

Chicago Stories

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“As everybody said: ‘Chicago has risen phoenix-like from its ashes.’ But many ashes remained, and the sense of ruin was still blended with ambition of recovery. Louis thought it all magnificent and wild: A crude extravaganza: An intoxicating rawness: A sense of big things to be done. For ‘Big’ was the word. ‘Biggest’ was preferred, and the ‘biggest in the world’ was the braggart phrase on every tongue. Chicago had had the biggest conflagration ‘in the world.’ It was the biggest grain and lumber market ‘in the world.’ It slaughtered more hogs than any city ‘in the world.’ It was the greatest railroad center, the greatest this, the greatest that. It shouted itself hoarse in *réclame*.”

--Louis Sullivan, *The Autobiography of an Idea* (1924)



“Chicago Taking a Beating,” Roger Brown (1989)

Course Overview

Chicago is, in many ways, a city of exhibition and experimentation. The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 offered an invitation to architects, engineers, utopianists, and dreamers to make the ideal U.S. city on what seemed to be a blank, burned-down slate. And indeed, as Chicago grew rapidly over the latter part of the 19th century, architect Louis Sullivan helped articulate a mythology around Chicago that became part of the American *zeitgeist*: Chicago, particularly in relationship to its East Coast cousin New York, is an urban phoenix. Not just rising from the ashes of a fire, Chicago seemed to rise out of the problems that New York and other more established American cities couldn't solve: overpopulation, poverty, and elitism. But this was just one story about Chicago—what about the others?

This is to say: this is not a history course. Yes, you will learn history, and a lot of it! But this class is one primarily interested in how the stories we tell about a city (in this particular case, Chicago) can create a psychic, literary life that tells us something else about Chicago other than what can be observed on a map, gleaned through statistical analysis, or viewed on the news. While Chicago might be nearly 800 miles from our location in Durham, NC, the stories we tell and have told about the Windy City have deeply informed the way U.S. Americans think about the possibilities and limitations of urban life in the United States. Our job in this class is to map out some of what those possibilities and limitations might be.

Course Materials

The following books can be found at the campus bookstore:

Cisneros, Sandra: *The House on Mango Street* (1984)
Hansberry, Lorraine: *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)
Ferber, Edna: *So Big* (1924)
Fuller, Henry Blake: *Cliff Dwellers* (1893)
Norris, Bruce: *Clybourne Park* (2010)
Sinclair, Upton: *The Jungle* (1906)
Ware, Chris: *Building Stories* (2012)
Wright, Richard: *Native Son* (1940)

The following texts I have made available on Sakai:

AMC blog: "Ferris Bueller: John Hughes and Chicago" (2007)
Biss, Eula: "No-Man's-Land" (2008)
Bradwell School of Excellence's fifth-grade class, "Fifth-graders defend their South Shore neighborhood" (2014)
Dybek, Stuart: "We Didn't" (2003)
De Certeau, Michel: "Spatial Stories" (1984, orig. published 1980)
Lipsitz, George: "Race, Place, and Power" (2011)

Lipsitz, George: "Something Left to Love: Lorraine Hansberry's Chicago" (2011)
Merwood-Salisbury, Joanna: "The First Chicago School and the Ideology of the Skyscraper"
(2014)
Sullivan, Louis: "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered (1896)

Course Blog

Each student will be required to contribute weekly to our ongoing conversations by writing in the course blog. Consider blog posts an informal opportunity to process the course readings, raise questions about the material, and draw connections not just among the readings on the syllabus, but with other materials you may have encountered in other classes (or even on your own, elsewhere)! These blog posts are also an opportunity for you as students to direct the conversation for our class.

In every blog post, you should write to make **one connection** between the material for the weekend and **anything else**. This can include *anything* we've encountered previously in the class, but can also include something you've learned in another class, or something you saw on TV, or something you've read in the newspaper, or something another student wrote. At the end of your blog post, you should also pose to the class *one question* derived from the inquiry you raise in your posting for the week. Every student should write in the course blog by Sunday at midnight before our Monday class. [**note to self: change as I find out when my course will be scheduled**]

Though each student is expected to read all of the course blogs, each week, I will designate **one student** to be responsible for presenting some of the major questions raised to kick off our daily conversation.

The blog posts constitute a portion of your final grade, but I will not be grading your posts week by week. Rather, I will evaluate the blogs holistically on the basis of completion and thoughtfulness.

Writing Projects

Over the course of the semester, you will write two papers, each 4-5 pages. Your first paper will be revised after its first submission. The revision will be graded on its own terms (that is—I will grade for how well you respond to my suggestion for revision).

I will hand out prompts for the paper well in advance of their due dates. You are, of course, welcome to explore topics other than what I provide on the prompt. You are also welcome to flesh out a blog post that you wrote.

Collaborative Course Project

In lieu of a larger final paper or a comprehensive exam, we will collaboratively create a literary map of Chicago on a website. We will talk about this project often, and shape its terms together. Every student should expect to produce one or more critical and/or creative projects in contribution to the map. Students can also expect that they have the option to produce projects in collaboration with peers if they so choose.

Grading

Your final grade will be determined by the following components:

Participation	10%
Blog Posts	15%
Paper 1	10%
Revision 1	15%
Paper 2	20%
Class Project	30%

Schedule

Week 1:	W, Jan. 7:	Introduction
Week 2:	M, Jan 12:	Dybek, "We Didn't" De Certeau, "Spatial Stories" Wright, selections from "Organic Architecture"
	W, Jan 14:	Fuller, <i>The Cliff Dwellers</i>
Week 3:	W, Jan 21:	Fuller, <i>The Cliff Dwellers</i> Merwood-Salisbury, "The First Chicago School and the Ideology of the Skyscraper"
Week 4:	M, Jan 26:	Fuller, <i>The Cliff Dwellers</i> Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered"
	W, Jan 28:	Sinclair, <i>The Jungle</i>
Week 5:	M, Feb 2:	Sinclair, <i>The Jungle</i>
	W, Feb 4:	Sinclair, <i>The Jungle</i>

Week 6:	M, Feb 9:	Ferber, <i>So Big</i>
	W, Feb 11:	Ferber, <i>So Big</i>
Week 7:	M, Feb 16:	Paper 1 Due. In class: poetry
	W, Feb 18:	Wright, <i>Native Son</i> Lipsitz, “Race, Place, and Power”
Week 8:	M, Feb 23:	Wright, <i>Native Son</i>
	W, Feb 25:	Wright, <i>Native Son</i>
Week 9:	M, Mar. 2:	Wright, <i>Native Son</i> “Fifth-graders defend their South Shore neighborhood”
	W, Mar. 4:	Revision 1 Due Finish Wright, <i>Native Son</i>

SPRING BREAK

Week 10:	M, Mar 16:	Hansberry, <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>
	W, Mar 18:	Hansberry, <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> Lipsitz, “Something Left to Love: Lorraine Hansberry’s Chicago”
Week 11:	M, Mar. 23:	Norris, <i>Clybourne Park</i>
	W, Mar 25:	Norris, <i>Clybourne Park</i> Biss, “No-Man’s-Land”
Week 12:	M, Mar. 30:	Hughes, <i>Ferris Bueller’s Day Off</i> “Ferris Bueller: John Hughes and Chicago”
	W, Apr. 1:	Paper 2 Due. In class: Music and Poetry
Week 13:	M, Apr. 6:	Cisneros, <i>The House on Mango Street</i>
	W, Apr. 8:	Cisneros, <i>The House on Mango Street</i>

Week 14: M, Apr. 13: Ware, *Building Stories*
W, Apr. 15: Ware, *Building Stories*
Week 15: M, Apr. 20: Class Presentations
W, Apr. 22: Class Presentations