism, and the production of urban space. He has recently published in *Social Text* and *Transition*. De Genova was born and raised in Chicago.