

History at Home for Teens

Weekly Project 6: Exploring Chicago's Neighborhoods—Near West Side

The Near West Side is a community area that consists of smaller, more specific neighborhoods, like [Little Italy](#), [Greektown](#), and West Loop, among others. Like many other neighborhoods in Chicago, many immigrant groups like the Irish, German, Czechs, and French, called the Near West Side home. The section south of Harrison, bounded by Halsted on the west and Roosevelt Road on the south, would remain a destination for poor European immigrants. After the [Great Chicago Fire of 1871](#), over 200,000 people took refuge on the Near West Side, creating overcrowded conditions. Toward the end of the 1800s, Russian and Polish Jews, along with Italians, replaced the Irish and Germans, with the Italians settling between Polk and Taylor Streets, and the Jews southward to 16th Street. The center of the Jewish business community, the Maxwell Street Market, or “Jew town,” came to life at the intersection of Halsted and Maxwell. A Greek settlement known as the “Delta” developed between Harrison, Halsted, Polk, and Blue Island.

Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr opened [Hull House](#) in 1889 around the intersection of Polk and Halsted. Hull House attempted to combine a policy of Americanization with celebration of the neighborhood's ethnic diversity. African Americans and Mexicans moved into the Near West Side in larger numbers during the 1930s and 1940s, with Hull House welcoming Mexican immigrants to their various social programs. African Americans were less welcome, relegated instead to institutions that catered only to blacks.

The second half of the twentieth century brought major alterations to the Near West Side. The [Chicago Circle expressway interchange](#) wiped out a significant section of the “Delta” and pushed Greektown to its current location north of Harrison, along Halsted. The construction of the [University of Illinois at Chicago \(UIC\)](#), resulted in the demolition of most of the Hull House complex, as well as the historic Italian neighborhood. University expansion toward the end of twentieth century once again reshaped the Near West Side, almost destroying the historical Maxwell Street Market and contributing to the gentrification in the areas around downtown. Because of these major changes and displacements, the Near West Side looks very different than it did a couple of decades ago.



Aerial view of University of Illinois at Chicago campus. 1970.
Chicago History Museum

To get an idea of how much this area changed over its history, try the mapping activity to visualize these changes!

Instructions:

- ◆ Look at the attached maps of a section of the Near West Side.
- ◆ What are some things that stick out to you about these maps from 1895? Jot them down in your journal.
- ◆ Then, check out this custom [Google map](#) with the area that the Hull House maps show. Compare both sets of maps. What are the changes you see and are there any similarities?
- ◆ Share your thoughts on social media or on our [Google Classroom](#) page.

To share with us, upload your creations using your phone, computer, or other device using the Google Classroom app. You can also share your story on social media (Twitter and Instagram @chicagomuseum, Facebook @chicagohistory) tagging us and using #historyathometeens!

[All activities can be done from your phone! Just follow the blue hyperlinks to the materials/pages!](#)

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Additional Activities

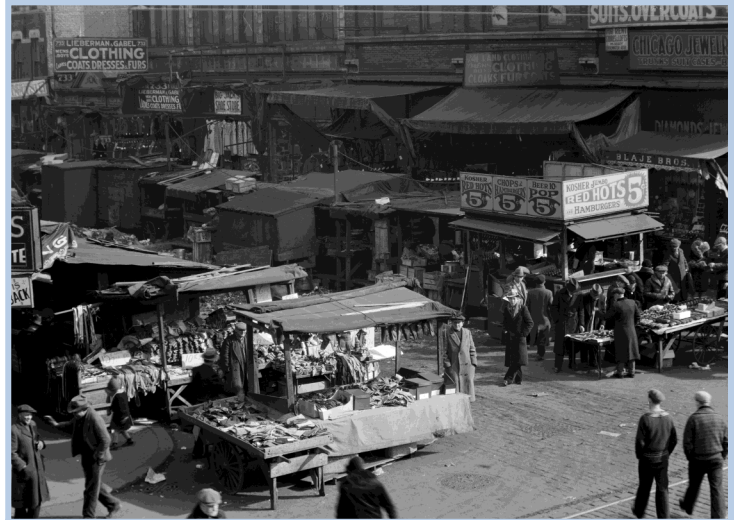
Maxwell Street Market

For about one hundred years, Maxwell Street was one of Chicago's most unconventional business districts. About a mile long and located just outside of downtown, it was a place where businesses grew selling anything from simple shoes to luxury items. Goods on card tables and blankets competed with goods in sidewalk kiosks and stores. There were colorful signs and advertisement everywhere you turned!

Its immigrants arrived from several continents and many countries throughout the 1800s and into the 1900's. In the 1940s, Southern African Americans worked in Maxwell Street's stores and entertained crowds with the blues. Maxwell Street is largely considered the birthplace of the [Chicago Blues](#)! Sunday was the market's busiest day since the Jews worked on the Christian Sabbath when stores were closed in most other parts of the city.

Merchants battled city officials to keep Maxwell Street alive despite its reputation for crime and residential overcrowding. Its eastern section was destroyed in the mid-1950s for the [Dan Ryan Expressway](#). In the 1980s and 1990s, virtually all of the rest of the market was destroyed for athletic fields for the University of Illinois at Chicago. What remained of the market was moved several blocks away, north of Roosevelt along Des Plaines.

Take a look at some of the historic images of Maxwell Street and imagine you are a vendor trying to sell you items on Maxwell Street! What would you sell? What would your stall and advertisements/signs look like?



Views of vendor booths on Maxwell Street, Chicago, Illinois, 1933.
Chicago History Museum

Instructions:

- ◆ Check out this gallery with images from [Maxwell Street](#).
- ◆ Write down some notes of what you see and what you think is going on in some of these pictures..
- ◆ Think about what you would sell if you were a vendor on Maxwell Street. What would it be, what would your stand look like? Use the stall template to help you get started, or get creative and build one out of household items!
- ◆ Share your creations with us!

Journaling

Journaling is a great way to record events as they are occurring and are often used by historians when they are conducting research. Keeping a journal is also a great way to share your own thoughts, reactions, feelings, and observations of your surroundings and the things you are learning about!

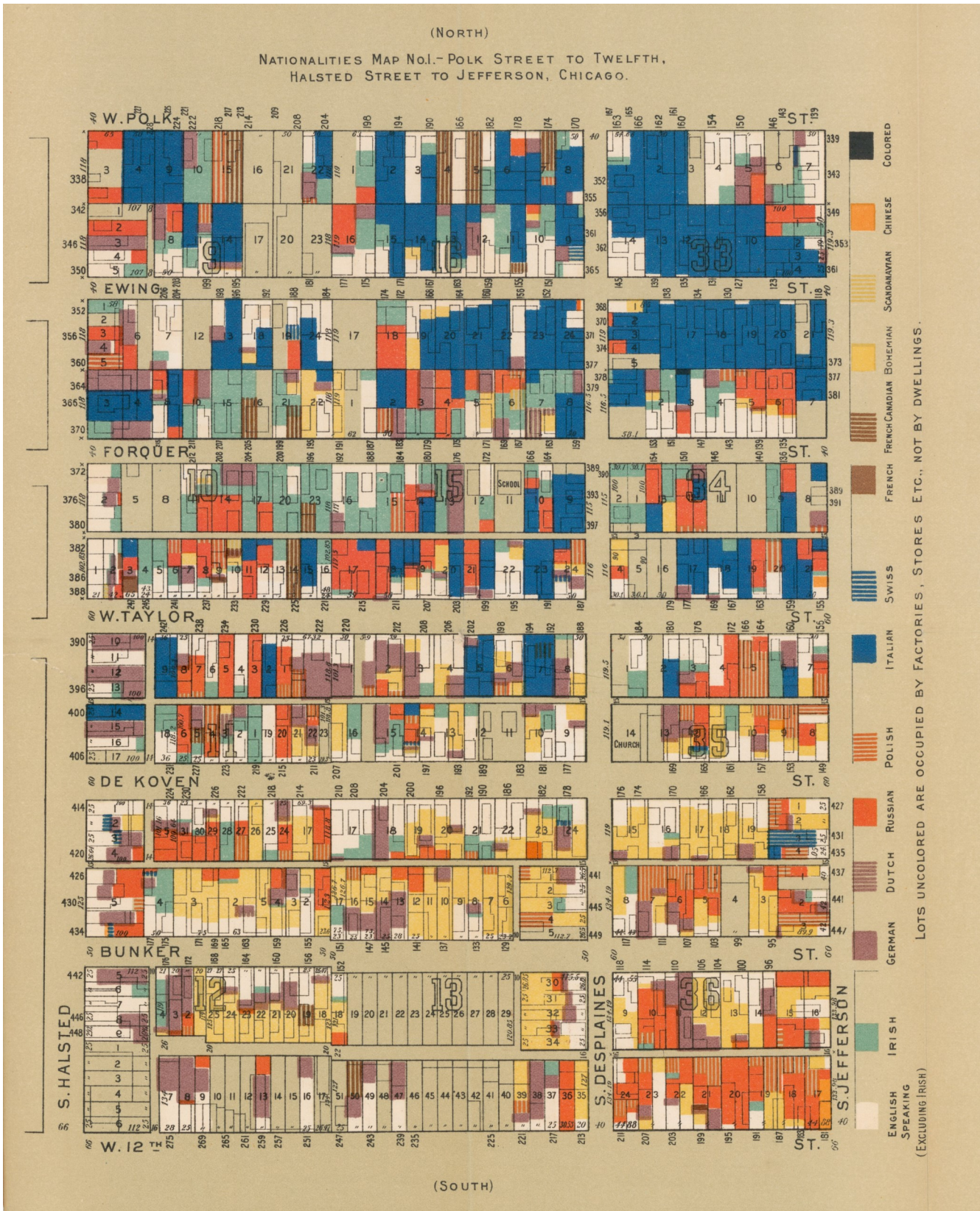
Consider keeping a journal of your experience during this pandemic, to not only record your experiences with the pandemic, but also of all the exciting, fun, and new things you may be doing and learning! You can use a notebook, your notes app on your phone, and/or a document on your computer.

Feel free to share any of your entries that you are comfortable sharing! Or share with us your thoughts on keeping a journal during these times and how you are journaling, so as to inspire others!

Share With Us!

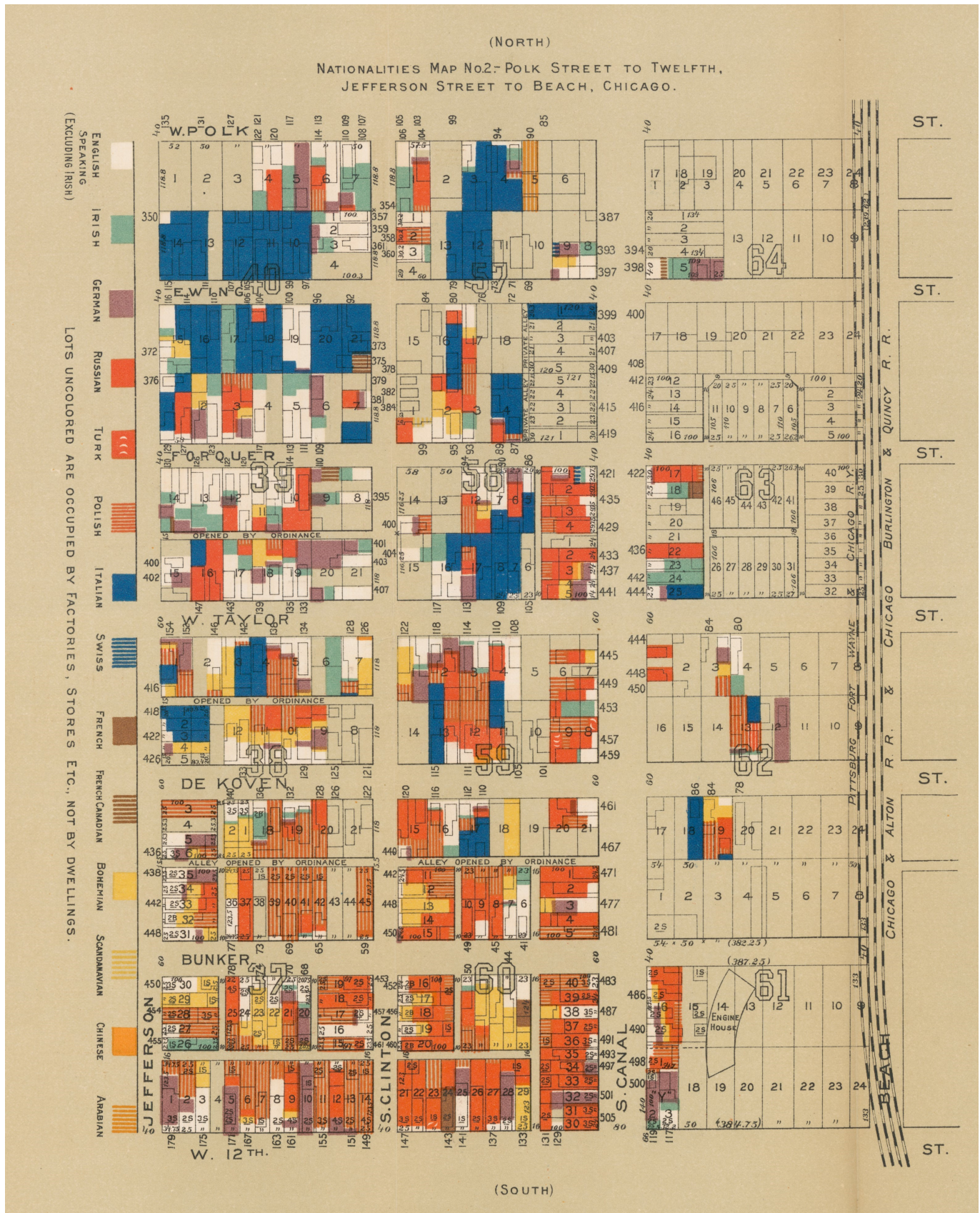
To share with us, upload your responses from your computer or from your phone through the Google Classroom App, through the submit assignment button. You can also share your creations on social media (Twitter and Instagram @chicagomuseum, Facebook @chicagohistory) tagging us and using the hashtag #historyathometeens!

Hull House Nationalities Map (1895)



Nationalities Map No. 1, Hull House, 1895. [Persuasive Maps: PJ Mode Collection](#), Northwestern university.

Hull House Nationalities Map (1895)



Nationalities Map No. 2, Hull House, 1895. [Persuasive Maps: PJ Mode Collection](#), Northwestern university.

Design Your Own Maxwell Street Market Stall

