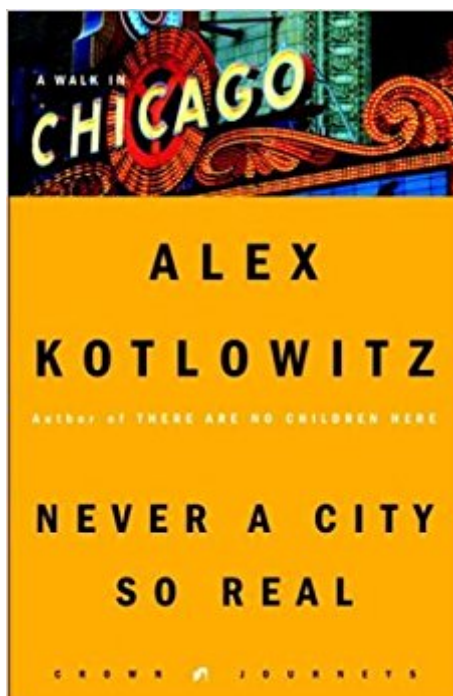


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# Never A City So Real: A Walk In Chicago (Crown Journeys)



## Synopsis

The acclaimed author of *There Are No Children Here* takes us into the heart of Chicago by introducing us to some of the city's most interesting, if not always celebrated, people. Chicago is one of America's most iconic, historic, and fascinating cities, as well as a major travel destination. For Alex Kotlowitz, an accidental Chicagoan, it is the perfect perch from which to peer into America's heart. It's a place, as one historian has said, of "messy vitalities," a stew of contradictions: coarse yet gentle, idealistic yet restrained, grappling with its promise, alternately sure and unsure of itself. Chicago, like America, is a kind of refuge for outsiders. It's probably why Alex Kotlowitz found comfort there. He's drawn to people on the outside who are trying to clean up—or at least make sense of—the mess on the inside. Perspective doesn't come easy if you're standing in the center. As with *There Are No Children Here*, *Never a City So Real* is not so much a tour of a place as a chronicle of its soul, its lifeblood. It is a tour of the people of Chicago, who have been the author's guides into this city's—and in a broader sense, this country's—heart.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Chicago is an awfully big place to fit into a small book, but Kotlowitz is a master of distillation. The author of *There Are No Children Here* (1991), a seminal tale of the Chicago projects, Kotlowitz is an omnivorous observer, discerning listener, and unassuming witness to urban life, who is as

compassionate as he is curious, as respectful as he is incisive. He portrays Chicago as a place without pretense where "people are taken for who they are, not for what they have or haven't achieved," and consequently he seeks the city's many-faceted soul in the lives of its mavericks. Individuals such as Millie Wortham and Brenda Stephenson, who work for an organization that helps young mothers; artist Milton Reed, "a Diego Rivera of the projects

ALEX KOTLOWITZ is the author of *The Other Side of the River* and *There Are No Children Here*, which was selected as one of the 150 most important books of the century by the New York Public Library. He lives in Chicago.

*A Walk in Chicago: Never a City So Real* by Alex Kotlowitz Crown Journeys, Crown: New York 2004 159 pp. Hardcover

The "Big Onion" is better than the "Big Apple" in many ways, and Alex Kotlowitz, a former New Yorker who has made Chicago his home for over twenty years, sets out to prove how great and diverse his adopted city really is. As he writes in his introduction, "Chicago is a place of passion and hustle...a place eternally in transition, always finding yet another way to think of itself, a city never satisfied." But this is not the Chicago of the Art Institute, of Michigan Avenue, of Water Tower Place, or the Magnificent Mile. This is the Chicago of the South Side housing projects, the South East's closed steel mills, of Division Street and the 26th Street Criminal Court. It is the Chicago of the resilient and dedicated people who make their own neighborhoods places that come to life with positive energy and social change. In Kotlowitz's book you meet "Oil Can Eddie," AKA, Ed Sadlowski, the retired steelworker who climbed the ranks of union leadership and "...who loves his city's opera, its museums, and its baseball teams..." You read about how this steelworker went from the steel furnace to the cover of Time Magazine, and how the union that he organized created a better life for its workers, and how that working life is now in peril. The 64-year old Sadlowski takes Kotlowitz on a city tour in his beat-up "Crown Vic" to places off the tourist map, places like Pinkerton's gravesite and the Calumet Riverfront where the strikers once clashed with police. You get to lunch at Manny's Jewish Deli just south of the Loop, the hangout for political bosses and pit stop for every major politician who swings through Chicago. Then it's off to Edna's soul food restaurant with his two social worker friends, Millie and Brenda. As they sit down to eat, we get to overhear their conversation as if we were sitting in the next booth. This lets the reader eavesdrop on some of the problems that plague this city, from gangs in public housing to unwed teenage mothers. But in Kotlowitz's hands, the city is brought to life through the eyes of Millie and Brenda. And we get to meet Edna, sixty-six years old, who in the middle of taking lunch orders hears gunshots and runs

out onto the street to shoo away the gang kids with her apron. We meet Milton Reed, the lanky street artist who paints provocative murals for the residents of the projects, and we tag along while Milton sets up his sketch pad on the street corner so that he can sketch portraits of parade watchers as the Bud Billiken Parade winds its way through the city's South Side, a still racially divided part of Chicago. Next we meet the embodiment of Sandburg's "City of Big Shoulders" in the form of a sturdily built six-foot female attorney, Andrea Lyon, who once while being attacked for her bag, punched her mugger so hard she broke his jaw. This imposing former public defender now works as a De Paul law professor and takes on some of the city's toughest criminal cases. It's a riveting account of the goings-on in this huge criminal beehive of a courthouse, and how Andrea heats up the proceedings. And we also meet a painter who paints the derelicts and prostitutes on Division Street near Wicker Park, and who has sold his work for many thousands of dollars in Paris, but who remains unknown in his own city. Robert Guinan paints the side of the city that is fast becoming gentrified out of existence and we hear him lament that the city is trying to homogenize itself. Guinan takes us into his studio and down to the jazz clubs like the HotHouse and the Velvet Lounge where he has painted the famous Blues musicians that have made Chicago legendary. We even go outside the city limits to Cicero, a suburb made infamous by Al Capone, to meet Dave Boyle, political gadfly and social activist, who runs a legal clinic for Cicero's disenfranchised. In Boyle's account, we learn how he foiled the town's corrupt politicians by exposing them to the truth of their actions when he tried to have illegal liquor licenses revoked. And finally, near the end of our tour in the city's northwest side at GT's Diner, a diner taken over by an Albanian immigrant who hands out free coffee and food to the Mexican day laborers who congregate in the parking lot outside his business, we read how he grumbles about the ones who don't pay and who sit all day in his booths, but we also learn why he sympathizes because as a child in Albania he learned from his parents that you have to help others. We read about how the city keeps changing in Kotlowitz's book as new immigrants arrive and change old neighborhoods, but we learn how much they add to the life of this great city. Wherever Kotlowitz takes us, we learn to love "his Chicago" and the very real people he introduces us to. These are the people that you would love to meet and sit down with in a bar to talk to for hours. Fortunately, Kotlowitz has done the sitting for us, taking it all down in this brilliant book.

the only reason i docked a star is because i wanted more stories. this is a great book and i am glad i downloaded it and ignored the reviews criticizing the author's politics. yes if all you read is the first story, about the union leader, you may get the idea that you are about to be fed all sorts of leftist propoganda, but that all stays in that chapter. i really enjoyed learning more about my hometown

through the eyes of people i would probably never have the chance to mingle with on my own. as i said, i only wish there were more stories.i apologize for the punctuation of this review, i am writing it on my kindle.

Thanks to the seller for extremely quick shipping and an amazing product. This book does a terrific job of encapsulating the essence of Chicago. The vignettes truly give us a glimpse of the nature of the "City of Neighborhoods." This book will work for the casual reader or even could be used in a could social science course.

I'm a Chicagoan, now living in Cali, but I love stories of my hometown, especially when they're heartfelt, like the ones in this compilation. Kotlowitz is an author I've learned so much from. He's an extraordinary observer and teacher.

On time, packaged well and received just in time for Christmas! Great read about the city, too, for locals and strangers alike.

Mr. Kotlowitz helps readers develop a positive image of the city. His eloquent style makes reading this book a very enjoyable experience, by connecting the reader to the life experiences of several individuals wisely selected by the author to help explain or represent the historical development of the city and its neighborhoods. I recommend this book.

I thought this book was written by a cab driver who never really got out of the car to really discover the rich ethnography in Chicago. It's a drive by edition. He does not even roll the windows of his "cab" down to tell us about the rich smells of the city, the coffee roaster, the chocolate factory, the bitter nose stinging air of Gary Indiana rolling across the southside where it is met by the Argo cornstarch plant.This guy does not know Chicago.

The author has captured what is, to me, a very accurate description of the people, modern history and neighborhoods of Chicago.The edition I bought was rated as "LIKE NEW" and so it appeared until I flipped through and found sveral pages underlined and/or highlighted. Who does this? Dirt heads, that's who does this.

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