

Chicago

Studs Terkel

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Peter says

Wonderful prose poem about Chicago by one of its greatest citizens. The book is an intriguing mix of essay, memoir and third-person oral narrative, supplemented by great black and white photographs from the likes of Stephen Deutch, Archie Lieberman, Marc PoKempner and Art Shay. Somewhat of a cousin to Nelson Algren's *Chicago: City on the Make*, which is fitting, given that Algren was a good friend and hero to the younger Terkel. Essential for any Chicagoan's bookshelf.

James says

Studs Terkel's *Chicago* is a rambling prose poem about his city, and the changes, in a thousand vignettes; his own and others; reeling from flashback to then-current events and back. That's what the book is about, sure, but when literature is good, as this is, it captures something else. In the transitions, in the sound of the language chosen, in the herky-jerky structure from past to future and from one face of this two-faced city between the go-getters and the go-get-it-yourselfers, as Terkel puts it. He captures a lot of background, drops a lot of names, but the feel, the spirit of the Windy City; he catches that too.

That's what I was looking for when I picked this book up some years ago in a used book store in Denver. Not the history of Chicago, not exactly, but who this city was, and who it has become.

Craig Barner says

Studs Terkel's *Chicago* is not among the must-read works of the late radio host, historian and unacknowledged mayor of the city. The book has an interesting link to a significant work in the city's literary history, though that alone still might not make it worth reading. *Chicago* is for the dedicated fan of Studs.

Terkel calls his work a "long epilogue" for another work. In 1951, Nelson Algren, Chicago's street corner poet of the dispossessed, published what is sometimes called a "prose-poem" entitled *Chicago: City on the Make*. That fascinating prose work was not an essay, though it has essay-like elements. It was meant to evoke emotions, some of them raw and harsh, others loving and kind, about changing Chicago. Terkel wrote the forward for the last edition.

In *Chicago*, Terkel covers much of the same ground he does in his other works. Some of the memories of the Wells-Grand Hotel, the rooming house his parents ran, are rich because of the people he met there during the Depression. Often they were speakers at Bughouse Square, the nickname for Washington Square Park, perhaps the most significant free-speech center in the nation's history and one-time rival of Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park.

Though Terkel covers a lot of the same ground in *Chicago*, he digs up some interesting social history. For example, he mentions the now largely forgotten bout between boxers Joe Louis and Max Schmeling on the South Side of the city. Louis, who was African American, knocked out his white opponent. Terkel, who had witnessed the fight but had apparently forgotten its exact year before writing this work, asked a black man

what year it had happened:

"He broke into a million-dollar smile: 'Nineteen thirty-eight.' Ask any black person of a certain age that question and you can hardly miss." That kind of ethnic pride, which is worth remembering, is a forgotten facet of the Chicago's history.

Terkel, who was a proud yet thoughtful political liberal, shows his characteristic ability to make his readers think in this work. In a section about the impoverished Cabrini-Green public housing project on Chicago's Near Northwest Side, he turns Lord Acton's famous proverb--Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely--on its head. For Terkel, the idea should have been powerlessness corrupts and absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely. It's an idea worth thinking about and not just in preparation for a Bughouse Square debate.

Erik Ostrom says

I read this to learn more about Chicago, and mostly what I learned is that Studs Terkel really loved Chicago. His highbrow/lowbrow style and the cast of characters he knew makes it engaging.

Gbug says

This is a long sort of stream of consciousness essay written in the 1980's. If you are not from Chicago or at least have some connection you may not appreciate it. I for one do have some connection so it triggered some memories and "Oh, yeahs" for me. The 1967 big snow and maredaly for example. Being a fan of Studs helps too. What a guy. "Take it easy. But take it."

Mark Litarowich says

First try at Turkel

I gave this book s try since I never read Studs and moved to Chicago in Uptown no less. I'll try another Studs book before I write him off, but I wasn't very impressed. I found his style annoying and he made too many assumptions on what people know. In my opinion, Chicago deserves a better love story than this

Joe says

Quippy and understated. Terkel hits his best notes when he addresses his personal experiences in the city whose characters' lives he so obviously embraced. From the night of the Joe Louis fight, to the bag lady helping him destroy the newspaper machine, and back to the time he relished music with his ailing father - this rambling stream of consciousness is a gift that proves the unassuming author the most interesting character of all.

Gina says

An ode to his beloved city, faults & all. If you love Chicago, you must know of Studs, who takes you in as an old friend & shares stories (his own & other folks') of the city, all the while exposing our humanity in the most profound ways.

René says

I finished this awhile ago, but forgot to review it. I love the pictures, especially the ones showing kids in the 60s and 70s. Brought back memories. Studs is a great writer to be sure, and I have nothing against the quality of writing in this book. I do think his persona -- or his reiteration of Chicago's persona as a great but deeply imperfect, tough, brash city blah blah -- only underlies the cliches in his observations. Because this book doesn't present a very original view of Chicago, nothing I hadn't read before in Sandburg or Algren or Royko and a dozen other white, male, streetwise Chicago journalists and writers. This book was published in the 80s, and the city has gone through some extensive changes both physically and culturally beginning in that decade, and nothing in this book foresees that. I think a writer less enchanted with personal and local personas and past reputations might have had a keener view on what was in store for the city. This is a quick read, and like I said the pictures are great, so I would recommend it to anyone interested in the city. But I think Terkel's oral histories (especially *Working*, *Division Street America*, and *Race*), all of which feature mostly Chicago and Midwestern speakers, are the real goldmine for people who want to understand Chicago and the American heartland that surrounds it.

Adam says

This is the least good of Studs' books I've read. Fellow Goodreaders' reviews celebrate this book, noting Studs' importance to Chicago, his love of Chicago, and the uncharacteristic speaking as himself, rather than as an interviewer of others. Studs' union with his city is undeniably part of the joy of reading him. But one needn't read this book to get that. Nor does one need to read this book to hear Studs' own voice—both the better *Touch and Go* and the even better *Talking to Myself* allow us that pleasure. Disappointingly, events and stories briefly referenced or recounted here appear in longer and better-told segments in these latter two books.

The photographs of our city interspersed throughout do add a dimension to Studs' ode to Chicago. Strikingly, these photographs don't so much reveal Chicago, but a previous Chicago, a Chicago of Studs' era. Check out the Appalachian toughs in Studs' neighborhood of Uptown on page 62 and the pair of butchers on page 117. These photographs, and the others they are among are important for the same reason Studs' famous books, *Working* and *Division Street*, are--they vividly capture life of the working class city in a particular moment in time.

Jan C says

Really was just an essay. So it made a fairly short book. Thoroughly enjoyable. Thoroughly Studs. Great follow-up to Nelson Algren's *Chicago, City on the Make*, which I found one day many years ago on father's

shelf. It wasn't there when we cleaned the house out though. I'm going to have to break down and buy a new copy. Also included is a foreword to the re-issued City on the Make.

This is a book for Chicagoans. West Siders, South Siders, even North Siders, and even those of us from the 'burbs. I think this one is a keeper. Something to dip into on those days when one feels a little bit homesick.

It has great photographs, too. Reminded me so fondly of trips to the Art Institute, Wrigley Field. He wasn't a Sox fan so he didn't go much to Commiskey Park. Some mentions regarding the old Stadium and how they had incorporated the bricks from Libby Prison (where one of my great-grandfathers spent some time). But there is a definite Janus about Chicago with two faces - one is always exposed to the Lake and the other is probably toward Halsted.

Studs came to town as a youngster and, although it struck him strange at first, quickly adapted to our sometimes unique ways. I think he always considered it a "raffish" town. Whether that was from this book or a WTTW show, I'm not sure. This is his paeon to Chicago.

Highly recommended to Chicagoans who have moved away. Always home to me.

Jason says

self-described by studs as an epilogue to Algren's Chicago: City on the Make, this prose poem (artfully paired with b&w photos of the city) is pretty extraordinary in its own right. Unlike most of his other books, the dominant voice providing the oral history is studs' - a voice that is so clearly his own: wonderful & unique (and which i could read all d*mn day).

Brent says

This book is Stud Terkel's tribute to Algren's City on the Make. Terkel tells a meandering series of stories that form a literary Chicago collage. As a Chicago resident it is exciting to follow through the thousands of references he makes to names and locations that are part of Chicago's fabric. There is even a 1 paragraph reference to UNO, my employer.

This book is now 30 years old. Chicago is due or another great literary treatment to continue the lineage of Carl Sandburg, Nelson Algren, and Studs Terkel.

Mark says

Chicago, by Studs Terkel, 1986. Probably not Studs' best book (I really liked Talking to Myself), but still worth reading. It includes his foreword to the last edition of Nelson Algren's Chicago: City on the Make. His main point is the two sides of Chicago, its greatness, and its corruption/depravity/injustice. A lot of great photographs from all over the city.

Matt Piechocinski says

Studs Terkel is yet another reason why my city (Chicago) is better than yours. I thought it was a great oral history of the finest city in the Union, although it did read as a little dated.
