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Chicago: A Biography

Dominic A. Pacyga

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Chicago has been called by many names. Nelson Algren declared it a “City on the Make.” Carl Sandburg dubbed it the “City of Big Shoulders.” Upton Sinclair christened it “The Jungle,” while New Yorkers, naturally, pronounced it “the Second City.”

At last there is a book for all of us, whatever we choose to call Chicago. In this magisterial biography, historian Dominic Pacygatraces the storied past of his hometown, from the explorations of Joliet and Marquette in 1673 to the new wave of urban pioneers today. The city’s great industrialists, reformers, and politicians—and, indeed, the many not-so-great and downright notorious—animate this book, from Al Capone and Jane Addams to Mayor Richard J. Daley and President Barack Obama. But what distinguishes this book from the many others on the subject is its author’s uncommon ability to illuminate the lives of Chicago’s ordinary people. Raised on the city’s South Side and employed for a time in the stockyards, Pacyga gives voice to the city’s steelyard workers and kill floor operators, and maps the neighborhoods distinguished not by Louis Sullivan masterworks, but by bungalows and corner taverns.

Filled with the city’s one-of-a-kind characters and all of its defining moments, *Chicago: A Biography* is as big and boisterous as its namesake—and as ambitious as the men and women who built it.

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