Chicago's Westside Histories

HIST 593
Professor Jennifer Brier

Spring 2026

Chicago's Westside Histories

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome to Chicago's Westside Histories class, a graduate course taught in conjunction with the Renewal Project, a national public history project working to redress the harms universities cause through displacement and dispossession. UIC is the lead university partner for Chicago's Near West Side Renewal Project and is working with three cultural institutions on the Westside: North Lawndale Historical and Cultural Society; National Public Housing Museum; and the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.

In this course, we will move through a semester-long exploration of Chicago's Westside as it underwent waves of urban renewal and displacement, paying particular attention to UIC's role in these historical processes beginning with its construction in the early 1960s. We will also spend significant class time researching in and exploring local historical and archival institutions, where we will locate various primary sources (maps, photographs, and ephemera) to serve as historical points on a digital map we will build of Chicago's Westside as it changed over time.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

For this class to work, we all need to make a commitment to building a shared learning space. This means being in class having done the reading/listening, ready to engage in conversation. We will meet each week in person to build a space where we can see and hear one another. At our first class, we will collectively produce our class agreements. This will help us be accountable to one another and set up conditions where can all be active members of our teaching and learning community.

Integration with Hull-House Materials

(Content adapted from original course syllabus by Hull-House educators to reflect how materials were used for in-class instruction and assignments)

TOPIC 1: HULL-HOUSE

This class will be dedicated to introducing students to Hull-House and the work of Jens Jensen as featured in the museum's current exhibit, "Perennial City."

READINGS

- *Twenty Years at Hull-House* by Jane Addams
- *A Greater West Park System, after the plans of Jens Jensen* published by West Chicago Park Commissioners

TOPIC 2: UIC & LATE 20TH CENTURY HULL-HOUSE

Students will be introduced to the construction of UIC and its impact on the Westside. We will also learn more about conducting related archival research.

READINGS

- *The City as Campus: Urbanism and Higher Education in Chicago* by Sharon Haar

TOPIC 3: STRUCTURE OF ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

This day of class will allow students to explore the broader impacts of creating the UIC campus as well as other impacts of public policy on Westside Chicago neighborhoods.

READINGS

- *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* by Amanda I. Seligman

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CLASS PROJECTS

The assignments in this class are organized to be of service to the Near Westside Renewal Project. Working with an organization called Whose Land? over the course of the semester we will build an interactive historical map of the Near Westside that tracks both time and place. This map will become a platform that we can utilize to collect and curate historical materials related to displacement, dispossession and reimagination on the Westside. Additionally, students will complete two projects that can incorporate information about Hull-House and UIC's current neighborhood. Reflection assignments will also be expected after attending tours.

REFLECTIONS

During and after each site visit write a set of notes that detail your sense of the place you are visiting.

GEOCODING ASSIGNMENT

Choose a neighborhood or a chapter from an assigned reading and identify 3 geo-located primary source documents (maps, photographs, newsletters, etc.), 3 from different time periods, and 3 about a theme of your choosing related to the neighborhood (by cultural group, ethnicity, event, etc.). Prepare the materials to be placed on the map and a 250-word annotation for each example.

PRIMARY SOURCE PACKET

Visit a local archive (digital or in-person) and find at least 6 items/primary sources about the neighborhood you wrote about in Assignment #2. Prepare the materials to be placed on the map and a 250-word annotation for each example

Sample Assignment

POST-TOUR REFLECTION JOURNAL

During and after each site visit write a set of notes that detail your sense of the place you are visiting. You may write about whatever you like, but I encourage you to think about as many of your senses as you can – sight, sound, taste, etc. You may also add photographs, if you like.

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