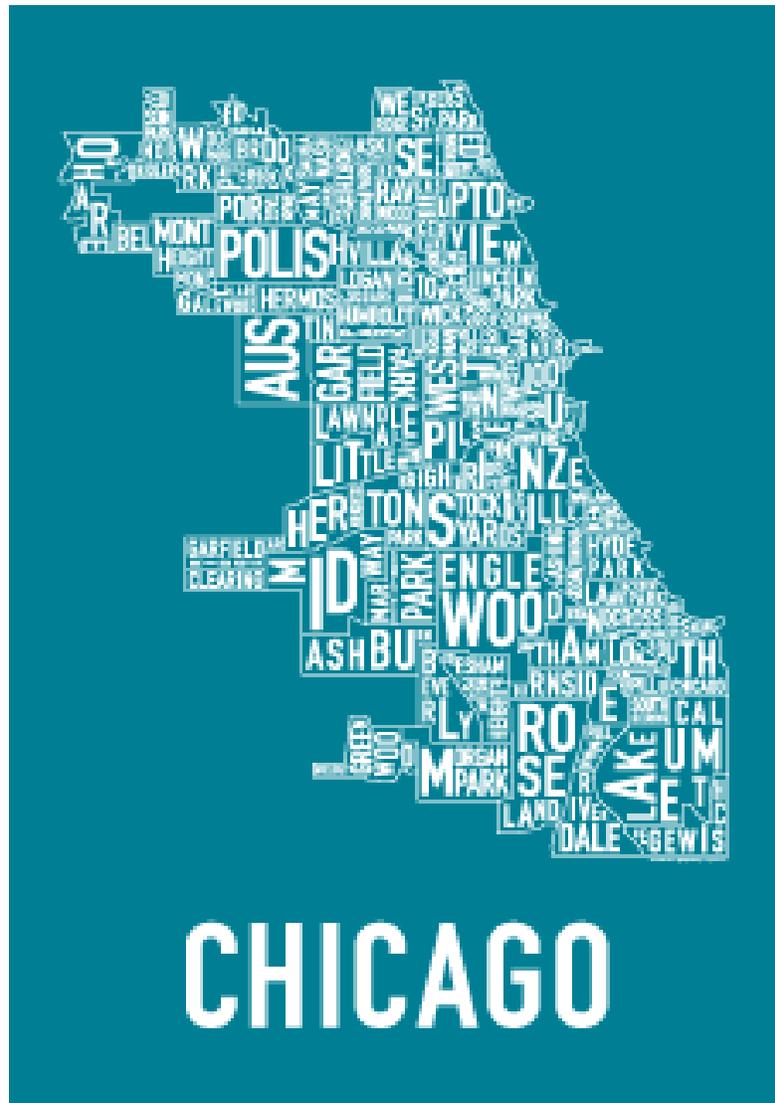


CUL-DE-SAC CULTURE WITHIN CITY LIMITS: EXPLORING URBAN/SUBURBAN BORDERS IN CHICAGO



Maisie O'Malley
University of Notre Dame
Department of American Studies
Professor Collin Meissner
Professor Dennis Doordan
April 10, 2012

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction: Introducing the Urban/Suburban Fringe.....	iv
Part I: Foundations in Urban/Suburban Character.....	1
Part II: Shifting Demographics and Active Response.....	18
Part III: Cul-de-Sac Controversies.....	34
Conclusion: The Importance of Place.....	54
Bibliography.....	59

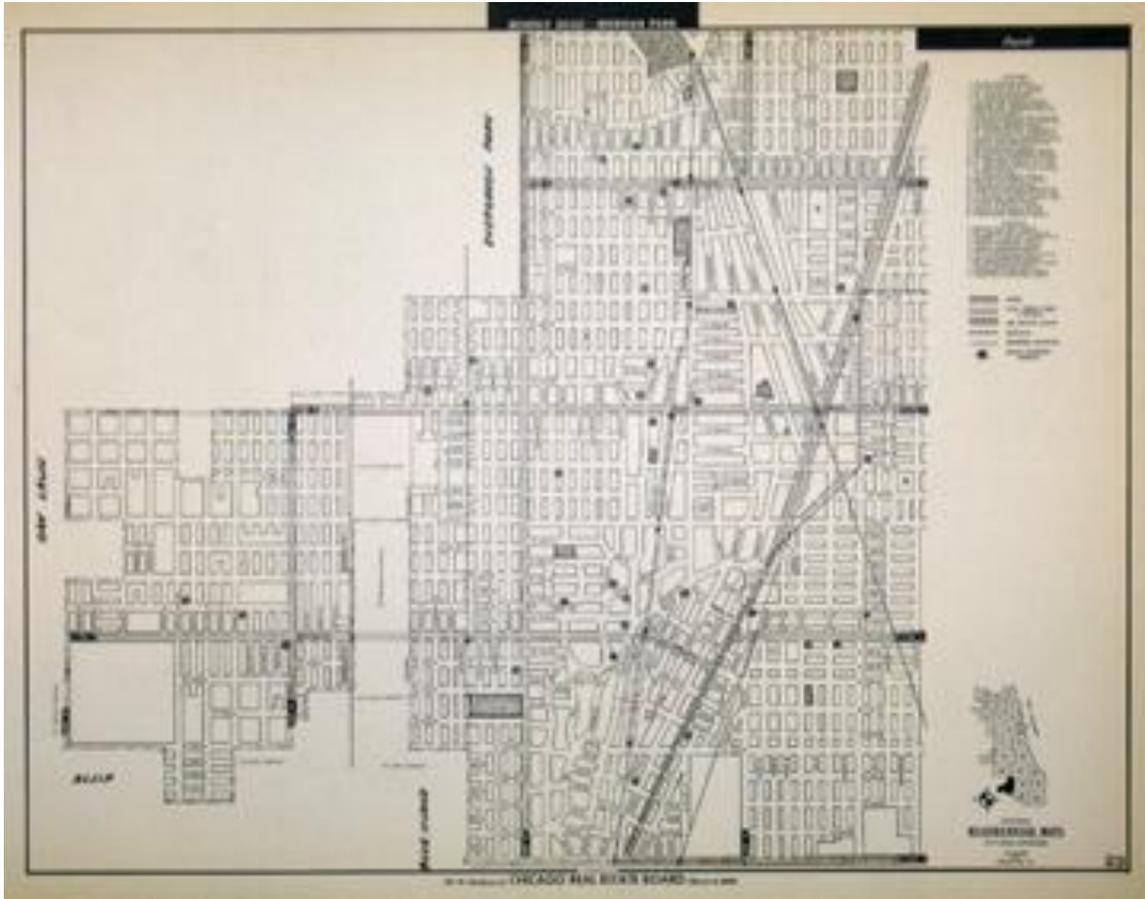
I would first like to thank the Department of American Studies at Notre Dame for challenging me to pursue my own interests. In “Introduction to American Studies” the Fall of my sophomore year, I wrote an essay about suburbs for Erika Doss that received a C. Dissuaded but determined, I continued to engage with ideas of urbanization and suburbanization inside and outside of class. I cannot fully articulate how grateful I am for the opportunities presented by the Department of American Studies.

Gratitude must also be extended to the support structure within the Department—specifically to my advisor Professor Collin Meissner, Professor Jason Ruiz, and Professor Anne Coleman, who have all left an indelible mark on the project. I would also like to thank my fellow thesis writers who have made the process tolerable—and even enjoyable at times. Further, thanks must also be attributed to the staff at Waddick’s who have been present during the majority of the writing process, and who have turned a blind eye to our consumption of their stock of oyster crackers.

Research for this project was made markedly easier due to the enthusiasm of the Ridge Historical Society and the generosity of Sue Delves. Both provided a wealth of primary sources without which the project would lack many of its strengths.

Finally, I want to thank my mom for nurturing in me an appreciation for the integrity of neighborhoods and the importance of Chicago as a city. This project is in some ways the culmination of 22 years of physical and mental exploration of Chicago’s urban and peripheral landscape, which my mom has provided guidance, support, and enthusiasm.

INTRODUCING THE URBAN/SUBURBAN FRINGE



This thesis project was born out of an annoyance with an interaction that residents of the Chicagoland area¹ are familiar with:

“Where are you from?”

“Chicago”

“Oh OK, what suburb?”

A dilemma arises when one lives within the actual city limits:

“I don’t live in a suburb; I live in the city”

“No, but really, what suburb?”

I live in Chicago—my neighborhood, Morgan Park, comprises half of the greater area referred to as Beverly/Morgan Park, and though it lies furthest southwest from the city center my address still reads Chicago, Illinois. Chicago, as a municipal entity, is comprised of 77 distinct residential areas.² Chicagoland, as an abstract regional identity, incorporates disparate suburban communities and blurs the borders between urban and suburban. As such, suburban residents are able to present themselves as city dwellers though they may be inhabitants of a subdivision an hour outside the city. These lost distinctions effectively mask the importance of Chicago’s urban neighborhoods. More importantly, the general inclusivity of the notion of Chicagoland misrepresents suburbia’s inherent exclusivity. Ironically, residents of suburban communities who present themselves as Chicagoans neglect the fact that their suburb was probably resistant to an

¹ The term “Chicagoland ” refers to the greater metropolitan area that envelops a geographic space of over 4,400 square miles with a population that exceeds 9.5 million people. Chicagoland’s boundaries are unclear, but expand past the actual city limits to include areas as dissimilar socioeconomically, geographically, and architecturally as Riverside and Robbins. These disparate communities, though separated on numerous levels, share a common bond—inclusion into the greater fabric of the city of Chicago. Residents of such suburban municipalities often readily offer that they live in Chicago, yet compared to the typically urban center these communities are decidedly and definitely suburban.

² Ann Durkin Keating, *Chicago Neighborhoods and Suburbs: A Historical Guide* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008). These “Community Areas” are an important aspect of Chicago and will garner further explanation later in the introduction.

urban annexation for the sole reason of preserving its unique suburban identity and separating its version of the American Dream from Chicago's urban conceptualization.

Whenever presented with the city-suburb conundrum, I do my best to calmly explain that, No, I don't live in a suburb, and Yes, there are people from Chicago who actually live in the city. Yet, my stance in this argument recently shifted. Through engaging with various books related to urban planning, namely Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett's *Plan of Chicago*, Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, and *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, I have come to realize that Beverly/Morgan Park cannot be categorized as distinctly urban. Further research elucidated the notion that there existed in Beverly/Morgan Park an intersection of suburban and urban characteristics that is a product of the community's efforts to shape its own version of suburbia on the urban fringe.



Map of Beverly/Morgan Park

Beverly/Morgan Park is the furthest southwest neighborhood in the city of Chicago, about twelve miles south of the Loop. The area is bordered by 87th street to the north and 119th to the south, and Vincennes to the east and California to the west. The neighborhood is easily defined as Beverly/Morgan Park, but the border street of 107th demarcates these two areas. As of 2000, Beverly housed 21,992 residents, 64.7% of whom were White, and 32% of

whom were African-American.³ In contrast, Morgan Park retained 25,226 residents, 30.9% white and 67% African-American. The neighborhood's current demographics belie its history as a contested space for upwardly mobile African American families, who fought upper-middle class Whites for the right to live in their community.

Chicago, as often noted, is a city of neighborhoods. The term "neighborhood" presents an amicable characterization of Chicago, yet one does not have to look too far to realize that these nominal distinctions blur the over-complicated mess of racial, ethnic, and class-based identities that compose each individual neighborhood. Surely, defining one or many neighborhoods can be based on an understanding of natural or manmade boundaries, institutions, or police districts, but the importance of these somewhat static factors are also subject to more malleable social networks, population demographics, and resident perceptions.

Though a plethora of urban planners and sociologists have studied and developed definitions of neighborhoods from these characteristics,⁴ it is only fitting in this project that neighborhoods are analyzed through the lens of the University of Chicago's Social Science Research Committee's concept of "Community Areas." In the 1920s, sociologists at the University of Chicago who analyzed demographic data on Chicago's regions came up with 75 distinct Community Areas based on the criteria of "(1) the settlement, growth, and history of the area; (2) local identification with the area; (3) the local trade area; (4) membership in local institutions; and (5) natural and manmade barriers (e.g. the Chicago River, railroad lines, local transportation routes, and parks and

³ Ellen Skerrett, "Beverly and Morgan Park," *The Encyclopedia of Chicago Online* The Chicago History Museum <encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org>

⁴ Jacobs, Burnham, CNU...

boulevards)”⁵ The researchers’ distinctions are by no means indicative of entire individual neighborhoods, as a variety of sub-areas often comprise one Community Area⁶ Compilers of data on Chicago acknowledge the complex nature of neighborhoods as “extremely susceptible to individual interpretation and variation,” but argue that the concept of the Community Areas has led to widespread recognition of a familiar and oft-used set of study boundaries. The boundaries have become the common criteria from which municipal records, analyses, and programs are based. Further, the original researchers’ collaboration with the United States Bureau of the Census resulted in a direct correlation between Community Area and federal census tract that has allowed for an abundance of compiled data on each Area. Also, the historical usage of Community Areas dating back to the 1920s provides a consistency of analysis over a great span of time.

Though neighborhood boundaries may waver, grow, or disappear, the Community Area boundaries represent an effort to maintain a “constant set of sub-areas in the city within which changes in the social, economic and residential structure may be monitored and analyzed.” It is for this reason that Beverly/Morgan Park is analyzed in this project as a Community Area defined by the University of Chicago researchers within the context of the larger metropolis.

Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett’s *Plan of Chicago*, as well as other seminal planning texts, are essential to understand the city’s tradition of planning. Chicago is a

⁵ “Chicago Comprehensive Neighborhood Needs Analysis,” compiled by Melaniphy & Associates, published by the City of Chicago, 1982. Accessed through the Municipal Records Department, Harold Washington Library Center, Chicago.

⁶ For example, the Beverly Community Area from 87th to 95th streets includes a variety of sub-areas, like North Beverly and West Beverly, in which residents align themselves by parish boundaries, like St. John Fisher in West Beverly and Christ the King in North Beverly.

city defined by its dense commercial center, gridded street pattern, public green spaces, and residential neighborhoods.⁷ Burnham and Bennett contended that the successful integration of streets, transportation systems, and open space would foster civic identity and ultimately create a successful urban landscape. Burnham's statement regarding the 1893 Columbian Exposition "Make no small plans" ignited an excitement for developing Chicago as a cultural and commercial epicenter in the early 20th century.⁸ Though the planners' vision is presented as a seamless masterpiece, it neglects residential neighborhoods and instead applies itself to developing the city center. This oversight does not negate the *Plan of Chicago*'s usefulness as a seminal text of urban planning, as the *Plan* will provide a general outline of streets' importance in fostering accessibility. The 1909 publication is also integral to understanding the excitement for regional expansion during the time of Beverly/Morgan Park's incorporation into the Chicago municipality.

While the *Plan* offers a general understanding of the metropolitan skeleton, Jane Jacobs provides intimate snapshots of the intricacies of urban life in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. These individual examples are not without overarching importance, though, as they are most often related to urban predicaments unaddressed by regional planners like Burnham and Bennett. Specifically, her analysis of the uses of streets will provide a tangible background for Morgan Park residents' response to street and sidewalk development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Suburbanization is often categorized into two distinct time periods, namely pre- and post-automobile developments. In general, pre-automobile suburbanization is

⁷ Aric Lasher and R. Samuel Roche, *Plans of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 2.

⁸ Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett, *Plan of Chicago* (Chicago: Commercial Club of Chicago, 1909)

characterized by proximity to railroads while post-automobile suburbanization is defined by dependence on the automobile. The Congress for the New Urbanism is a group of



Residential development characteristic of suburban sprawl—similar houses situated on cul-de-sacs.

urban planners and architects that are actively responding to the effects of post-automobile suburban sprawl by reasserting the positive elements of urban development. *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* is a pointed account of

suburbanization's negative effects in America and will be used as a comparative text.⁹

This project will provide examples of the Beverly/Morgan Park community reacting to its surrounding environment through neighborhood planning, and will analyze these reactions as the way in which the community mediated the pressures of white flight and suburban sprawl. I will use the three aforementioned texts, and others, to formalize Beverly/Morgan Park as a suburban enclave within an urban setting. Three distinct time periods in the neighborhood's history will be focused on because of their importance in shaping the community's identity. Part I will provide a narrative of Beverly/Morgan Park's origins in the late nineteenth century. I will present the developing neighborhood as both a facet of Chicago's regional expansion along the railroad lines, as well as a unique community attempting to preserve its established identity when faced with annexation by Chicago. Part II offers a more politicized view of Chicago's residential and racial landscape. In the late 1960s and 1970s, shifting racial demographics in

⁹ Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, eds., *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000)

Chicago's urban center presented a threat to the essentially all-White Beverly/Morgan Park neighborhood. The community responded by attempting to redefine and reassert its identity, similar to the way it responded in the late nineteenth century. Part III focuses on the most recent example of controversial community planning with the imposition of cul-de-sacs in North Beverly in the 1990s. I will argue that the community's actions in this case were founded in the trends exhibited in the previous two instances, though redefining the traditional street grid was not appropriate in Chicago's modern racial landscape.

More importantly, I will use my examination of Beverly/Morgan Park in order to formulate an argument about the importance of urban neighborhoods in the American Landscape. Literature on suburbia often invokes conceptualizations of the American Dream, but little is devoted to urban conceptualizations. Suburbia, as the typified American Landscape, is built on the foundation of Individualism and Exceptionalism. Individuality is the overwhelming theme of the American Dream, supported by the integral aspects of homeownership, automobile use, and exclusivity. Judging by the rampant expansion of suburban sprawl on the foundations of single-family homes and dependence on the automobile, everyone is attaining the American Dream. Yet, something about the unremarkable characteristics of suburbia is offensive to the notions of America and of dreams. Shouldn't Americans be pulling themselves up from their bootstraps with the dream of living in something a bit more aesthetically pleasing than a cookie-cutter house with an attached garage in a planned subdivision named after the forest it replaced? And, if they are able to live somewhere else than a cul-de-sac, how do

they protect such a place from the antagonizing forces of White Flight, sprawl, and blight?

Whereas white flight used to resonate as a death sentence for the urban neighborhood, income segregation has become the new threat to successful communities. Recent studies have found that the increasing income gap is segregating many metropolitan areas by income.¹⁰ As the economy sours, those with means are increasingly distancing themselves from those without. This trend represents an important opportunity for affected neighborhoods that will be forced to assert or redefine their identities. Demographic shifts show that both the wealthy and the poor are on the move, and as such they will be faced with transforming ideas of what their communities should look like. In America's changing residential landscape, it is intrinsically important that citizens understand the value of neighborhood space and community identity so they can formulate successful communities instead of blindly accepting sprawl.

¹⁰ "US2010," a study released by the Russell Sage Foundation and Brown University, conducted by Stanford University, as chronicled in Sabrina Tavernise's article, "Middle-Class Areas Shrink as Income Gap Grows, New Report Finds," in *The New York Times*, 16 November 2011.