Track Changes

The Red Line looks ahead to shorter travel times—and a proposed extension.
A sense of closure

By Brian Ng

Ahjoomah’s Apron, which opened this past March, boldly declares itself to be “the only authentic Korean restaurant” in Chinatown. When a friend and I visited Ahjoomah’s Apron on a recent Saturday night, we hoped to test the strength of this claim.

I should note that I am not exactly an expert on Korean cuisine. My personal impressions of Korean culture have come mostly from childhood traumas: choking on ginseng soup at five, burning my dry tongue on savory barbecue meat at nine, and, at seventeen, finding my classroom walls plastered with posters of the South Korean girl group SNSD as part of a senior prank. Ahjoomah’s, thankfully, did not remind me of any of these previous painful experiences; though there was that familiar K-pop beat playing hazily on the speakers when we entered.

The restaurant’s lively chatter, a strange amalgam of English, Korean, and Mandarin, served as evidence of a cosmopolitan clientele. The décor, while modern, is rather minimalist, with an emphasis on variable rectangular patterns: the angled shelf-decoration greeting the entrance, the cool gray composite-wood tables, and the long communal benches that uncomfortably lacked backrests. On the walls, murals with tantalizing shots of menu items and descriptions helpfully informed us that “Bibim Bop is served on many airlines connecting to South Korea.” All in all, the atmosphere was fresh, modern, and open—if not without some incongruous quirks.

In addition to banchan, the traditional Korean side dishes, we had a haemul pajun—a Korean seafood pancake—as an appetizer, which came in around fifteen minutes. While the pancake is technically easy to cook—flour, eggs, seafood: presto—rarely, in my experience, is it of the correct consistency. While the pancake was warm and savory, and the “soy-based house sauce” gave it some pleasant salt and spice, it was also soggy and stuck to our teeth—perhaps due to an abundance of flour. The six plates of banchan, meanwhile, had a raw vegetable taste that highlighted their freshness but verged on the disagreementable.

The first main course, dolsoot bibim bop—stone-pot mixed rice—soon arrived. Scattered sesame seeds tastefully adorned the beef, egg, and vegetables, which, in turn covered the rice in the black stone bowl. With much anticipation, I poked the yolk of the fried egg to mix it with the rice underneath, only to discover that it had mostly hardened. The small helping of beef arrived a little thinly cut, but was exceptionally tender and flavorful.

The second main course, stir-fried pork belly and kimchi, came next. The finely textured meat had just the right fat content, and was fried in a savory sauce that went excellently with rice. However, we were served only a small helping of the rice—in a wide, lean bowl. This small serving, along with the fact that the amount of thin-cut pork was far surpassed by the kimchi, led us to suspect that we would have had to order more food had we chosen a less filling appetizer. Overall, the service was responsive, courteous, and polite. The waitresses graciously replenished our water and banchan, and inquired as to our level of satisfaction at regular intervals. The two pieces of Japanese candy that came with the bill were a nice additional touch.

On the heels of the largest bankruptcy in history of mass media back in 2000, the insipid paper peddlers over at Tribune Co. tried numerous tactics to keep their staid corporate America decades ago.

Korea Comes to Chinatown

By Brian Ng

Chinatown

food & drink
"AMERICA—A BEAUTIFUL ITALIAN WORD," SAID THE MAN BEHIND THE PODIUM AT THE Old Neighborhood Italian American Club's Memorial Day ceremony. "That's right," said an old man standing in front of me in the audience, nudging his neighbor. Elsewhere in the crowd, grey heads nodded up and down. "Our parents and grandparents, they came to this country with fear in their heads and hope in their hearts," the speaker continued. "They built this for us.

ONIA C is situated on Shields between 29th and 30th, in what was once considered Armor Square. Now it is more commonly identified as the eastern edge of Bridgeport. Bridgeport has a reputation as one of Chicago's great Irish American neighborhoods, and, inextricably, as one of Chicago's great seats of political power. This is deserved—Bridgeport ruled the city with four successive mayors from 1933 to 1979. Throw in the younger Mayor Daley, and a Bridgeport native has had an office on the fifth floor of city hall for sixty-eight years of the city's 176-year history.

Yet this mythical Irish hegemony masks a lot of the real character of the neighborhood. ONIA C anchors a strong Italian American community, one that has maintained a steady presence in the neighborhood for years. North of 35th Street, many two-flats and bungalows proudly display Italian flags.

"Could you tell me a bit about Bridgeport?" I asked one of the grey heads at the ceremony. He wore a drab track jacket over pressed slacks, which seemed to pass as a uniform among the audience members.

"This isn't Bridgeport, this is Armor Square." He gave me an impatient look. "Can you tell me about Armor Square?" I tried.

"It's not an Italian club, it's the neighborhood club. There's a mixture of people. We have Croatians and Irish and Chinese. It's the neighborhood club."

How has the neighborhood changed?" I followed up. "Very little," he said, walking away into a group of four similar old-timers, shaking hands in greeting.

"It's a close-knit neighborhood. A lot of people think we are rude or racist, but really it's because we are close-knit," offered Renee. She stood around casually chatting with Chris and Brian after the ceremony. Now in their late twenties, the trio grew away into a group of four similar old-timers, shaking hands in greeting.

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"A lot of people think we're from New York 'cause of the way we talk," said Chris. "One, two, three," Brian demonstrated, counting his fingers.

University of Chicago sociologist Gerald Suttles coined the term "ordered seg-
WE KNOW THERE WILL BE SOME GLITCHES ALONG THE WAY,” Forrest Claypool, CTA president, said of the South Side Red Line closures in a recent press conference. The five-month, $425 million project has shut down nine Red Line stations, from 95th Street to Chinatown, with the promise of improving commute times by up to twenty minutes round-trip. The Red Line is often called “the lifeblood of the South Side,” and the decision to shut down the entire Dan Ryan branch until a planned reopening on October 19 has been unpopular among many riders.

For the thousands of inconvenienced commuters, the CTA is spending $13 million of the total cost on alternative transportation. Free shuttles lead from every Red Line stop south of Garfield to the Green Line’s Garfield station, and the western fork of the Green Line, which terminates at the 63rd and Ashland station, is instead running Red Line trains. Trains on both the Green and new “Red” Lines are running more frequently, and hundreds of temporary bus drivers have been hired to bring fifty percent more buses to popular South Side routes. The CTA anticipates hiring 400 temporary drivers on as permanent employees after construction ends in October.

As the changes were implemented this past week, the commute north did not appear too disrupted. At the 95th Street station on Friday, there were still many confused riders, but CTA staff were on hand to make sure everything ran smoothly, directing people to the correct buses.

Maurice Cade, who regularly commutes to 87th Street in the evening, said the “shuttle system is actually working pretty good.” He’s even getting to his job earlier than he used to. “At first I was pretty skeptical about the shuttles, ‘cause I wasn’t sure how they were gonna run it, but it’s actually turning out that I’m saving time,” he said. It’s saving him money, too—about twenty dollars a month—since he hasn’t had to pay for the shuttles or trains at the Garfield station. In fact, most people we talked to agreed that their commutes were now faster; only one woman said her commute had increased by more than ten minutes.

Overcrowded buses and train station platforms, however, were definitely an issue, especially on the morning commute from 95th Street to Garfield. One woman, who asked not to be named, said that the stations were “more crowded than they should be,” and that the crowding alone made the shutdown not worth it. Yet the northbound trains came swiftly to the Garfield station, and the clogged platform would empty just in time to swallow the next round of commuters.

One member of the newly deployed CTA personnel told me it can get very busy around the rush periods at Garfield and the 95th Street station, where 9,000 people usually jump from buses to the rail each day, but that the crowding is nothing the shuttles and the extra drivers can’t handle. “I thought it was gonna be more complicated than it is,” he said, but he thought that the amount of extra staff the CTA had placed at the stations and bus stops was really making a difference. He told me he and his colleagues were intent on providing a “personal touch,” answering everyone’s questions as they stepped off the buses or went through the turnstiles.

At least one woman relied on the extra attention, talking to a driver for several minutes before deciding she was on the right shuttle. “Lord Jesus, this is so confusing,” she said, as she finally walked down the aisle.

Another rider called the replacement transit system “highly organized and efficient,” but she thought the decision to shut down the South Side branch for five months instead of doing weekend construction was politi-
cal—a reflection of City Hall’s dismissive attitude toward the South Side. Michael McKin, a security guard, agreed that the shutdown was a poor decision, saying, “I understand that this needed to be done, cause some of the tracks are very old, but I wish it would have been better if they would have done it during the weekends, cause it really is inconveniencing everybody, especially for people on the west South Side.”

The alternative, however, may have never been feasible. Chrissy Nichols, director of the nonprofit Metropolitan Planning Council, said that it is very difficult to do construction on a stop-by-stop basis. Laying completely new track, she told me, is a significant enough process that the city needed to be able to have the whole South Side branch closed in order to stay efficient. She called the $75 million in overall savings “a huge incentive” to do a complete service suspension, saying that the immediacy and impact of the fixes were both worth the inconvenience. (The city claims the savings will be channeled into sprucing up the existing stations.) Of the CTA, she said, “I think they’re definitely working their hardest to make sure people get to where they need to go.” Claypool has promised that the CTA will respond quickly and fine-tune the interim system as necessary.

Though there have been questions about whether the project can actually be completed by the city’s October 19 due date, Nichols was confident that the crews would come through, citing the pay incentives for an early finish, and the penalties for a late one, included in the contract between the city and the construction companies working along the rail.

Whenever the construction is completed, nearly every rider will be happy to see the upgrade done. The current tracks have been in place since the rail was first installed in 1969. Gwendolyn Rice, executive director of Developing Communities Project, a nonprofit in Roseland, said that the modernization was long overdue, and that the running times of the trains had gotten much worse even over the past few years. But she also acknowledged that concern over a late completion date was consistent with “the history of public transportation taking longer than expected” on the South Side, in reference to long delays that plagued the CTA’s Green Line overhaul in the mid-nineties. “Typically communities like ours—socially disadvantaged, low-income communities—often get short-changed for other projects further north, in other neighborhoods,” she said.

One big item on DCP’s agenda is extending the Red Line south, into the Greater Roseland area, to 130th and Cottage Grove. This project is currently estimated to cost around $1.4 billion, and could cut commute times from 130th to downtown by twenty minutes.

A report from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the government organization tasked with land use and transportation planning in northeastern Illinois, said that an extension would “generate a catalytic economic impact” in the area, bringing fifty-five percent more jobs within an hour’s commute. As things stand, DCP has been advocating for since 2002. The project is currently estimated to cost around $1.4 billion, and could cut commute times from 130th to downtown by twenty minutes.

For now, however, the city’s attention is focused on the issue at hand. If the Red Line truly is “the lifeblood of the South Side,” an extension could only make the community healthier. Until then, the aim is to keep things moving without this lifeblood in place. Though many feel the CTA has demanded a lot from riders for the duration of the construction, South Siders at least seem to be prepared. “Most folks in this community just roll with the punches,” said one woman. “As long as we get to work we don’t care.”

Additional Reporting by Sharon Lurye.

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IT'S A DANGEROUS BUSINESS, GOING OUT YOUR DOOR. CHICAGO'S CHAPTER OF the Guardian Angels, however, is undeterred by the prospect of such danger. With Miguel “3rdRail” Fuentes at the helm, the Guardian Angels regularly and intentionally encounter all the violence, injuries, and admiring citizens that Chicago's streets can throw at them. As Fuentes says, asked if the job puts him and the Angels in real danger, “Yeah. Of course.” But in his words, because of the Angels, “[the criminals] will think twice.”

The Angels patrol the city as often as possible, constantly trying to widen their anti-criminal reach. As Fuentes says, the group's aim is “to deter crime.” The CTA provides a natural opportunity to protect many people from across the city, as well as an opportunity to easily traverse and patrol some of the city's roughest areas.

It was no accident that the Guardian Angels were on the Green Line the night that they almost identified a rapist. Fuentes had chosen the Roosevelt Red Line stop as a base for that night. There were four Angels in the group: “3rdRail” Fuentes, the patrol's stocky Hispanic leader; Richard, a lanky, gaunt, African-American newbie; and Luis and Javier, two young Hispanic men.

Richard, Luis, and Javier were assigned to “float” around the train, which, as Fuentes explained, means that they travel from car to car as the train moves, checking for suspicious activity. As Fuentes monitored the car, Luis floated by and stopped. He and Fuentes quietly conferred. Fuentes began to stare intently at his Android smartphone, on which he carries hundreds of wanted posters. Glancing at an overweight African-American passenger behind him, he began scrolling through the photos before stopping. He and Luis made eye contact, and Fuentes surreptitiously snapped a photo of the passenger.

Although they say that no man is an island, the passenger could surely have made for a large atoll. Weighing in at over 300 pounds (part of the wanted poster description), clutches of fat bulged out of tears in his jeans, while his shirt, maculated in sweat, was stretched to the seams. He was fast asleep, blissfully unaware of his surroundings like a character on a "Law and Order: SVU" rendition of the Princess and the Pea.

The man that Fuentes had in mind was a suspected of committing a rape in broad daylight near the Red Line. In his Little Village Latino accent, Fuentes said, “Look. He matches the weight, he’s got the same face, facial hair, little hair. I think it looks like him.” Luis stayed in the car with us while Richard and Javier, who had both been quietly briefed on the situation, continued to float throughout the train.

The victim's parents had contacted Fuentes roughly a week before to ask for help. Fuentes had already made and distributed posters asking for information about the case across the city, and he had the parents' cell phone numbers on hand. Luis, younger and more technologically adept, commandeered Fuentes' phone and texted the picture to the victim's parents.

Then they waited. As long as the suspect slept, the Angels stood, while the Green Line ran through some of Chicago's roughest neighborhoods. The Angels, if they see a known criminal or suspect, will drop all other plans and trail that person until he reaches home. The suspect snored as the train thinned out. The victim's parents responded to Luis, saying that they had forwarded the message to their daughter. If she gave a negative ID, the Angels could move on, but if she gave a positive ID, they would have to spring into action.

The train hit Roosevelt around midnight. Just as the intercom drew our attention to the closing of the doors, the suspect jolted into consciousness. He turned to Miguel, who was holding the door open. Miguel opened the door for him. Fuentes had already made and distributed posters asking for information about the case across the city, and he had the parents' cell phone numbers on hand. Luis, younger and more technologically adept, commandeered Fuentes' phone and texted the picture to the victim's parents.

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The train hit Roosevelt around midnight. Just as the intercom drew our attention to the closing of the doors, the suspect jolted into consciousness. He jumped up with far more agility than his BMI would suggest, and made for the door. In a moment of profoundly ironic uncertainty, he turned to Miguel, who was holding the door open.

“Yeah, man, it is.”

The suspect tumbled off the train. Fuentes forced the doors open as the intercom
ding-donged in opposition. Signaling down the cars to one another, the Angels emerged from the train like bees zooming out of a honeycomb.

The suspect was moving slowly and, more importantly, inattentively. In spite of the Angels’ numbers and gaudiness—four men dressed in loud red berets and poofy white hoodies—the man failed to notice that he was under close pursuit.

On the platform, Fuentes muttered directions to the Angels. They were to pursue and, if the victim responded with a positive ID, call the police while attempting to keep the suspect in the same place.

The man walked on, leaving only him and the Angels on the deserted street. Luis, after paroxysmally checking his phone, finally received a text from the victim’s parents: negative. He told Fuentes, who signaled to the other Angels to break off pursuit and regroup at Roosevelt. In spite of the tension, and the confidence with which Fuentes pursued the lead, he had refrained from calling the police. He would have been betting the group’s reputation: “The cops might get mad at us, CTA might get mad at us for holding up the train, that guy would probably get mad at us too!” Given that Fuentes acted entirely on suspicion, ringing the police could have had dire consequences, both for the group and for the man. The Angels clearly violated his privacy, based entirely on a haphazard glance and a blurry cell phone picture. Fuentes, if troubled, displayed no such concerns while debriefing the rest of the group back at Roosevelt. He concluded, after a theatrical appraisal of what had happened: “Too bad it wasn’t him. We need to get this guy off the street.”

While acting out of the best of intentions, the Angels put themselves in danger of this kind on a regular basis. They go out prepared to make citizens’ arrests, and stoically follow possibly violent criminals across empty city streets in the name of safety. But noble motives do not necessarily translate to realities on the ground. As Sergeant Antoinette Ursitti of the Chicago Police Department said of the Guardian Angels, “We never encourage anyone to take any enforcement action risking their own personal safety.”

Such risks have taken their toll: Since the Guardian Angels’ inception in 1979, six have been killed, and dozens have been seriously injured. Fuentes himself, along with three other Angels, was wounded last year. During a patrol on the Red Line, he and his Angel squadron came across a man being pistol-whipped. They tried to intervene, but were rebuffed by the blade of a knife—an accomplice stabbed Fuentes and the other

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Angels, leaving them to bleed on the platform as the perpetrators escaped.

These attempts at arrest can make the Guardian Angels a nuisance for the police. The Red Line intervention quadrupled the incident’s victim count. However, these gory and action-packed events break the norm. Numerous videos on YouTube show Fuentes and other Angels detaining violent offenders while suffering no injury. However, most of these videos follow the Guardian Angels’ dictum found in their patrol manual: “Guardian Angels will only make an arrest when it is safe to do so. An arrest will not be made if: The perp produces a gun.” The events on the Red Line thus directly contravened Guardian Angels protocol. Fuentes, however, remains undeterred: “Yeah, I’ve been shot at, hit, stabbed…being a Guardian Angel is tough.”

Nonetheless, the danger that the Angels put themselves in not only affects the local police department, but also exposes a gap in the group’s avowed volunteerism. No member, from Luis to the group’s founder, Curtis Sliwa, receives compensation, nor do they expect to. As a nonprofit organization, the Angels are funded almost entirely
by donations, with some gathered from the public and some gleaned from an annual fundraiser gala held in New York. None of the fundraised money goes to injured Angels—as Sliva said during a phone interview, “there’s no benefit packages.”

According to available tax records, however, the organization has channeled its spending away from the volunteers on which it relies. In 2011, the Guardian Angels reported revenue of $579,548, with $712,374 in expenditures, leaving them $132,826 in the red. $423,247 was allotted toward “community safety.” However, the Chicago Angels are left with little to no financial support in their activities. Members purchase their own gear. Wounded Angels like Fuentes must raise their own funds to cover medical expenses.

Sliva, who speaks with a Brooklyn accent thick enough to make Joe Pesci sound like William F. Buckley, says of the effect of injuries over time: “[Healthcare] really hasn’t cost people that much.”

While the footsoldiers of Guardian Angels volunteer and expect no payment, a significant amount of the $423,247 in expenditures goes toward one board member’s salary. Although Sliva does claim that “the board members are all volunteer,” the organization’s chief operating officer at the time, Mary Sliva, Curtis Sliva’s ex-wife, received $147,115 in compensation.

As to Ms. Sliva’s payment, Mr. Sliva claimed that she had been offered a position at another firm. The Angels on the board preferred to reject voluntarism in favor of Sliva-ism, and thus offered her the $147,115 paycheck. Mr. Sliva receives no compensation, although he does hold down an additional job as a radio host.

Yet beneath the shadow of possible institutional injustice, the Chicago Guardian Angels’ commitment to the community shines all the stronger. Last year, for example, the Angels led a self-defense workshop at Harper High School in Englewood at the request of 15th Ward Alderman Toni Foulkes. The seminar was targeted at vulnerable populations in a high-risk area—mostly women and the elderly.

Foulkes, who speaks with the kindly timbre of a grandmother, called on the Guardian Angels after a sexual assault on a young girl on her way to school. At around the same time, adjacent Chicago Lawn was shaken by multiple sexual assaults. The incidents provoked widespread outrage, resulting in a march through the neighborhood. Foulkes, however, wanted her constituents to gain practical knowledge of how to defend themselves against the predator and depraved. She called on the Guardian Angels for help, and they happily obliged.

The brand of “self-defense” taught in the workshop was distinctly Angelic in nature—a combination of street smarts and martial arts. Fuentes explained how to defend yourself with a credit card: “You grip the corner of the [credit card], and scratch…Not only will the card leave a mark on the individual that the police can look for, but you’ll also get DNA on the credit card.” Other tactics included basic hits and kicks, as well as common sense tips on avoiding risky situations.

In spite of neither promise nor potential of payment, the Angels managed the whole workshop, from PR operations to cleanup. Foulkes said, “For someone to come out and not ask you for a quarter, and just do good, it’s really heartwarming.” Other community organizations in the area are following the grassroots model that the Guardian Angels employ. After reports of sexual assaults on schoolchildren, the Angels often escort kids on their way to school. Such measures can only be preventive, but Foulkes plans on replicating the model in a more permanent way for her ward. This “Porch Patrol” would focus on getting members of the community to stand out on their porches as children walk to school, incorporating Fuentes’ mantra of “deter” into the area’s everyday life.

The Guardian Angels go out their doors every day, inviting dangerous business so that citizens don’t have to. In spite of the protests of the police, and what most would consider common sense, the Angels commit to their job. While financial irregularities seem to plague the organization’s upper echelons, a commitment to service endures in the organization’s grassroots. Each member of the organization wears the same logo: an eyeball inside of a winged shield perched atop a carpet of fluffy clouds. On one of the last Red Line trains to run on the South Side before the closure, Fuentes explained the Guardian Angels logo to me. “Everyone has eyes. The shield around [the eye] represents strength, the wings around the shield incorporates elevation, hence we look over everybody, we’re the Guardian Angels, we’re looking over you.”
Conference of curiosity

The silica-fusing firestorm that results from a ten-megaton nuclear missile began the second annual Conference of Curiosity with a bang. Hosted in the Glessner House’s refinished stables and curated by Jeff Wagg, the Conference found a comfortable niche between a TEDx convention, a PBS documentary, and a “Ripley's Believe It Or Not”. Though we had started late and without much preparatory fanfare, the audience was nevertheless transfixed by Lt. Col. Hal Bidlack’s accounts of his key-turning experiences in the Strategic Air Command. Brandishing a red binder, he said, “This is the book you open when you want to end the world,” and passed it down into the audience. It was mercifully empty.

His presentation belonged to a day-long docket of tangentially-related learning exercises, as presenters convened to speak on topics as disparate as homicidal miniatures and homopolar motors. Author Aubrey Henretty briefed us on effective deception. Jairus Durnett conducted a reader’s theater for the Battle of Cannae and the three Punic Wars, complete with hammy speech-making, plumed helmets, and plastic gladii. I discovered there’s a healthy underground trade for notoriously unobtainable musk-flavored candies in the United States, from Australia, where the market’s more firmly entrenched. I also discovered that they’re pretty delicious.

Wagg believes in curiosity’s restorative and reconciliatory powers. “It’s pretty difficult to be depressed and curious, or hateful and curious,” he said. “I’d like people to realize that the world is still an interesting place.” He hopes to defeat the nightly news, with its shootings, its crashes, and its brutally Hobbesian overtones. To that end, he’s led tours and trips to the Galapagos, Greece, and Israel, but the conference is a new tactic for dissolving weary jadedness and half-hip, all-acid sarcasm. Before lunchtime, he’d established a robust, extra-academic space for friendly education, his speakers all treating their varied topics in compellingly simple terms.

For all its latent nerdiness, the conference developed an impressively thorough discourse on wonder and amazement. What are the moral harms behind mentalism and mysticism? Why can’t theatrical magic win improv’s critical legitimacy and Second City’s coolness? What is a puzzle’s inherent appeal? Magician Denis Watkins said that his job was to “ignite the imagination,” and—in the end—the conference had that exact effect. It anticipated the Lt. Col.’s burningly nuclear opening, and ultimately stoked the mind’s inquisitive joy. (Stephen Urchick)
Chicago on the Defensive
Thomas Dyja’s “The Third Coast”

By Olivia Dorow Hovland

IN THE DAYS WHEN PLANES HAD TO STOP AND REFUEL WHEN FLYING COAST TO

coast, Chicago sat at the crossroads of America: it’s now a dot in the landscape as

transcontinental planes fly overhead. But when flipping through the annals of

America’s twentieth-century history, it’s hard to go far without registering the signif-

icance of this sprawling Midwestern metropolis. Shifting the glitz and glamour of its

coastal counterparts, Chicago was home to the development of “regular” or standard-

ized American culture. It was the stumping ground of people like Ludwig Mies van der

Rohe, whose architectural innovations changed the face of American cities, and Ray

Kroc, whose global fast food franchise revolutionized the way our country views meals.

More recently, Chicago has suffered from the stain of growing crime rates, drastic seg-

regation, and political corruption. Its growth has leveled off and its influence has been

tempered.

At the end of April, the New York Times published a review of three books aimed

at analyzing Chicago’s history and culture: “You Were Never in Chicago” by Neil

Steinberg, “Golden” by Jeff Coen and John Chase, and “The Third Coast” by Thomas

Dyja. The review was written by Rachel Shteir, a DePaul University professor who

moved to Chicago from New York thirteen years ago to study at the University of

Chicago.

Her review essentially accuses Chicago of having unjustified “swagger” and

describes the city as likely to go the way of Detroit. Her attacks address the political

corruption, murder rates, economic issues, and segregation. She uses a condescend-

ing and critical tone when discussing “You Were Never in Chicago” and “Golden.”

In her mind, both fail in their aims due to pitching “even more indulgently into plati-

tudes” and a “tone of weary resignation,” respectively. Labeling these books as too

high in their praise and conversely not animated enough, Shteir presents “The Third

Coast” as being just right.

Shteir’s preference for “The Third Coast” could be coincidental, but it is also possible to draw a coastal con-

clusion, as Shteir is a New York native and Dyja is cur-

rently a New York resident himself. It is as if Shteir couldn’t trust native Chicagoans to expound on their own city

of residence and had to turn to a New Yorker as a higher

authority. This fact, combined with her harsh attacks on

the “Second City,” has sparked many vehement reactions

to her review among Chicagoans.

Passionate advocates have turned to Twitter, express-

ing their conviction that Shteir should either learn to

appreciate Chicago or move away. As Bill Savage noted

in Crain’s Chicago Business, “The reaction against Ms.

Shteir’s review is not because she didn’t like some Chicago

books, but because she doesn’t like Chicago. And because

her dislike seems to grow from ignorance.” Dyja’s book

seeks to remedy this type of ignorance in a moderated,

realistic fashion. His carefully researched book backs up

Savage’s statement that “there’s a subtext to this kind of
civic criticism, that if you love New York, Chicago can’t

measure up. And if you love Chicago, you just don’t know

any better. Nonsense.” Chicago has its own rich and tan-
gled history, impressive in its messiness.

In “The Third Coast,” Dyja begins with an account of

how the social and technological development that set-

ded the nation during the mid-twentieth century was physi-

cally represented in Chicago by the modern glass and steel

architecture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. His buildings

pushed the city forward technologically while also pro-

moting its burgeoning segregation. Dyja describes how

the Mecca, a tenement building in Bronzeville, was

bought by the Illinois Institute of Technology in the hope

that—with enough managerial neglect—its African-

American residents would vacate and the university would finally be able to raze the

building to make way for a new Mies van der Rohe–designed campus.

Dyja also addresses the growth of consumerist America as promoted by Ray Kroc

and Hugh Hefner, the Chicago-based innovators who, respectively, founded McDonald’s

and Playboy. Dyja describes their homogenizing endeavors as being in line with the

Chicago ideal of “regular,” as opposed to coastal pursuits of flash and fame. McDonald’s

was the hallmark of smart business at the time. “The company that today for many epit-

omizes mindless conformity was conceived as a profoundly American innovation—a

mammoth corporation built out of every man’s hunger to be his own man,” he writes.

Kroc and Hefner each worked to make their respective commodities, food and sex, nor-

malized, efficient, and socially “regular.” The corporatization of America began in

Chicago.

The UofC doesn’t escape Dyja’s critical eye, as he analyzes its academic innovations

as enacted by Robert Maynard Hutchins, a prominent president of the university and a

man who disliked Chicago as much as Chicago disliked him. Hutchins spearheaded the

Great Books initiative, which made education a commodity, a process in line with Kroc

and Hefner’s own goals. Under his supervision, authors like Plato, Marx, and Melville

were brought together in a fifty-four-volume collection that attempted to provide a

comprehensive compilation of foundational Western literature. But during the univer-

sity’s years under this drastic leader, “little about its course of study encouraged

engagement with the world.” While the UofC is located seven miles from downtown, it

is connected by a stretch of highway that allows academic travelers to circumvent the

poorer neighborhoods in between. While later presidents like Lawrence Kimpトン

attempted to focus “the university’s full attention on the condition of Hyde Park,” Dyja

expresses concern over the university’s drastic isolation: “the university and in partic-

ular the College, beaming with intellectual energy, removed themselves from the surrounding city.” Time has

done much to remedy this removal. In “The Third Coast,” Dyja surveys Chicago’s history

with a critical but appreciative eye. His key assertion is that an understanding of Chicago is significant to the

broader understanding of America and should therefore not be

written off. The city has served as a hotbed of social,
cultural, economic, and political evolution, with its own
developments acting as catalysts for national trends.

Shteir claims that Chicago’s time is over. With its contin-
ued segregation and high crime rates, as well as its polit-
corruption and stagnating development, she no longer

sees it as a crossroads of America; instead, it is slipping in

relation to the coastal cities of New York and Los Angeles.

Her analysis is too dismissive. Dyja’s book, while crit-
icial, portrays a rich Chicago history, rife with both strug-
gles and successes. Devoid of the glamour found in

America’s larger cities, Chicago is a place for the regular,
and there is something laudable in that. Despite its tumul-
tuous past, there is still room for optimism and an

informed appreciation. As Dyja asserts, “restoring Chicago
to its central place in American history is a crucial step
toward reassembling a nation that has lost its shared

sense of identity and experience.” Chicago is inextricable

from its diversity, disorder, and development, attributes it

has made essential to the creation of American culture on

a national scale. Despite its weaknesses, Dyja ultimately

concludes, Chicago remains “the city that most genuinely

expresses America as a whole.” This does not always mean

that Chicago is good, but it does mean that it’s usually

interesting.
IN HISTORICAL DISCUSSIONS, THE LOOSELY LINKED COLLECTIVE OF BLACK FILM-makers who studied at the University of California at Los Angeles film school from the late sixties through the early eighties, known as L.A. Rebellion, is often contextualized in the political anger and turmoil of Los Angeles at that time. Landmark events such as the Angela Davis trial and the Watts Riots are commonly cited as primary sources for cinematic inspiration. Meanwhile, film scholars harp on the Rebellion’s indebtedness to European filmmakers, citing the influence of Italian Neo-realist cinema as a antithled to the over the top, distorted fantasies of Hollywood’s Blaxploitation films. Yet to only think of the L.A. Rebellion films within this academic space—as a footnote in a discussion of cinematic genre or as source documents for the history of black LA—is a grave mistake. The films of the twelve-part retrospective series “L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema,” hosted by Northwestern University Professor Jacqueline Stewart and the University of Chicago’s Film Studies Center, evoke the sense that the Rebellion, in and of itself, is a living tradition. The “real” elements of the films are not merely confined to foreign-isms, but are recognizable and evocative for the modern viewer.

“I thought that was my life on the screen!” an audience member testified to the Rebellion filmmaker Billy Woodberry after Saturday’s screening of his 1984 film, “Bless Their Little Hearts,” at the Logan Center for the Arts. Woodberry’s film tells the slowly unraveling story of Charlie Banks, a Watts-area resident struggling to find gainful employment and maintain his fidelity to his wife and family. According to Woodberry, the actor in the film—Chicago native Nate Hardman—had a similar experience to this empathetic audience member. “This guy…he was convinced that we had incorporated his story into the film. He thought Kaycee [Kaycee Moore, Hardman’s friend and co-star in the film] had told us all this stuff about his life,” Yet Hardman’s public persona—a guy who had to have his nails done, who liked his clothes, according to Woodberry—had little in common with the proletarian Charlie Banks, who is perpetually presented in a grubby undershirt and, in one tense scene, harasses his own son for keeping his nails long, “like a sissy.” Despite these external differences, there was something about the psychological and experiential reality of Banks’ story that convinced the actor that the story was his own. Beyond its narrative elements, the film’s power of the film: it forces us to acknowledge a reality that many of us do not know or understand.

With both Woodberry and Dash’s films, it’s possible to get a better sense of what “realism” means for the L.A. Rebellion collective, whether you call it “neo-“ or not. They create encounters rife with both strangeness and familiarity. While these films are heirs to the particularities of the struggle against poverty and racism in seventies L.A., their subjects and objectives extend thematically, geographically, and temporally, past this initial point of inspiration. Moreover, while Blaxploitation may have initially been the boogyman of the day for the UCLA students, almost all of the filmmakers and presenters in this series addressed the fact that black cinema—as well as Hollywood more generally—has been haunted by corporate distortions throughout its history. In introducing Dash’s film, Stewart critically closed the nineties trend of “ghetto-centric narratives focusing on ‘boys’ with a ‘z’” (winking at the spate of shooter films that tried to imitate the success of John Singleton’s “Boyz in the Hood”). Meanwhile, Sergio Mims, who hosted Wednesday’s screening of short films from the L.A. Rebellion, painted out the movement of film students today trying to become “the next Tyler Perry.”

The call for realism, then, is also a call for both artists and audience to cast off the distorting lenses of Hollywood, and to critically examine their own everyday lives, particularly in black communities, regardless of whether they may appear familiar or foreign to their audience. The Rebellion, then, should not just be thought of as a dated battle, but as an ongoing struggle that lies far beyond the archives of an L.A. film school.
Banking Small
The University of Chicago invests in local banks

By Jason Huang

LAST SPRING, THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO DISTRIBUTED FOUR $250,000 deposits to four community development financial institutions and banks on the South Side. The $1 million total, split between Urban Partnership Bank, Hyde Park Bank, Seaway Bank and Trust Company, and Illinois Service Federal Bank, is meant to spur community-led development. Unlike larger financial institutions and private investors, CDFIs are focused more on community consequences than getting a big return on investment.

The deposits mark a notably different approach to community engagement for the university. The UofC’s implicit mission has long extended beyond pure academics—consider its hand in shaping the neighborhood, from the contentious 1960s urban renewal policies to the preservation of the iconic Robie House. This strong precedent is bolstered by the university’s more visible projects of the past few years, including the Washington Park Arts Incubator, the Harper Court renovation, and the proposed mixed-use high-rise along 53rd between Kenwood and Kimbark. While these plans are seen as an investment in the community, the bank deposits are significantly less heavy-handed.

“Have you heard of bank deserts? The South and West Sides have around a third fewer banks than the rest of Chicago,” said Brian Berg, director of corporate communications at Urban Partnership Bank. “Too often, people in these areas have to rely on irresponsible services such as currency exchanges.”

UBP has already seen a bevy of projects arise within the past year, supported by the new cash on hand. One example Berg provides is an investor who acquires and renovates houses that are furnished and rented at affordable rates to low-income tenants. It’s hard to imagine such a project wowing angel investors, but not so hard to see it impressing a neighborhood club.

Another project has been the Lakeshore Learning Academy, a daycare center for children of teenage mothers. Led by Tess McKenzie, the learning center opened in 2012 at 87th and Euclid with support from UPB. “She used the loan to expand her daycare business to young and single moms so they have a safe learning environment for their children...some of the mothers work two to three jobs and go to school,” said Berg.

CDFIs were established by the U.S. Treasury in 1994 to promote economic development in underserved communities. The CDFI program awards federal resources to qualified banks pursuing development goals such as providing financial services or promoting homeownership. The allocated funds are legally designated to provide financial resources to low-income people who would have previously been unable to access them. Banks like UBP, whose primary focus is to revitalize those on the economic fringe, contribute primarily to small-scale projects—individual loans, small businesses, personal mortgages.

Technically, the UofC did not actually invest in the CDFIs; they made a deposit. The money was not part of the school’s invested endowment, but rather came out of its operational budget.

As one of the largest employers on the South Side, the UofC plays an influential role in the economic fortunes of the surrounding community. “I want to say that obviously the University is not an institution on an island,” says Steve Kloehn, Associate Vice President for News and Public Affairs. The CDFI money makes this clear.

“If it fits our values but it was students who raised these questions...who wanted to talk about all sorts of ways the university invests its money,” said Kloehn.

“The idea was to have the university begin a culture of thinking critically about how the university invests its money,” said Kloehn. “I want to say that obviously the University is not an institution on an island.”

By February the University had examined four banks, submitted by students, to be considered for possible deposits. The administration researched the financial strengths of each bank. Associated financial professionals sat down with representatives of each to determine how beneficial deposits would be and how the banks would be able to effectively link these funds to the community.

“The university was satisfied going in, in making these deposits that it would serve the university’s own interests by moving this amount of money to local banks, it could help them achieve their own goals within the community,” says Kloehn. “The more the neighborhood thrives, the better off we all are.”

“It was a nice gesture by the university...as recognition for what we’ve done for the community,” says Mike McGarry, president of Hyde Park Bank. HPB has been a fixture in Hyde Park for the last eighty years. While not technically a CDFI, HPB focuses on small business loans on the South Side, characteristic of the other participating banks.

It is difficult to trace the outcome of every project which has benefitted from the deposits. Does the university plan to continue with community bank deposits? “Our work with local banks is ongoing... I wouldn’t call it a one-time project. They are still working with those banks, and I don’t know of any plans of that to change,” says Kloehn.

Singh, for one, remains skeptical. “If they really cared they would give more autonomy in what happens in Hyde Park, instead of buying everything and putting in an Akira,” he says. In light of other development projects, such as the reimagined 53rd street, these deposits seem lost in the university’s relationship with the community outside of Hyde Park. While one route is to directly partner with private developers to alter the community landscape, a second one is to allow members to shape the community with their own hands. Can both paths coexist, and will it ever be possible for the second to have the same power as the first?
IT WASN'T UNTIL I CAME TO CHICAGO THAT I learned that pizza could connote geography, and not gastronomy. Upon arrival, I was swiftly urged to try the deep-dish, which I was told was “Chicago’s pizza.” So I did. But something about that first restaurant felt false, with its blinking, marquee-like sign out front and checkered tablecloths inside. It also seemed—despite my limited exposure to pizza styles—that a slice with a crust so thick and a layer of cheesy-saucy-soup so high that you have no choice but to eat it with a fork and knife was not really pizza at all.

According to some South Siders, nothing could be truer. “If I want to eat bread, I’ll go eat bread,” says Rose Mary George. George is the current owner of Vito and Nick’s pizzeria on 84th and Pulaski. After eighty-four years, five generations, and four different locations, Vito and Nick’s is widely considered to be the original South Side establishment of thin-crust pizza.

As recounted to me over Vito and Nick’s signature egg pizza, Vito and Mary Barraco, George’s grandparents, moved from Sicily to Chicago in 1923. Although they didn’t start making pizzas with their son, Nick, until 1946, their Sicilian pizza recipe was with them from the start. This is thin-crust pizza straight from Italy. “It’s always been thin crust. I’ve never had anything else other than that,” she says.

Then why is Chicago so widely known for deep-dish? “Because of customers,” George explains. “Pizza has changed due to demand.

But tonight, the demand seems to be right here at Vito and Nick’s. The restaurant is bustling at the seams with people. Families with young children eat in booths while groups of older friends crowd around tables and sit back in their chairs, beer bottles in hand. The atmosphere is jovial, like being in a friend’s basement, with colored lights and Christmas lights strung across the bar. As to the menu, there aren’t very many options. But with a recipe that has lasted generations, these are all the options you need. The pies are large and round, with cheese and sauce spread to the very edges of the dough. The crust is, well, thin, but it’s not the flatbread, cracker-like crust you often see these days. The dough is firm, and a fraction of the height of a traditional New York-style pizza, but it still has a comforting softness you can sink your teeth into. With a crust this thin, the cheese, sauce, and toppings get just as much attention.

Perhaps the most beautiful aspect of this thin-crust style is the ritual of cutting into the pie to smaller squares, each only a few inches long. This pizza must be shared. Ordering by the slice is not allowed. People eat together, taking piece by piece until there is nothing left.

Vito and Nick’s is not the only proprietor of thin crust on the South Side. While the restaurant is known for its traditional menu and years of consistent service, local chain Italian Fiesta Pizzeria is known for something else—it’s status as the Obama family’s favorite. Legend has it that when young Michelle Obama brought home an outstanding report card, her parents would reward her with an Italian Fiesta dinner. Years later, her husband became such a fan that he had the DeCarlo family flown to Washington so they could make their pizzas for the Presidential Inauguration Expo in 2008. Hidden in a small shopping center on 47th and Lake Park, the pizzeria’s Kenwood location doesn’t command much attention. I was surprised to find only a small room and a strict policy of take out and delivery only. In placing an order for delivery, I found the service slow and the pizza average. Perhaps it was because the pie had been transported in a cardboard box, but the cheese and sauce seemed to sink into the crust. Overall, its slight greasiness seemed to lack the vitality I had tasted at Vito and Nick’s. But I guess when you’re the president’s pizza darling, people will keep coming to you no matter what.

As to the future of South Side thin-crust Flo and Santos has a solid foundation. The three-year-old South Loop restaurant may lack the dynastic quality of some of its older competitors, but it has successfully added a modern twist to the longstanding thin-crust tradition with respect and grace, standing on a simple philosophy: “Deep-dish pizza,” as chef Mark Rimkus puts it, “is pizza for tourists.” As a South Side native, Chef Mark says thin crust is all he’s ever eaten.

Flo and Santos is more a bar and restaurant than a pizzeria, but the menu offers quite a wide variety of different pizzas. And with Polska Kielbasa, sauerkraut, and bacon, the restaurant has quickly acquired a reputation for Polish-Italian fusion.

Upon our waitress’s suggestion, we decided to order a pie that was half Farmer’s Market Pizza—based on Chef Mark’s weekly farmstand finds—and half goat cheese, red peppers, and Italian sausage. Served on a wooden paddle, the ends of the crust were quite crispy, while the center was still able to capture the softness of Vito and Nick’s crust. The goat cheese remained distinct from the sauce and the roasted vegetables brought new flavor to a traditional format. Mixed with the fresh air, this warm blend of a familiar crust and novel trimmings was borderline perfection.

As a friend and I sat at our smaller table on the spacious patio, enjoying the setting sun, we laughed at the squealing kids toddling away from their parents. Inside, while groups of older friends crowd around tables and sit back in their chairs, beer bottles in hand. The atmosphere is jovial, like being in a friend’s basement, with colored lights and Christmas lights strung across the bar. As to the menu, there aren’t very many options. But with a recipe that has lasted generations, these are all the options you need. The pies are large and round, with cheese and sauce spread to the very edges of the dough. The crust is, well, thin, but it’s not the flatbread, cracker-like crust you often see these days. The dough is firm, and a fraction of the height of a traditional New York-style pizza, but it still has a comforting softness you can sink your teeth into. With a crust this thin, the cheese, sauce, and toppings get just as much attention.

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Vito and Nick’s, 8433 S. Pulaski Rd. Monday-Thursday, 11am-11pm; Friday, 11am-1am; Saturday, noon-11pm. (773)735-2050. vitoandnicks.com

Italian Fiesta Pizzeria, South Side locations in South Shore, Kenwood, and Auburn-Gresham. Hours vary. (773)735-2050. italiangispizzeria.com

Flo and Santos, 1310 S. Wabash Ave. Sunday-Thursday, 11:30am-midnight; Friday-Saturday, 11:30am-1am. (312)566-9817. floandsantos.com
“ACID RAP,” THE NEW MIXTAPE FROM CHATHAM-RAISED ARTIST CHANCE the Rapper, is triumphant. This is in line with Chancellor Bennet’s trajectory, which has been marked by a fair share of triumph.

His rise has been meteoric. His debut mixtape, “10 Day,” conceived during a ten-day school suspension from the Loop’s selective enrollment school Jones College Prep, was released in 2012 to almost universal acclaim. His style is different; he mixes cheeky swagger with a sharp intelligence. Chance has something to say, and the way that he says it sticks. It rings fresh, but with a backbeat of a Chicago past, a South Side rhythm replete with the soul samples and earnest style similar to those that drove Common and Kanye West to superstardom.

With “Acid Rap,” his second self-produced mixtape, Chance departs from the current narrative of South Side rap. Compared with fellow young talent Chief Keef, whose angry, jagged delivery is defiant to the point of participation in the violence that defines his youth and his music, Chance’s verbosity and drawled delivery immediately frame a far more nuanced take on similar issues. Chance does not hide behind a gruff, street exterior, and he does not feign to act older than his twenty years of age. His music retains its earnestness because it is unabashedly from the mouth of a recent high school graduate. While he stands apart from the street, his perspective on the violence in Chicago is one that matters.

“Acid Rap” opens with swagger, with “Good Ass Intro,” during which Chance’s gleeful whine cuts through an upbeat sample from West’s and John Legend’s “Intro (I’m Good).” It’s a joyous, gospel-tinged victory lap, and it merely hints at the more nuanced, less self-assured tracks to come.

The next track, “Pusha Man,” is less straightforward. It sets Chance in the aftermath of “10 Day,” a world of “shoes and shows and chauffeurs with road rage.” He’s a rapper still chasing success and still plagued by the demons of his past. It paints a picture of the complicated nature of life after the first break: what Chance wants to be, and the reality of the moment. In the chorus he declares himself a “pusha man,” referencing the 1972 film “Super Fly.” For the duration of the track, he is the epitome of Blaxploitation coolness and Curtis Mayfield soul and swagger. It’s cartoonish and excessive, intentionally unrealistic, and as such, pain chillingly with the hidden track on the back half of “Pusha Man,” “Paranoid,” in which Chance bitterly asks where Katie Couric and Matt Lauer are to witness the violence of his city where “everybody dies in the summer.” He toes a line between a teenager whose confidence is swollen with his own verbal virtuosity and an embittered veteran of Chicago street violence.

It is this dual mentality, this tendency to prance between his swaggering ebullience and his earnest musings on violence and personal struggles that pervades the rest of the album. Take a track like “Juice,” which jokingly praises his own indelible talent, yet states that “I ain’t never been the same since Rod passed.” Rod is his friend Rodney Kyle Jr., whose death by stabbing occurred in the fall of 2011. Others, like “Cocoa Butter Kisses,” with lines like, “I put Visene in my eyes so my grandma will fucking hug me,” pine for lost youth and lost love that conflict with the life of a rising hip-hop artist.

Chance belongs to the Save Money crew, a collaboration of friends, some going back to early childhood. It started as a family affair, a group of friends messing around, drawn by their common interest in music. The group includes the genre-bending rock/pop/hip-hop outfit Kids These Days and up-and-coming rapper Vic Mensa, along with videographers, designers, and producers. Members of the crew frequently guest on each other’s projects—Mensa was featured on “10 Day” and “Cocoa Butter Kisses” from “Acid Rap.”

With his samples of soul and jazzy rhythms—“Acid Rap” is both a reference to the psychedelic and the style of jazz—Chance demonstrates an awareness of Chicago rappers past. His is a complicated story—the Chatham native who went to the prestigious prep school downtown. It’s the antithesis of drill music, but shouts out to Chief Keef on “Acid Rap.” He’s intelligent, with a knowledge of musical history, but essentially youthful, rapping about prom night and smoking weed. With his distinctive voice, Chance narrates a story about the South Side, about Chicago, and about youth.
Female Nationalists: Out of the Shadows

There’s a reason you may be feeling nervous about the Trump administration.

President Donald Trump is a female nationalist, and he’s not alone.

In his first year in office, Trump has been the subject of a growing number of online petitions and protests, as well as headlines about his administration.

But what is a female nationalist, and how does it affect us?

The term “female nationalist” was coined by scholars and activists to describe a political movement that seeks to empower women through economic and social policies.

Female nationalists argue that women are often left out of political decisions that affect their lives, and that the current system is failing to address their needs.

They believe that women should be represented in positions of power, and that policies should be enacted that support women’s rights.

The movement has gained traction in recent years, with a number of prominent female nationalists rising to prominence.

And while some may view this as a threat, others see it as a positive step forward.

The female nationalist movement is about more than just politics, though.

It’s about empowering women in all aspects of life, from education to healthcare.

And with the help of female nationalists, we can create a world that truly values the contributions of women.

So if you’re feeling ready to take action, consider joining the movement.

Together, we can create a brighter future for all women.