



# Chicago: A Biography

By 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 Pacyga traces 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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## Chicago: A Biography By Dominic A. Pacyga Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

My goal is to... tell the story of Chicago through events minor and major that I believe explain its importance to America and the world, says Pacyga, a veteran historian of the Windy City who teaches at Columbia College Chicago. The first permanent settler in a city that would be a magnet for the world's immigrants was probably Jean Baptiste Point de Sable, a fur trader of mixed West African and French descent. From there Pacyga goes on to discuss the economic, political, social and cultural development of the city, from the Erie Canal and the development of the railroads, which were crucial in making the city a thriving port and destination for immigrants, to Chicago's industry boom during the Civil War. The suburbs, the stockyards, Jane Addams's settlement house and public housing projects all receive Pacyga's attention, as does Richard Daley's infamous 20-year reign. Enlivened by archival pictures, this book offers a broad and compressed overview of the Windy City that's generally well written and absorbing and captures most of the highlights, although contemporary Chicago receives short shrift. 145 b&w photos, 7 maps. (Oct.)

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## **Review**

"A wonderful achievement from someone who has devoted much of his career to studying Chicago's history. Pacyga gives us the singular story of Chicago in his own inimitable voice."

(Ann Durkin Keating, coeditor of *The Encyclopedia of Chicago* and author of *Chicagoland: City and Suburbs in the Railroad Age* 2009-03-30)

"When I first moved to Chicago, I was told that 'if you really want to know the city, you have to take a tour with Dominic Pacyga. He knows it block by block.' When Pacyga took me around, I found that he also knew the city's history, decade by decade. I continue to learn from his vast store of knowledge on Chicago—and now, thanks to his book, everyone can."

(Garry Wills, professor emeritus of history at Northwestern University and author of *Why I am a Catholic* 2009-03-30)

"Well paced and clearly organized, Pacyga's *Chicago* tells the compelling story of this uniquely American city. Pacyga's narrative provides a particularly enjoyable time-lapse view of the successive waves of change that have seen this settlement in a swamp grow into a modern metropolis."

(Stuart Dybek, author of *The Coast of Chicago* and *I Sailed with Magellan* 2009-05-07)

"A thoughtful and compelling addition to the great shelf of essential Chicago books. Rarely have I encountered a work of scholarship that is at once enlightening and wildly entertaining."

(Rick Kogan, host of WGN's "The Sunday Papers" and author of *A Chicago Tavern: A Goat, a Curse, and the American Dream* 2009-05-07)

"The suburbs, the stockyards, Jane Addams's settlement house and public housing projects all receive Pacyga's attention, as does Richard [J.] Daley's infamous 20-year reign. Enlivened by archival pictures, [*Chicago: A Biography*] offers a broad and compressed overview of the Windy City."

(*Publishers Weekly* 2009-08-04)

“Can anyone convey the essence of that beguiling, cantankerous, and quintessentially American city, Chicago? Public historian (and Chicago-native) Pacyga largely succeeds through his employment of textual portraits of famous figures and a necessarily limited selection of events and neighborhoods over the course of over 300 years. . . . Satisfying for scholars and highly recommended for general readers—in and beyond Chicago. A fine purchase for both institutions and individuals.”

(Frederick J. Augustyn Jr. *Library Journal* 2009-07-17)

“[Pacyga] decided not to write a chronological history of the city, something that could take up multiple volumes, but to treat Chicago as if it were a person — hence the title *Chicago: A Biography*. . . . His attention is taken up by what really does define the city: a fight for fairness for laborers, for the poor, and for children; capitalism and corruption run amok; the work produced and the people who do it.”

(Jessa Crispin *The Smart Set* 2009-10-08)

“[The book] includes the usual characters and events: early French traders, the Chicago Fire, Haymarket Square, George Pullman, Jane Addams, the Columbian Exposition, various mayors and Al Capone. But Pacyga seeks out the stories of the not-so-famous as well.”

(*Chicago Sun-Times* 2009-10-11)

“Those new to Chicago and its history will find this book to be a great place to start. For those who know something

about it already, they will find a comprehensive history that is bound to show them something new about this ever-changing city.”

(*PopMatters* 2009-11-25)

“Highly recommended.”

(*Choice* 2010-02-01)

“Chicago history buffs can skip the tuition cost of a class with Columbia’s uberpopular prof Dominic Pacyga and buy his new tome. . . . Not a bad last-minute gift for the holidays.”

(*Time Out Chicago* 2009-12-17)

“Dominic Pacyga’s *Chicago* is a biography of a great and comparatively young city. It provides a comprehensive overview of Chicago’s meteoric growth in the nineteenth century and its survival in the leaner years of the late twentieth century. Along the way, Pacyga reminds us of the remarkable things that can result when human beings interact with each other in dense, urban areas. . . . [Pacyga has] produced a very fine volume that should grace the bookshelves of every Chicago buff and every urbanist.”

(Edward Glaeser *New Republic*)

"Concentrating on Chicago's ever-changing cultural diversity, notorious politics, and the crucial role technology played in the city's rapid rise, Pacyga seeds the big picture with cameos of fascinating individuals. . . . A vivid, streamlined, and superbly well-illustrated portrait of an essential American city."  
(*Booklist*)

About the Author

**Dominic Pacyga** is the award-winning author or coauthor of several books, including *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago: Workers on the South Side, 1880–1922*, also published by the University of Chicago Press. He teaches in the Department of Humanities, History, and Social Sciences at Columbia College Chicago.

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