THE GOLD COAST AND THE SLUM
The GOLD COAST
AND THE SLUM

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY of CHICAGO'S
NEAR NORTH SIDE

By
Harvey Warren Zorbaugh

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INTRODUCTION, 1976
Howard P. Chudacoff

A half century has passed since Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess laid the groundwork for scientific study of modern urban life. Working with colleagues and students at the University of Chicago in the 1920s, these urban sociologists posited new theories about the development of cities, and they experimented with new methods of investigating forces that determined patterns of geographical and social organization. In the years that have passed since these efforts began, social scientists have revised many of the original concepts and refined much of the methodology. Yet the zest that Chicago sociologists had for their work is still refreshing, and much of their work remains useful.

Among scores of studies inspired by Park and Burgess’s work Harvey W. Zorbaugh’s The Gold Coast and the Slum, originally published by the University of Chicago Press in 1929, stands today as an important link between the Chicago school’s fascination with community structure and current efforts by local groups to inspire neighborhood awareness. Sponsored by the University of Chicago’s Local Community Research Committee, Zorbaugh’s book presents a graphic analysis of social segregation within Chicago’s Near North Side. Zorbaugh established himself with his mentors as being among the first to recognize explicitly that patterns of neighborhood life resulted from historical processes involved in the growth of the greater city. Moreover, he applied theoretical concepts of urban growth to a specific
district and showed how a community was fragmented. His identifications of structural defects in community organization instruct and challenge modern reformers who want to improve old neighborhoods by preserving them. His sensitive descriptions survive as graphic historical documents about contrasting types of neighborhood life fifty years ago.

In 1932 a Chicago social worker observed, "The lower North Side has a beautiful front yard but a sorry-looking backyard." This area was the setting for *The Gold Coast and the Slum*. It was a district about a mile wide and a mile and a half long which in the 1920s included both extremes of the urban social spectrum. The "front yard," or "Gold Coast," contained the highest residential land values of any area in Chicago, more professional men, more persons listed in *Who's Who* and the *Social Register*, and more philanthropists. But behind the facade of fashionable apartments, hotels, and town houses that stretched along Lake Michigan lay the "sorry backyard," gray neighborhoods of rooming houses, honky-tonk dives, and immigrant tenements. Within the Near North Side area lived ninety thousand people—as many as inhabited the entire state of Nevada—of varied types: elites, artists, hoboes, Italians, Persians, blacks, and many more. Zorbaugh's task was to try to make some sense of this "nondescript" region and see if it had any potential for common interest and common action.

Zorbaugh sorted out the Near North Side by dividing it into geographical and social subdistricts. Chapters 3–8 present perceptive analyses of the characteristics and evolution of these places. The descriptive prose, among the most vivid written by students of the Chicago school, endures as a model for modern social analysts who depend more heavily
on statistical finesse. Zorbaugh's literary skills, plus his presentation of individual cases, give the book a human quality necessary for social area analysis. As one contemporary reviewer remarked, Zorbaugh wrote “from the standpoint of a reporter rather than a scientist,” but his technique enabled him to approach his topic more intimately than a direct empirical examination might have allowed.

Yet Zorbaugh's analysis raised problems because, of necessity, it was tangled in the issues of community, a concept that still nags social scientists. Most agree in the abstract that the term “community” connotes some form of shared interactions and sense of belonging within a geographically limited space. But controversies have resulted when someone has tried to apply the model to a specific case or, perhaps more frequently, when someone could not match reality with the model and therefore lamented the “breakdown” of community. Zorbaugh sided with the latter group; he found segregation and social disorganization in the Near North Side so pervasive that “there is scarcely an area that may be called a community” (p. 182).

On the other hand, his richly detailed descriptions reveal important forms of social organization that imply alternative types of community life. In his unsuccessful search for traditional agencies that would stabilize social behavior, such as family, clan, and church, Zorbaugh overlooked new urban institutions that assumed important functions. Several passages of The Gold Coast and the Slum mention how places such as barbershops, ethnic lodges, pawn shops, cafes, and coffee houses nurtured close human interactions and, by implication, replaced or reproduced older forms of community organization. Zorbaugh might have argued that these institutions were merely impersonal and artificial sub-
stitutes for older forms; yet, it seems clear that his concern with social disorganization deflected his attention from newer and different types of relationships. Moreover, Zorbaugh even documents a richness in the family life that he simultaneously identifies as being in a stage of dissolution. Although his chapter on "Little Hell," the Italian slum, laments the breakdown of social tranquility and control, he admits that in "Little Hell" family cohesiveness prevented serious disorganization, and he closes his narrative with a moving testimony from one of his documents on the district: "But after all I wonder if there is as much happiness on the Gold Coast as over in these basement rooms. When the father comes home at night, six or seven children run to meet him, and a warm supper is always ready; and summer nights—the streets—you would go a long way to hear the concertinas" (p. 181).

The virtues and drawbacks of Zorbaugh's study lie within the larger implications that his and similar analyses suggest. In the 1920s, the Chicago school of sociology made pioneering efforts to understand the forces of urban society by designing a new method for studying the city, a method that focused on the interactions between urban inhabitants and their environment. This approach was called "human ecology" because it paralleled similar investigations of the ways that plants and animals adjusted to their environments. Human ecology had attractions as a theory because it conceived of the city as an organism with complex, differentiated parts that somehow integrated into the larger urban society. The different parts were "natural areas," as Park called them, and they provided the locales for the most basic urban institutions and activities. Zorbaugh explained that these areas were the "unplanned, natural product of
the city’s growth,” and he considered Chicago’s Near North Side to be a typical example. The organic view of the city in the 1920s logically extended issues raised in the preceding Progressive years, and the concept of natural areas inspired closer, more systematic examinations of subregions (neighborhoods) and subgroups (ethnic, occupational, status, etc.). These examinations have informed urban planning and policy for the past five decades.

But two principal problems, one of vagueness and the other of emphasis, haunted works like Zorbaugh’s that took an ecological approach. First, Chicago sociologists do not seem to have offered a clear definition of “natural areas.” In plant ecology, natural areas were specific spatial units distinguished by their own peculiar characteristics. Human ecologists, however, blurred the translation to social situations. Thus, as critic Miller Alihan noted, it was not certain whether a “natural area” was a unit of geography, a grouping of buildings, a system of human relationships, or some combination of features. In some instances, the terms “natural area” and “neighborhood” were equivalent; on other occasions neighborhoods represented subunits of natural areas. Louis Wirth, another noted Chicago sociologist, wrote that land values determined boundaries of natural areas and then in the following sentence observed that rivers, streets, railroad tracks, and other physical barriers marked limits of natural areas. According to Wirth’s first definition, Zorbaugh’s Gold Coast, rooming-house district, and “Little Hell” qualify as natural areas; according to Wirth’s second criterion and to Zorbaugh’s own implications, the Near North Side is the principal natural area. Moreover, there was an unclear correspondence between natural areas and the series of concentric zones that Burgess
postulated to typify the modern city's physical and spatial structure and that Zorbaugh applied to his own work. Thus although the areal emphasis seems to make sense intuitively, refined definitions are elusive.

Perhaps more importantly, the human ecologists' emphasis on environment raised questions about the role of human choice. That is, the ecological approach tended to view environmental factors as stimulants to behavior and change. This principle seemed reasonable when applied to biology, where environmentally produced competition effected a process of natural selection that then determined the survival and distribution of certain organisms. Human social systems, however, contain institutions which derive from conscious and rational choice as well as from nature. Park, Burgess, Zorbaugh, and the others undoubtedly recognized this distinction, but their emphasis on the principle of environmental determinism left the impression that the area was chiefly responsible for sifting and sorting people just as it did with plants and animals. Thus Zorbaugh asserts in a revealing footnote that "the modern city, industrial or commercial, like the plant or animal community, is largely an ecological product; that is, the rate and direction of the city's growth, the distribution of city features, the segregation of communities within the city, are by-products of the economic process—in which land values, rents, and wages are fixed—and the unintended result of competition" (p. 232).

Recent historical studies, particularly those of Sam Bass Warner, Jr., have confirmed that this theoretical statement has validity. Yet the concept ascribes an overly causative role to the environment and undervalues human volition. In a 1923 essay, Zorbaugh wrote "each natural area of the
city tends to collect the particular individuals *predestined* to it” (italics added). Although Zorbaugh explained that these particular individuals gave each area its distinct cultural identity, his view of predestination or determinism implied a rigid process, particularly when applied to so-called disorganized areas. It then became possible to conclude that unstable areas attracted, and even produced, unstable people. Thus, in *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, the anonymous rooming-house district created restless and lonely people; unconventional Towertown encouraged egocentrics and neurotics; the poverty of the slum undermined social sanctions and group identity.

Again, such generalizations include some valid assumptions, but they overlook the dynamics and functions of the areas examined. The disorganized neighborhoods of Chicago’s Near North Side contained residences that were least adaptive to the needs of urban families. Rather, the “World of Furnished Rooms,” the “bohemia,” the “Rialto,” and even the slums offered small rental units and cheap, unfurnished tenement apartments that either filled the housing needs of unattached, familyless individuals or served as temporary expedients for young families hoping to find better dwellings elsewhere (though their hopes were not always realized). The areas, inevitably characterized by high mobility, fulfilled the important function of providing housing for migrants, old people, young singles, immigrant families, and persons on the edge of poverty. As sociologist Peter Rossi observed in *Why Families Move* (1955), “mobile areas are mobile because they provide housing for households in those life cycle stages which are particularly unstable” (p. 181). Although this mobility often prevents viable organizational life in a neighborhood, it often reflects
a natural—and functional—exercise of human choice that secures the needed environment.

One area in Zorbaugh's survey, the Gold Coast, preserved some solidarity, if not stability. This region, with its wealth, leadership, and sense of aristocratic responsibility, seemed to hold the keys to the city's destiny. Zorbaugh hoped that the people who inhabited the Gold Coast would assume functions beyond those of mere "pageantry, display, and froth"; for only these people had roots deep enough to identify with the welfare of the entire city, and only they had resources and ability to improve civic and social life. Zorbaugh's hopes and admiration, coming at the end of the 1920s, a period when local initiative still was the canon of urban policy, sound outmoded in the wake of the New Deal, subsequent federal intervention in cities, and the exodus of affluent whites to the suburbs. And yet the need for able and visionary local leaders, who can identify with the entire metropolitan area as well as understand its diverse subareas, still presses modern society.

_The Gold Coast and the Slum_ and works by other Chicago sociologists remain important today not only as historical documents of urban theory but also as catalysts for discussions of how order and social progress could be achieved within heterogeneous cities. If Zorbaugh and his colleagues did not fully explore the meaning and functions of community and mobility, modern policymakers have not always recognized the subtle complexities of urban life that the Chicago school stressed. These complexities change as cities grow and are transformed; but thanks to the work of the Chicago school, urban experts have become more sensitive to the process of change and the dynamics of city life.
Harvey Warren Zorbaugh was born in Cleveland, Ohio, September 20, 1896. He received an A.B. from Vanderbilt in 1922 and studied at the University of Chicago between 1923 and 1926 as a Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial fellow. He spent the rest of his career on the faculty of New York University where he became a leading specialist in the social adjustment of gifted children. During his study of Chicago's Near North Side, Zorbaugh noticed that leaders of gangs were extremely intelligent youths who apparently had become lawbreakers because no one had discovered or channeled their talents. After completing The Gold Coast and the Slum, he involved himself in a number of clinics, committees, conferences, and projects that addressed problems of gifted children. Zorbaugh also pioneered in educational and commercial television and was an outspoken opponent of race prejudice in public schools. He died January 21, 1965, at the age of sixty-eight.
INTRODUCTION

One of the pleasures of travel, says Von Ogden Vogt, is that of "discovering communities that are descript rather than nondescript." He mentions Oberammergau, Bangkok, Oxford, and adds "or any other place where there has been some sustained attempt to describe all things and set forth the common views in laws, customs, and all the arts of life from house building to worship." A descript community is "a place of unity and charm." A nondescript community is one that lacks these qualities. A nondescript community may be interesting, of course, but it will not be restful, and will not be satisfying merely as an object of contemplation.

The community with which this volume is concerned is nondescript; it is a place of unusual interest, but it has neither the unity nor the charm of a place in which the common view is set forth "in laws, customs, and all the arts of life." There are few customs that are common at once to the "Gold Coast" and to "Little Sicily," and there is certainly no common view which holds the cosmopolitan population of this whole region together in any common purpose. Furthermore, the laws which prevail are not a communal product, and there is no organized public opinion which supports and contributes to their enforcement. In fact, it is doubtful whether, in any proper sense of the word, the "Lower North Side" can be called a community at all. It is a region; one of the characteristic regions of a metropolitan city, remarkable for the number and kinds of people huddled and crowded together in physical proximity, without the opportunity and, apparently, with very little desire
for the intimacies and the mutual understanding and comprehension which ordinarily insure a common view and make collective action possible. It is, however, just this “nondescript” situation, so lacking in “unity and charm,” that gives this region its peculiar interest. It is nondescript because it is in process of evolution. It is typically an area of transition, the character of its populations and the problems which it presents are at once a reflection and a consequence of the conditions which this period of transition imposes.

What is true of the region is characteristic of most of the very different classes and kinds of people that inhabit it. From the Gold Coast on the lake front to Little Sicily on the river, they are all in transition. Everywhere the old order is passing, but the new order has not arrived. Everything is loose and free, but everything is problematic.

This is particularly true of the so-called rooming-house area, which occupies the center of the region. Into this area all the young and adventurous people, who come to the city to seek their fortunes, tend to drift. Presently they will find their places somewhere in the broad cadre of occupations which the great city offers them. In this way they will become incorporated into the permanent economic and social order about them. In the meantime they are at large, and in transition. In the rooming-house area there is apparently a larger number of young women than of young men. The Lower North Side is for young women in particular, a kind of Latin Quarter, where students of art and music find places to live in close proximity to the studios. It is this region that supports most of the little theaters, the smart book stores, and the bohemian and radical clubs. Here is Bohemia, which is itself a place of transition, a
place in which life is adventurous, to be sure, but often very lonely.

Every great city has its bohemia and its hobohemias; its gold coast and little Sicilies; its rooming-house areas and its slums. In Chicago, and on the Lower North Side, they are in close physical proximity to one another. This gives one an interesting illustration of the situation in which the physical distances and the social distances do not coincide; a situation in which people who live side by side are not, and—because of the divergence of their interests and their heritages—cannot, even with the best of good will, become neighbors.

It is this situation which constitutes the specific problem and the central theme of this study. Our political system is founded upon the conviction that people who live in the same locality have common interests, and that they can therefore be relied upon to act together for their common welfare. This assumption, as it turns out, is not valid for large cities. The difficulty of maintaining in the city the intimate contacts which in the small town insured the existence of a common purpose and made concerted action possible is certainly very great. Particularly is this true of those parts of the city where people live in hotels or lodging houses, where few people own their homes and most people are transient dwellers. Under such circumstances, all the traditional forms of local government fail or break down altogether. The fact that there exists on the Lower North Side a community council which recognizes this problem and has sought to solve it, is itself an evidence of the conditions it seeks to remedy. It was, by the way, this community council and its problems which furnished the original motive for this study.
Perhaps I should add that this volume is not a solution; it is a definition of the problem merely. The statement which it offers has, at any rate, laid the foundation for further study and experiment. Furthermore, it offers an example of a kind of investigation of urban life which is at least comparable with the studies that anthropologists have made of the cultures of primitive peoples. It is upon studies of this general character, I am convinced, that we must base our programs for the reorganization of our own political and collective life.

Robert E. Park

University of Chicago
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Rooms”; Mrs. Charles Harrington Chadwick for material on slum life; the many persons who contributed material for the chapter “The Gold Coast,” whose names are omitted at their request; and a host of other individuals and agencies on the Near North Side, and many students in the graduate school of the University of Chicago, for suggestions, access to materials, data, documents, and assistance in the actual investigation which has made possible this cross-section of the tidelands of city life. Finally, the writer wishes to thank the Local Community Research Committee of the University of Chicago for its assistance in the study, and Professor Paul Bixler for his careful reading and helpful criticism of the manuscript.

Harvey Warren Zorbaugh
CHAPTER I

THE SHADOW OF THE SKYSCRAPER

It is a veritable Babel, in which some thirty or more tongues are spoken. Gunmen haunt its streets, and a murder is committed in them nearly every day in the year. It is smoke-ridden and disfigured by factories and railway yards, and many of its streets are ill-paved. Moreover, the people who throng them are more carelessly dressed than those in Fifth Avenue, and their voices not so well modulated as those of the inhabitants of Boston. Their manners, too, are of the kind the New Yorker defines as western.—Chatfield-Taylor, Chicago

The Chicago River, its waters stained by industry, flows back upon itself, branching to divide the city into the South Side, the North Side, and "the great West Side." In the river's southward bend lies the Loop, its skyline looming toward Lake Michigan. The Loop is the heart of Chicago, the knot in the steel arteries of elevated structure which pump in a ceaseless stream the three millions of population of the city into and out of its central business district. The canyon-like streets of the Loop rumble with the traffic of commerce. On its sidewalks throng people of every nation, pushing unseeingly past one another, into and out of office buildings, shops, theaters, hotels, and ultimately back to the north, south, and west "sides" from which they came. For miles over what once was prairie now sprawls in endless blocks the city.

The city's conquest of the prairie has proceeded stride for stride with the development of transportation. The outskirts of the city have always been about forty-five minutes from the heart of the Loop. In the days of the horse-drawn
car they were not beyond Twenty-second Street on the South Side. With the coming of the cable car they were extended to the vicinity of Thirty-sixth Street. The electric car—surface and elevated—again extended the city's outskirts, this time well past Seventieth Street. How far "rapid transit" will take them, no one can predict.

Apace with the expansion of the city has gone the ascendancy of the Loop. Every development in transportation, drawing increasing throngs of people into the central business district, has tended to centralize there not only commerce and finance, but all the vital activities of the city's life. The development of communication has further tightened the Loop's grip on the life of the city. The telephone has at once enormously increased the area over which the central business district can exert control and centralized that control. The newspaper, through the medium of advertising, has firmly established the supremacy of the Loop and, through the news, focused the attention of the city upon the Loop. The skyscraper is the visible symbol of the Loop's domination of the city's life. The central business district of the old city—like that of modern London—with its six- and eight-story buildings, sprawled over an unwieldy area. But the skyscraper, thrusting the Loop skyward thirty, forty, fifty stories, has made possible an extraordinary centralization and articulation of the central business district of the modern city. Drawing thousands daily into the heart of the city, where the old type of building drew hundreds, the cluster of skyscrapers within the Loop has become the city's vortex.

As the Loop expands it literally submerges the areas about it with the traffic of its commerce. Business and industry encroach upon residential neighborhoods. As the
roar of traffic swells, and the smoke of industry begrimes buildings, land values rise. The old population moves slowly out, to be replaced by a mobile, shifting, anonymous population bringing with it transitional forms of social life. Within the looming shadow of the skyscraper, in Chicago as in every great city, is found a zone of instability and change—the tidelands of city life.

A part of these tidelands, within ten minutes' walk of the Loop and the central business district, within five minutes by street car or bus, just across the Chicago River, lies the Near North Side, sometimes called "North Town." Within this area, a mile and a half long and scarcely a mile wide, bounded by lake Michigan on the east and by the Chicago River on the south and west, under the shadow of the Tribune Tower, a part of the inner city, live ninety thousand people, a population representing all the types and contrasts that lend to the great city its glamor and romance.

The first settlers of Chicago built upon the north bank of the Chicago River, and Chicago's first business house and first railroad were on Kinzie street. But early in Chicago's history destiny took its great commercial and industrial development southward, and for several decades the North Side was a residential district, well-to-do and fashionable. The story of early Chicago society centers about homes on Ohio, Erie, Cass, and Rush streets; and street after street of old stone fronts, curious streets some of them, still breathe an air of respectability reminiscent of earlier and better days and belying the slow conquest of the slum.

Here change has followed fast upon change. With the growth of the city commerce has encroached upon residential property, relentlessly pushing it northward or crowding it along the lake shore, until now the Near North Side
is chequered with business streets. Into this area, where commerce is competing the conquest of the community, has crept the slum. Meantime great industries have sprung up along the river, and peoples speaking foreign tongues have come to labor in them. The slum has offered these alien peoples a place to live cheaply and to themselves; and wave upon wave of immigrants has swept over the area—Irish, Swedish, German, Italian, Persian, Greek, and Negro—forming colonies, staying for a while, then giving way to others. But each has left its impress and its stragglers, and today there live on the Near North Side twenty-nine or more nationalities, many of them with their Old World tongues and customs.

The city's streets can be read as can the geological record in the rock. The old stone fronts of the houses on the side streets; old residences along lower Rush and State, crowded between new business blocks, or with shops built along the street in front of them; a garage with "Riding Academy" in faded letters above its doors; the many old churches along La Salle and Dearborn streets; an office building growing out of a block of rooming-houses; "Deutsche Apotheke" on the window of a store in a neighborhood long since Italian—these are signs that record the changes brought about by the passing decades, changes still taking place today.

The Near North Side is an area of high light and shadow, of vivid contrasts—contrasts not only between the old and the new, between the native and the foreign, but between wealth and poverty, vice and respectability, the conventional and the bohemian, luxury and toil.

Variety is the spice of life, as depicted in the books of the Board of Assessors; autocracy and democracy mingle on the same pages;
aphorisms are borne out; and "art for art's sake" remains the slogan of the twentieth century.

On one page of North District Book 18, the record of the worldly holdings of James C. Ewell, artist, 4 Ohio Street, is set down as "Total personal property, $19." So-and-so, artists, are reported throughout the district with this notation: "Attic room, ill-furnished, many paintings: unable to estimate."

The art colony is located in this section, as is the colony of the rich and the nearly rich. And on the same page are the following three entries which span the stream of life:

Cyrus H. McCormick, 50 E. Huron St., $895,000; taxable assessment, $447,500.

Mary V. McCormick, 678 Rush St., $480,000; taxable assessment, $240,000.

And then—as another contrast—the following entry appears on record:

United States Senator Medill McCormick, guest at the Drake Hotel, $____,000,000,000.¹

At the corner of Division Street and the Lake Shore Drive stands a tall apartment building in which seventeen-room apartments rent at one thousand dollars a month. One mile west, near Division Street and the river, Italian families are living in squalid basement rooms for which they pay six dollars a month. The greatest wealth in Chicago is concentrated along the Lake Shore Drive, in what is called the "Gold Coast." Almost at its back door, in "Little Hell," is the greatest concentration of poverty in Chicago. Respectability, it would seem, is measured by rentals and land values!²

The Near North Side is not merely an area of contrasts; it is an area of extremes. All the phenomena characteristic

¹ Chicago Herald and Examiner, July, 1923.
² United Charities of Chicago: Sixty Years of Service. In 1920–21 there were 90 contributors to the United Charities in less than a square mile on the Gold Coast, and 460 poverty cases in the square mile behind it.
of the city are clearly segregated and appear in exaggerated form. Not only are there extremes of wealth and poverty. The Near North Side has the highest residential land values in the city, and among the lowest; it has more professional men, more politicians, more suicides, more persons in *Who's Who*, than any other "community" in Chicago.

The turgid stream of the Chicago River, which bounds the Near North Side on the south and the west, has played a prominent part in its history. A great deal of shipping once went up the river, and tugs, coal barges, tramp freighters, and occasional ore boats still whistle at its bridges and steam slowly around its bends. This shipping caused commerce and industry to locate along the river, and today wharves, lumber and coal yards, iron works, gas works, sheet metal works, light manufacturing plants and storage plants, wholesale houses for spices, furs, groceries, butter, and imported oils line both sides of the river for miles, and with the noise and smoke of the railroads make a great barrier that half encircles the Near North Side, renders the part of it along the river undesirable to live in, and slowly encroaches northward and eastward.

Taking figures for five widely differing "communities" in Chicago, this fact is clearly brought out:

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<th>Community</th>
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<th>Suicides</th>
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<td>Bridgeport†</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>212</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodlawn§</td>
<td>60,594</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near North</td>
<td>83,819</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Immigrant community back of the Stockyards.
† Polish "area of first settlement" on the Southwest Side.
‡ Jewish "area of second settlement" on the West Side.
§ South Side residential community, surrounding the University of Chicago, containing many professional men and women.
“North Town” is divided into east and west by State Street. East of State Street lies the Gold Coast, Chicago’s most exclusive residential district, turning its face to the lake and its back upon what may lie west toward the river. West of State Street lies a nondescript area of furnished rooms: Clark Street, the Rialto of the half-world; “Little Sicily,” the slum.

The Lake Shore Drive is the Mayfair of the Gold Coast. It runs north and south along Lake Michigan, with a wide parkway, bridle path, and promenade. On its western side rise the imposing stone mansions, with their green lawns and wrought-iron-grilled doorways, of Chicago’s wealthy aristocracy and her industrial and financial kings. South of these is Streeterville a “restricted” district of tall apartments and hotels. Here are the Drake Hotel and the Lake Shore Drive hotel, Chicago’s most exclusive. And here apartments rent for from three hundred fifty to a thousand dollars a month. Indeed, the Lake Shore Drive is a street more of wealth than of aristocracy; for in this midwest metropolis money counts for more than does family, and the aristocracy is largely that of the financially successful.

South of Oak Street the Lake Shore Drive, as it turns, becomes North Michigan Avenue, an avenue of fashionable hotels and restaurants, of smart clubs and shops. North Michigan Avenue is the Fifth Avenue of the Middle West; and already it looks forward to the day when Fifth Avenue will be the North Michigan Avenue of the East.

On a warm spring Sunday “Vanity Fair” glides along “the Drive” in motor cars of expensive mark, makes colorful the bridle-paths, or saunters up the promenade between “the Drake” and Lincoln Park. The tops of the tan motor busses are crowded with those who live farther out, going home
from church—those of a different world who look at “Vanity Fair” with curious or envious eyes. Even here the element of contrast is not lacking, for a mother from back west, with a shawl over her head, waits for a pause in the stream of motors to lead her eager child across to the beach, while beside her stand a collarless man in a brown derby and his girl in Sunday gingham, from some rooming-house back on La Salle Street.

For a few blocks back of “the Drive”—on Bellevue Place, East Division Street, Stone, Astor, Banks, and North State Parkway, streets less pretentious but equally aristocratic—live more than a third of the people in Chicago’s social register, “of good family and not employed.” Here are the families that lived on the once fashionable Prairie Avenue, and later Ashland Boulevard, on the South and West sides. These streets, with the Lake Shore Drive, constitute Chicago’s much vaunted Gold Coast, a little world to itself, which the city, failing to dislodge, has grown around and passed by.

At the back door of the Gold Coast, on Dearborn, Clark, and La Salle streets, and on the side streets extending south to the business and industrial area, is a strange world, painfully plain by contrast, a world that lives in houses with neatly lettered cards in the window: “Furnished Rooms.” In these houses, from midnight to dawn, sleep some twenty-five thousand people. But by day houses and streets are practically deserted. For early in the morning this population hurries from its houses and down its streets, boarding cars and busses, to work in the Loop. It is a childless area, an area of young men and young women, most of whom are single, though some are married, and others are living together unmarried. It is a world of constant comings and
goings, of dull routine and little romance, a world of unsatisfied longings.

The Near North Side shades from light to shadow, and from shadow to dark. The Gold Coast gives way to the world of furnished rooms; and the rooming-house area, to the west again, imperceptibly becomes the slum. The common denominator of the slum is its submerged aspect and its detachment from the city as a whole. The slum is a bleak area of segregation of the sediment of society; an area of extreme poverty, tenements, ramshackle buildings, of evictions and evaded rents; an area of working mothers and children, of high rates of birth, infant mortality, illegitimacy, and death; an area of pawnshops and second-hand stores, of gangs, of "flops" where every bed is a vote. As distinguished from the vice area, the disintegrating neighborhood, the slum is an area which has reached the limit of decay and is on the verge of reorganization as missions, settlements, playparks, and business come in.

The Near North Side, west of Clark Street from North Avenue to the river, and east of Clark Street from Chicago Avenue to the river, we may describe as a slum, without fear of contradiction. For this area, cut off by the barrier of river and industry, and for years without adequate transportation, has long been a backwater in the life of the city. This slum district is drab and mean. In ten months the United Charities here had 460 relief cases. Poverty is extreme. Many families are living in one or two basement rooms for which they pay less than ten dollars a month. These rooms are stove heated, and wood is sold on the streets in bundles, and coal in small sacks. The majority of houses, back toward the river, are of wood, and not a few have windows broken out. Smoke, the odor from the gas