CHICAGO'S EDUCATION LANDSCAPE:
CO-LIBERATING CHICAGO'S YOUTH THROUGH DESIGN

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ArtDes 499: Integrative Project
April 22, 2020

Intro

As most Chicagoans will talk about non-stop, I grew up in Chicago. It is where I learned about the world, and I was privileged to exist in a space where I had access to culture, a variety of experiences, and schools that parents wanted to send their kids to. I had friends from multitudes of backgrounds, but I was also severely separated from multitudes of people and cultures from across the city, and this separation was no accident. To the kids that grow up on the north side of Chicago, the people on the south side, which is primarily a black population, are made to seem like they are on the other side of the world, when in reality they are merely 15 to 20 miles away. This segregation is ingrained in Chicago's history and its maintained status quo. As I got older, I became aware of the inequalities present between myself and my peers that live these few miles south. My school options were better than theirs, my housing options were better than theirs, my public resources were better than theirs, and overall it just felt like the City of Chicago cared more about my quality of life than it did theirs.

For a city that is usually so starkly liberal, why has this status quo of racialized oppression held on for so long? White Chicagoans tend to vote Democrat just to 'vote blue', instead of really looking at what policies would be the most progressive; Chicago Democrats demonstrate a true spectrum of policy, with a lot of people running on a blue ticket just to get elected instead of promoting democratic values. As I learned more about this disparity between white students and students of color in the city, the harder it seemed to find the information that was reputable and true information, compared to the sensationalized media my parents and other peers were accustomed to ingesting. There is a way that the main news media in Chicago comes off as indifferent (if not liberal) yet sensationalizes the death and violence within the black and

brown neighborhoods in the city, making it seem like some disease runs rampant in those parts of town instead of something caused by the mismanagement of the city. As someone who has spent tons of time scouring the internet, learning from black writers and educators who were writing about the topic, the issue was obvious to me. However, whenever I tried to bring this information up to my parents, who had lived in this city for most of their life, they tended to be shocked by what they didn't know and tended to become defensive in their positionality to the subject—people in their position don't want to hear that they may have a better life because of the city's racist policy. How could I expect a city, even when most people vote liberal, to understand the progressive criteria they should be looking for when casting their vote and create real change for these marginalized students when it takes so much time and effort to realize the truth about these issues? I knew I wanted to make something with my design skills and my knowledge of education justice that can help enlighten others in the way I had been enlightened through my own research.

Through this project, I will use a book design to educate and influence the white voting population of Chicago to advocate for equal access to education within the city. My book design will be a 'picture book for voters' in Chicago with the goal of teaching Chicagoans about the historical precedents of segregation and housing discrimination, connecting that to the current issues in Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and the reforms that they can take part in within their community and with their vote. This piece will explore how graphic design for social change can move beyond the ephemeral poster or pamphlet design and into a space that creates something voters actually want to own, learn from, and share with their peers.

Context

Community Based Design

The most important step in doing any sort of art or data visualization in service to social justice is to get to know the needs of the community that you are working with and advocating for. In his book *Designing for Social Change: Strategies for Community Based Graphic Design*, Andrew Shea lays out the ground rules for designers to work by. He stresses that as designers, we need to immerse ourselves in the community and get to know their needs[1]. The community is the expert on the issues we address as designers. Because of the nature of IP, I could not work directly side-by-side with community partners in Chicago, but I did make sure to take in a lot of research written by Chicago natives. I have also reached out to organizations such as Mothers Against Senseless Killings (MASK) and teachers that work in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), which has tirelessly fought for student's rights through historical (and very recent) teacher strikes.

Chicago Education Inequities

The research I found showed me how monumental the gap really is between white and black students in Chicago. From a project called *ProPublica: Miseducation*, I learned so much about the numbers that make up the racial divide in the city. In Chicago, "black students are 4.3 times as likely to be suspended as white students, […] black students are, on average, academically 3 grades behind white students," and while making up only 39% of the school

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[1] Shea, Andrew. "Designing for Social Change: Strategies for Community-Based Graphic Design." Book. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012.

population, black students account for 75% of total expulsions in the Chicago Public School District.[2] This kind of data shows that there is something wrong with how the district handles the education of black students.

In fact, the whole structure of the Chicago Public School District is built around the racist policies Chicago was molded by and still operates around today. Historically, Chicago was racially segregated by law and social marginalization, and this segregation did not simply end with the legal end to segregation in 1964. This segregation was "manufactured by whites through a series of self-conscious actions and purposeful institutional arrangements" such as redlining and restrictive covenants that had consequences that "continue today".[3] While white people in Chicago continue to benefit from these discriminatory practices, the black population is continually subjected to the fallout of these policies.

This history has created a school district that reflects the segregation of the city. In part of their fight for equal and quality education across the city, the Chicago Teachers Union has reported on how deep this divide goes. They report that

> "Chicago's schools remain some of the most segregated in the country. Schools are often triply segregated—racially, economically, and by academic engagement. In the 2017-18 school year, 65 percent of Black students attended schools where more than 90 percent of students were also Black. [...] Triply segregated schools are particularly vulnerable to disinvestment, resource deprivation, and closure."[4]

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[2] Eads, Lena Groeger, Annie Waldman, David. "Miseducation." ProPublica. Accessed September 19, 2019. https://projects.propublica.org/miseducation/.

[3] Denton, Nancy A. "American Apartheid : Segregation and the Making of the Underclass." Book. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1993.

[4] Caref, Carol, and Et Al. "The Schools Chicago's Students Deserve 2.0 | CTU Report." Chicago Teachers Union (blog). Accessed January 24, 2020. https://www.ctulocal1.org/reports/schools-chicagos-students-deserve-2.

When schools are funded through property taxes, the schools throughout the district that are in

segregated areas with low income are automatically at a disadvantage under the schools around

the city that are home to richer and whiter families. My book design will take these histories,

facts, and figures and make them ingestible for voters all around Chicago. I want white readers to

read it and understand that this is not just an issue that the CTU complains about to get days off

of work (while they strike). This is an ongoing issue that everyone needs to understand the depth

of in order to want to act.

Publication and Information Design

My approach to graphic design is an attempt to engage readers beyond posters, facebook

banners they come across, and pamphlets they get handed on the street. Book design is

something that feels more concrete, like something that needs to, deserves to, be cared for and

thoroughly read through. The book *Posters for Change: Tear, Paste, Protest* by the Princeton
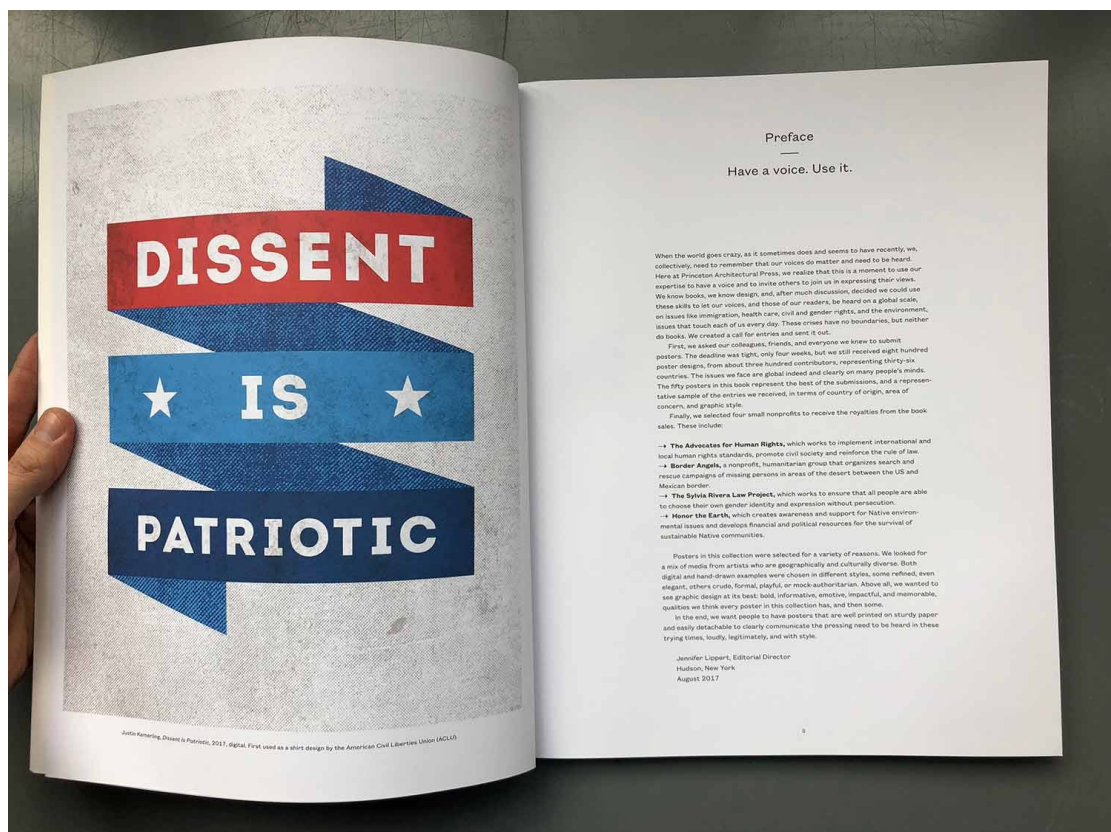
Architectural Press is a collection of posters that encourages the readers to not only sit with the poster design longer than they might if they simply passed the poster on the street, but the reader also gets their own little collection that they can tear out and paste up if they choose to. I love this design because it encourages readers to be curious about different causes as well as express
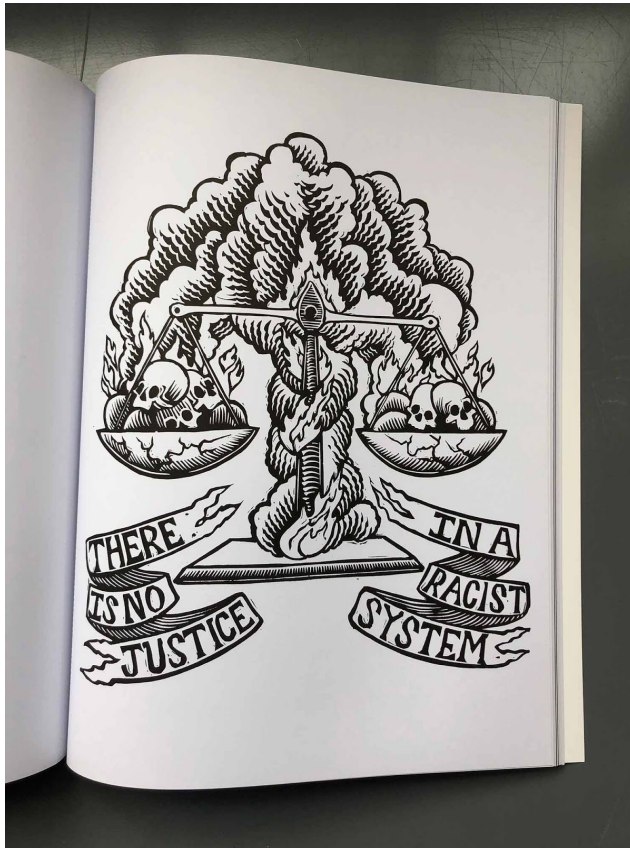

their passion all at once. Because the book as a whole seems more important than each poster separately, it makes me want to take care of each poster more than if I had just come across the posters separately.

Since information design will be a large part of how I disseminate information, I have gained inspiration from this Vox article "We can draw school zones to make classrooms less segregated. This is how well your district does." This article does a wonderful job of not only explaining the topic of gerrymandered school districts (which I will need to talk about in my book), but it also utilizes very simple illustrations to visualize what this gerrymandering looks like and how this plays into segregation of schools. These illustrations are able to get the point across in clear visual language and does not distract from the content at hand.

If kids go to the **nearest school**, it would recreate the underlying residential segregation.
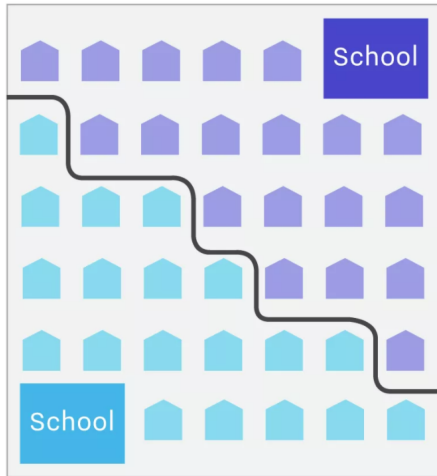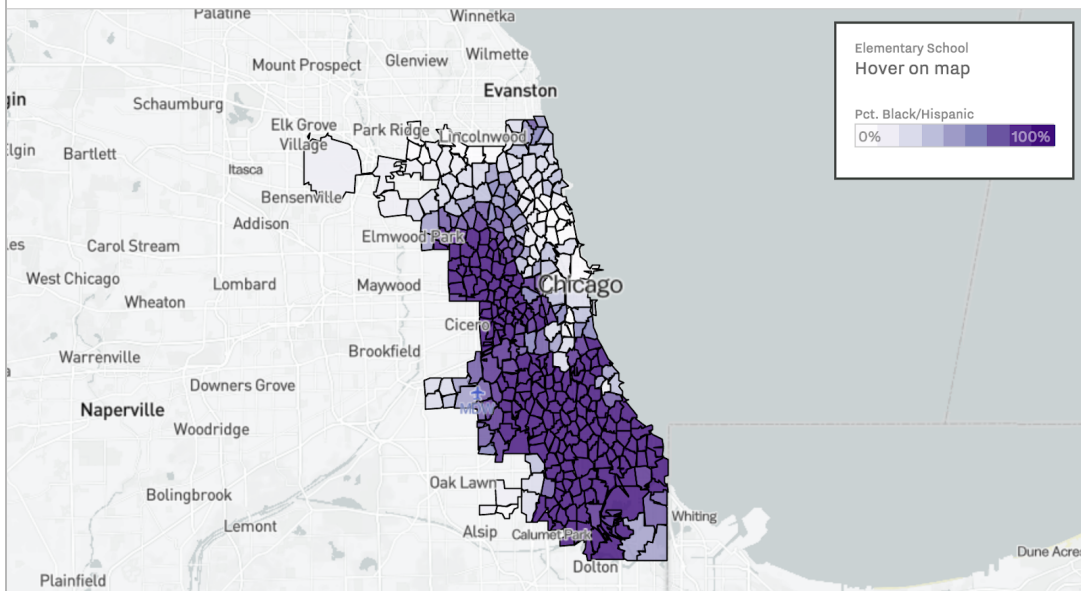
But it's possible to gerrymander these zones to **reduce segregation** — or make it worse.
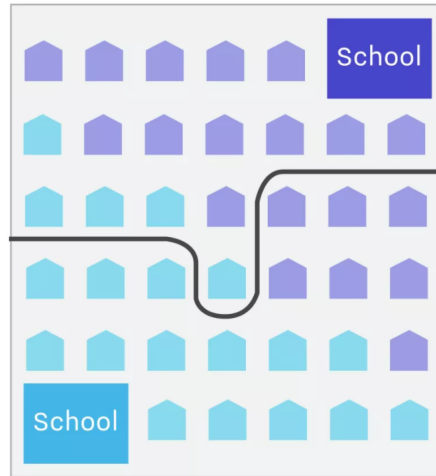

But that's not happening in most places.

How the City Of Chicago SD 299 zones would look if everyone was assigned to the **nearest elementary school**

Monarrez figured out what the zoning map would look like if each household was zoned to the nearest elementary school.

One sociologist and famed civil rights activist, W. E. B. Du Bois, became a designer in his own right when he teamed up with his students from Atlanta University to create infographics, featured in *W. E. B. Du Bois's Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America.* This book showcases the graphics they made that demonstrated "the progress made by African Americans since the Civil War" and to establish "the Black South's place within and claim to global modernity."[5] These graphics are simple and modern, drawing the eye straight to the data so that the viewer can rest on it and interpret its significance. Some pages have more text as well, which make proclamations as to what the viewer should be taking away from the content.
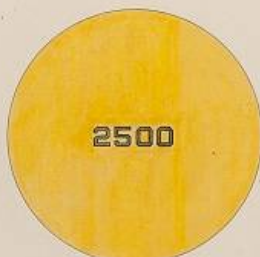

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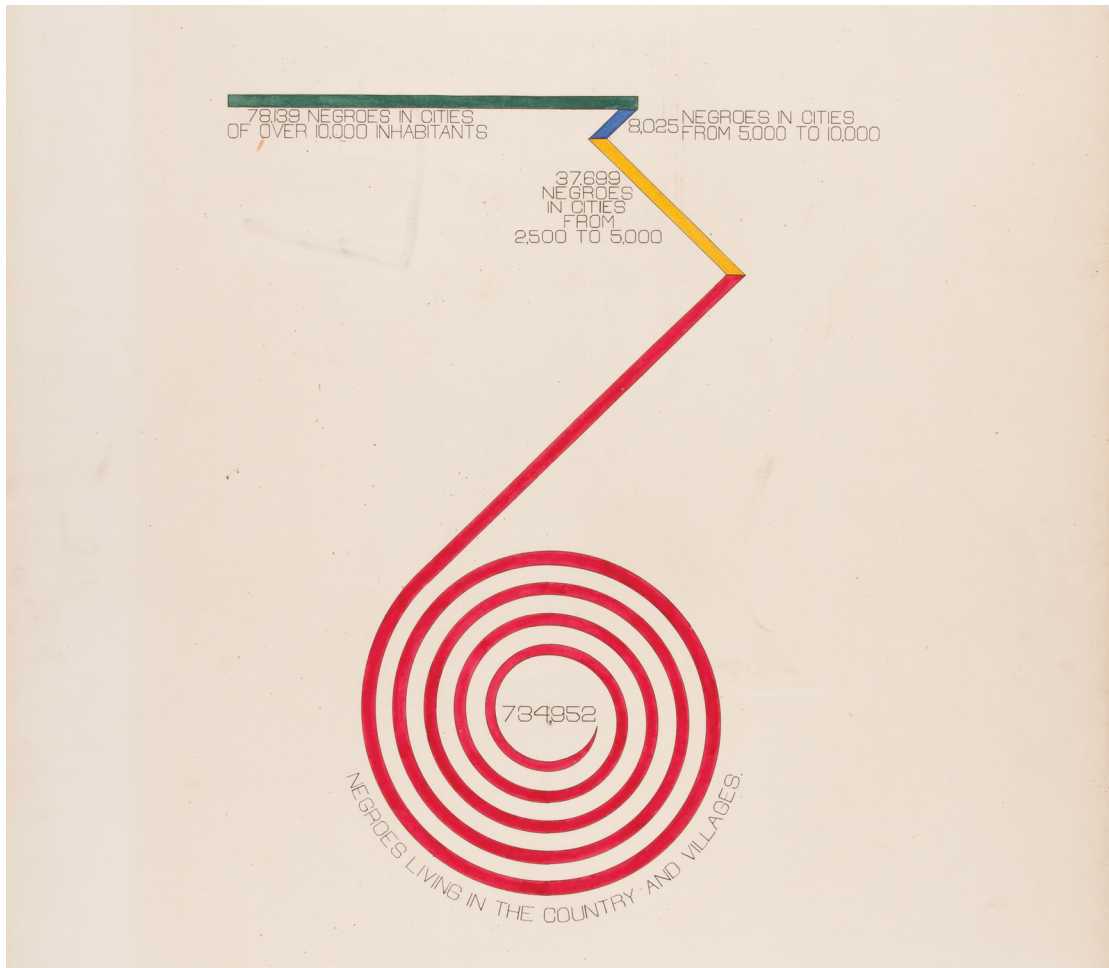
[5] Du Bois, W. E. B., Whitney Battle-Baptiste, Britt Rusert, Aldon D. Morris, Britt Rusert, Mabel Wilson, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt) Du Bois, et al. *W.E.B. Du Bois's Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America: The Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. First edition. [Amherst, Massachusetts]: Hudson, NY: The W.E.B. Du Bois Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst; Princeton Architectural Press, 2018.
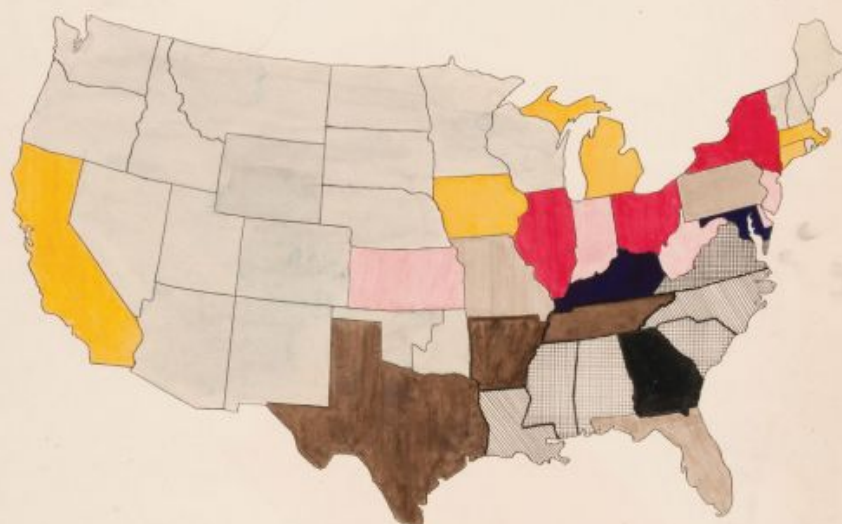
NEGRO TEACHERS IN GEORGIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

2512

1886

2500

1889

3206

1893

3316

1897

RELATIVE NEGRO POPULATION OF THE STATES OF THE UNITED STATES.

|			
■	750,000 NEGROES AND OVER		100,000 — 200,000
	600,000 — 750,000	■	50,000 — 100,000
	500,000 — 600,000		25,000 — 50,000
■	300,000 — 500,000		10,000 — 25,000
■	200,000 — 300,000		UNDER — 10,000

Methodology

Arriving at my final project idea took a lot of second guessing and reflecting on what I really wanted to get out of my project this year. Starting out, I knew I had an interest in Design for Social Change, and I had skills in graphic design and print publications. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what Design for Social Change means for me and how that can translate into an IP. I needed to figure out what social cause and social justice issue I wanted to focus on designing something about, and then I had to figure out exactly what it was that I was going to design.

As time went on, I realized I was struggling with how I would be able to expand a message of social justice beyond the normal confines of graphic design (posters, social posts, etc). I did not want to follow what seemed like a 'safe' graphic design choice of poster design. Discussing with classmates inspired me to try to make something that is more of an installation or interactive piece, maybe involving sound or projection. While I didn't have a subject for my project figured out yet, I started to generate ideas around creating this book; I saw that I was trying to tackle two issues at once: the specifics of my message, and how to make an impact while spreading that message.

I wanted to explore all the ways that print publication can work for my voice and make something long lasting—ephemeral designs like pamphlets, fliers, or posters that people only experience for a moment did not seem like enough. I believed that making something more memorable like a book would make a bigger impact because of the lasting importance books tend to have. I also wondered how sound and visual effects influence my message, since some of

the most memorable pieces about social justice that I have experienced have involved sound, moving image, or projection. Can I make someone reflect on their actions and privileges in society? Can I get them to emotionally respond and connect to the piece? Can I spur them to take an action that will help the issue? I want these questions to be some of the driving forces in what I make. Of course, I didn't end up going along this grand idea of using sound or video, but it was important to question where I could take the mediums I wanted to explore in order to make people want to listen to what I had to say. I carried these questions with me as I started to develop my book.

The most important step in this process was figuring out my message. My original idea was much too broad: I wanted to teach others about racial systems of oppression as they relate to access to education in cities across the US, in the context of historical housing segregation and other systemic discrimination. I wanted to be able to teach people about this as well as question my own position in this system and have people question their position as well. I started generating some poster design sketches and listening to audio archives around this topic in order to gather content that I might want to use in an audio portion of an installation. This was the first iterating I started to do:
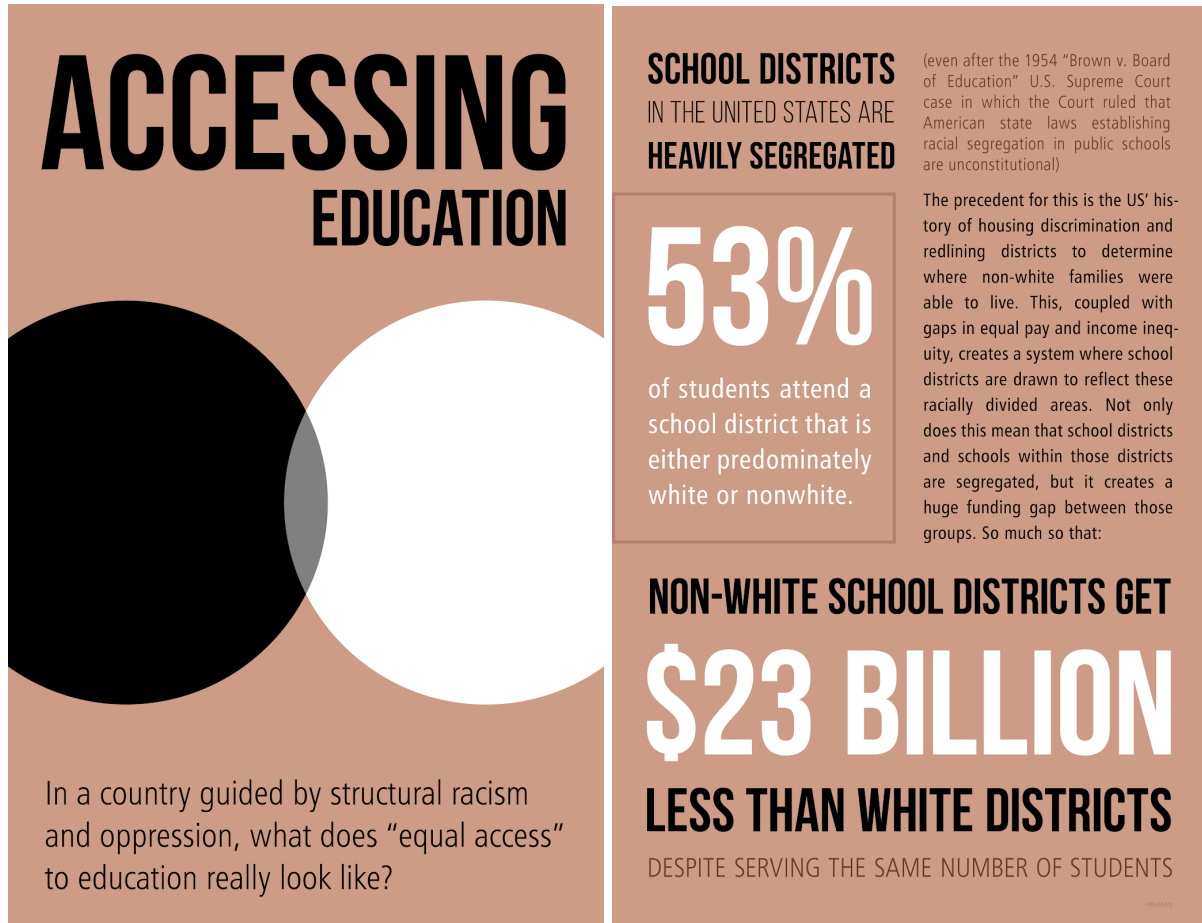
These posters are typographic based sketches that call out the inequalities in the US education system.

I made these posters in order to sketch how the information I wanted to teach people about could

disseminate in a printed fashion. It is here that I started to realize that just poster design was not

going to work for the amount of content I thought was necessary to share on this topic, and I

started to get overwhelmed with how to best showcase this broad topic. I started to question what

my real goal was with my IP project and whose attention I wanted to grab. I am a designer but I

am also an activist. Activism and social justice work does not live in the vacuum of a studio

space or an office or a brain, and I cannot get stuck in that vacuum either; I went back and

sketched some more by hand and mind-mapped. I hoped that this would help me connect all of the dots in my head into a tangible thing to design.
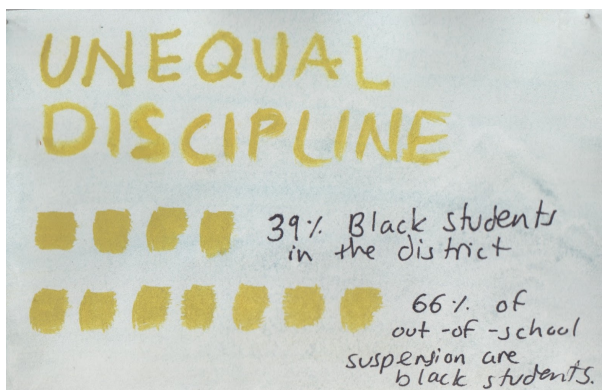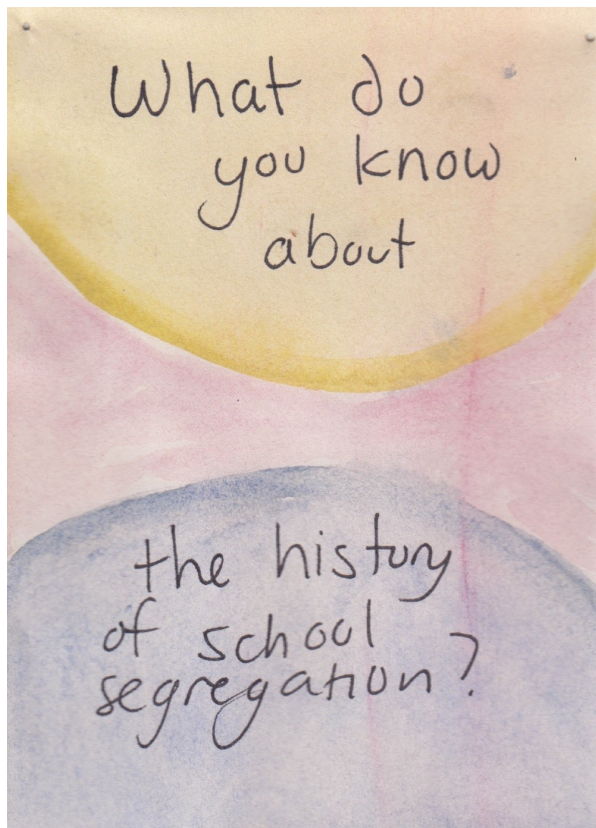

It was not until mid-October that I realized my main roadblock. Through reflection on my overwhelming anxiety over my project, I realized that trying to talk about the inequality in the whole system of education in the US is *way* too daunting of a task, and I was trying to make a *way* too daunting of a project to go along with it. Narrowing down my focus to just the educational inequity in the city of Chicago, where I grew up and plan to live after school, was the revision that I desperately needed. From this decision, I was able to narrow my research and start to create materials to test out this subject and create spreads for my book. Why is there such a discrepancy in how the city prioritizes the education of white children of black and brown

children? How has the history of Chicago led the city to a point where students on the South and West sides of the city have to deal with school closures, classroom overcrowding, neighborhoods without any sufficient public schools, and lack of resources while their peers just a few miles north of them do not have to worry about such conditions? Why are these students more familiar with the multiple police officers assigned to their school than they are with the one social worker? These are some of the questions that come to my mind when I think about Chicago Public Schools, and these are the questions that I want everyone in Chicago to ask and what everyone should be asking about their own school districts. Working through these questions with a design lens, I did some more poster iterations at first, pictured below.
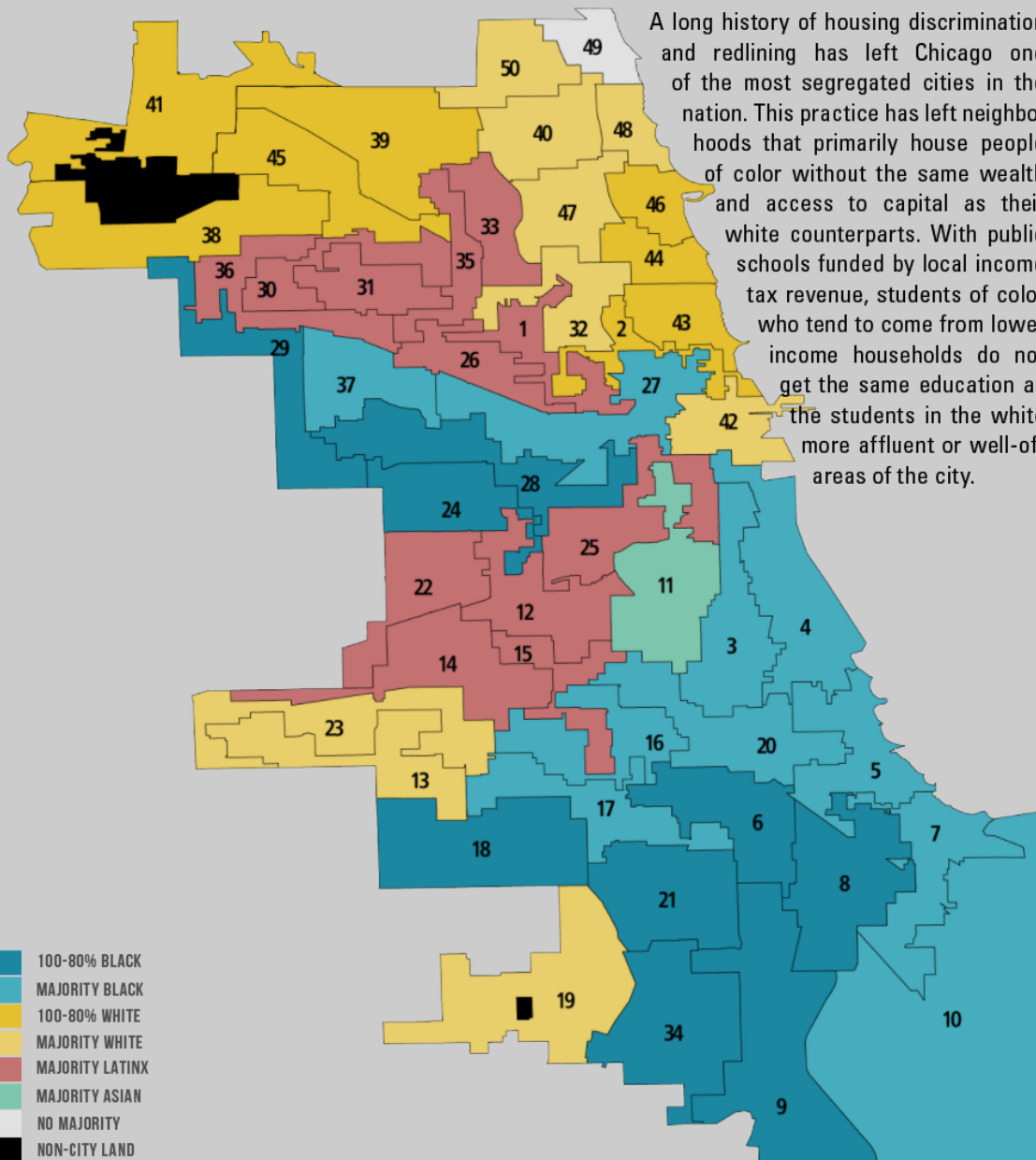
RESULTS OF A
SEGREGATED SCHOOL SYSTEM

DISTRICT COMPOSITION

GIFTED PROGRAMS

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS

EXPULSIONS
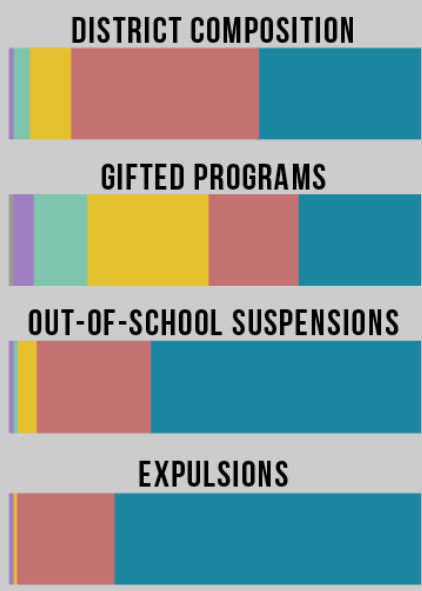
BLACK
LATINX
WHITE
ASIAN, PACIFIC ISLANDER OR NATIVE HAWAIIAN
2 OR MORE RACES
OTHER

SEGREGATED CITY

~~SECOND CITY~~
SEGREGATED CITY

A long history of housing discrimination and redlining has left Chicago one of the most segregated cities in the nation. This practice has left neighborhoods that primarily house people of color without the same wealth and access to capital as their white counterparts. With public schools funded by local income tax revenue, students of color who tend to come from lower income households do not get the same education as the students in the white, more affluent or well-off areas of the city.

100-80% BLACK
MAJORITY BLACK
100-80% WHITE
MAJORITY WHITE
MAJORITY LATINX
MAJORITY ASIAN
NO MAJORITY
NON-CITY LAND

I used these to jump into designing my spreads for the book to be able to show some sketches of spreads for the end of semester review. In the second semester, I continued bouncing between writing copy and making spreads until I was happy with the final product, making mockups of layouts and the construction of the book along the way.
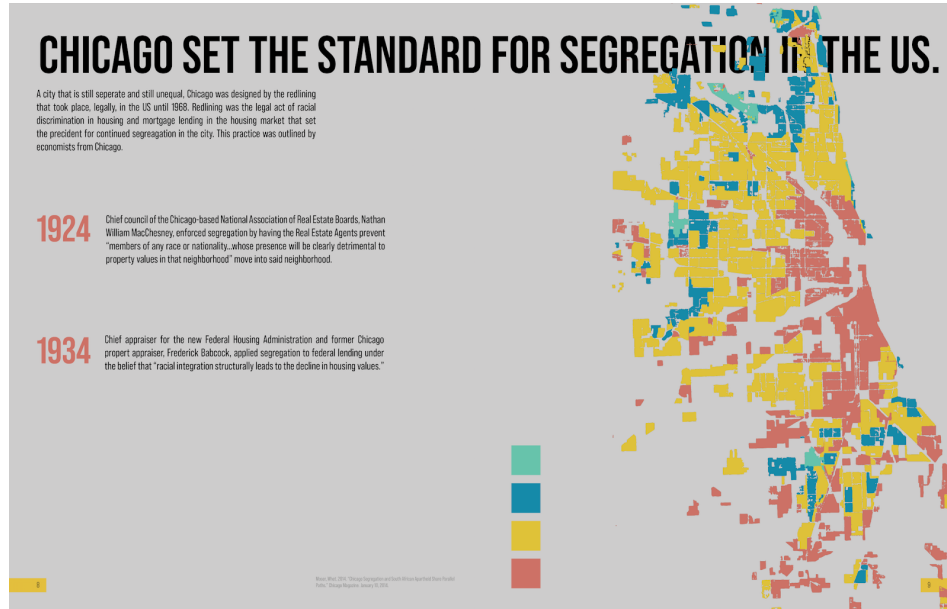
First drafts of spreads

Images of a draft accordion book pulled open, showing the spreads in succession.

Creative Work

Chicago's Education Landscape: Co-Liberating Chicago's Youth, Part 1
April, 2020
Pg. 41, Online and Printed
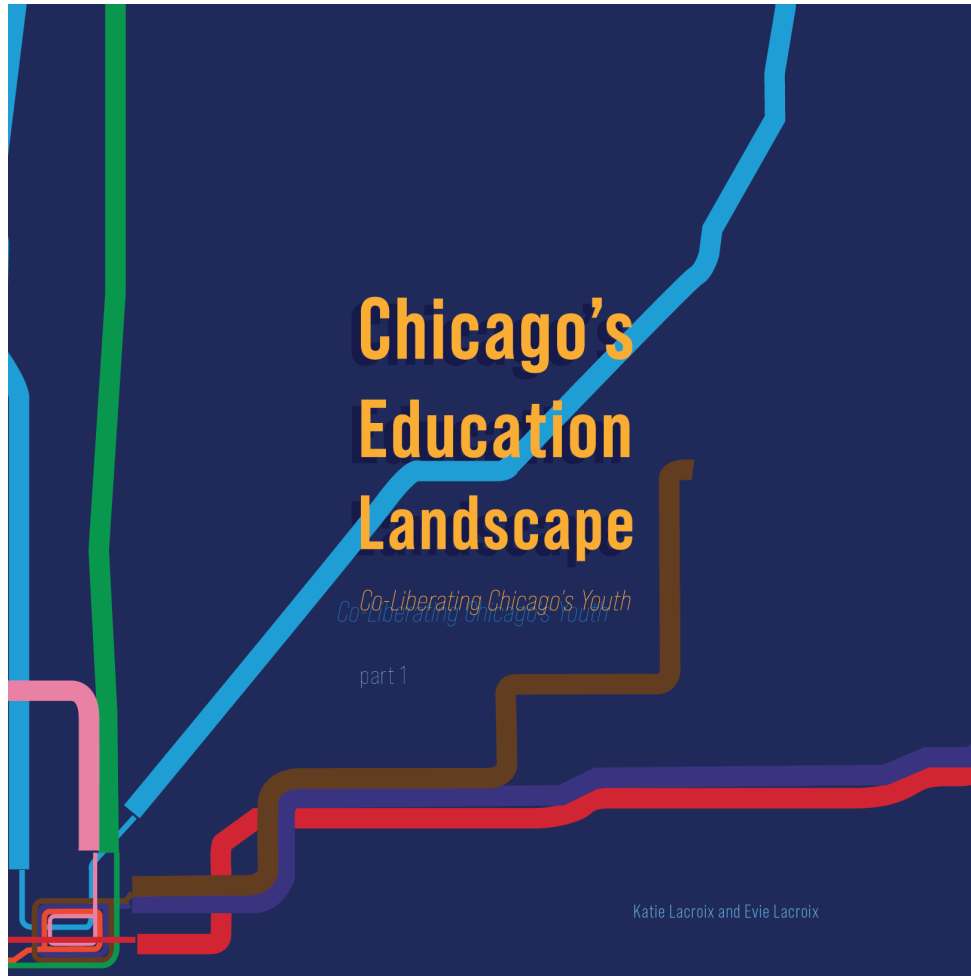Printed Closed - 8" x 8" x 1"
Printed Open - 8" x 27.3'
Epson Ultra Premium Presentation Paper Matte, Digital PDF

     Chicago's Education Landscape: Co-Liberating Chicago's Youth Part 1 in physical form is printed on Epson Ultra Premium Presentation Paper Matte and accordion bound with double sided tape. Folded up, it lives as a simple 41 page book. Unfolded, it becomes a long infographic with the pages bleeding over onto each other. The main presentation of this book for the thesis purpose will take place online, through an online flipbook platform.

     The content of the book takes the reader through several historical and contemporary topics about Chicago's education system in relation to the city's racial divide and inequities. It is co-written by me and my sister, Evie Lacroix, a journalist and expert on the subject in her own right. The content of the book is specific for the story I want to tell alongside the data that I visualized throughout the book. I felt that simply bringing attention to the issues of inequality in the city was not enough to create change, and I saw this as an opportunity to be able to actually teach Chicagoans by encapsulating my months of research into a read that makes this information much more approachable to those that don't want to (or know how to) approach this information on their own. I think that the writing in my book fits well alongside the imagery to tell a story about the effects of segregation and discrimination on the education of modern black and brown students of Chicago.

The book begins with an endearing introduction that calls Chicagoans to action. I ask the reader to take in this content and use it to inform their vote and connection to the community. The chapters of the book bring the reader through the history of the Great Migration and redlining and housing discrimination. It then connects this to the inequities in school funding across the city. The original plan of the book was shortened due to time during the COVID-19 pandemic, cutting the book into a Part 1 and a hypothetical Part 2. Part 2 will be about the school to prison pipeline created by the inequity, the rhetoric and action of the city officials and teachers over this issue, and what can be done to change the system. It ends with information on what the reader can specifically do to create change, whether that is by ballot, or by monetary or volunteering help to community organizations already working on the issue. This way of laying out the content helps the reader understand the connections between these ideas that might otherwise seem inconsequential or maybe had never heard of before; they are then immediately offered a way to help if this information has upset them.

The layout of this information is equally as important in the total design of this print publication as the aesthetic design. The aesthetics of the piece keep bright hues at the surface, which makes the content engaging and eye catching throughout, keeping the reader interested. The warm gray background keeps the content from feeling too morbid or unwelcoming, especially when there is plenty of content that is upsetting. The infographic designs are simple and clean, not asking much from the viewer to be able to understand them. This makes it easier to keep the attention of the reader, especially when a lot of this information seems daunting when trying to research on your own.

Chicago's Education Landscape

Co-Liberating Chicago's Youth

part 1

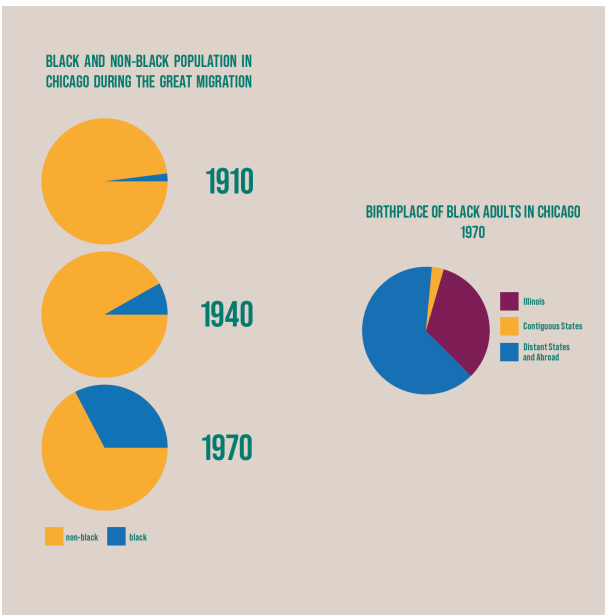Katie Lacroix and Evie Lacroix

Above: Cover of the book.
Below: Several details from across the book

As a member of one of our 77 neighborhoods I am sure you have seen injustice. This book is a guide to help educate on the historical importance of injustices in Chicago and how to use that knowledge to do better by our city. You are a voter, hopefully, and even if you don't have the power to actually cast a ballot in this city, you still have the power to advocate for the vulnerable people in our city. People, such as the students across the city who's future and quality of education relies on voters and advocates to ensure that they have a just chance at a quality future.

The bottom line is: the education policy in the city is racist.

The racism in our city is a system, a pattern, that creates "different outcomes for different people in ways linked to race".
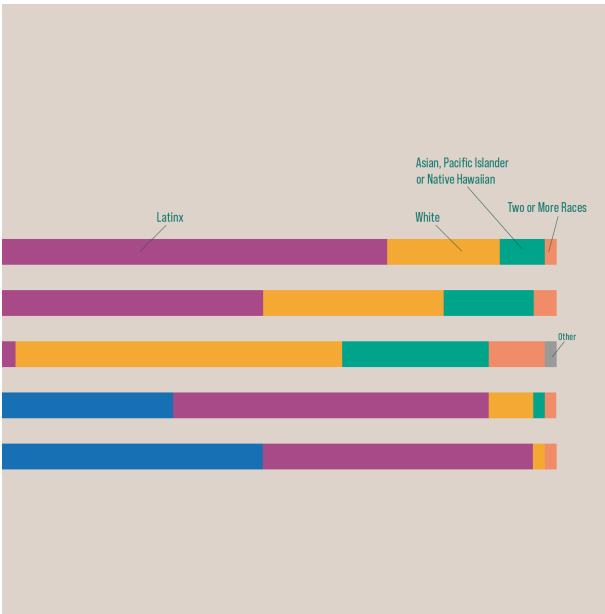
"What started as a march of the impatient, became a rite of passage, and would become the biggest under-reported story of the 20th Century"

Isabel Wilkerson,
The Warmth of Other Suns

BLACK AND NON-BLACK POPULATION IN CHICAGO DURING THE GREAT MIGRATION

1910

1940

1970

non-black   black

BIRTHPLACE OF BLACK ADULTS IN CHICAGO 1970

Illinois
Contiguous States
Distant States and Abroad

Discrimination
...t and Not Over Yet

...sing discrimination faced by black people in Chicago ...s redlining. In the 1930s, while many of your parents ... begin their life in the midst of the Great Depression, ... instituted the New Deal, which came with a hefty ...orated racism into his institution of housing across ...gram allowed white families to take out protected ...them own property and accrue wealth.

...68, 98% of the New Deal ...e given to white families.

...e this creates a cycle of poverty in the black com-
...nnot grow their wealth in the same way and can not
...as, thus creating a similar future for their children.
... enough to get a home loan, they would be charged
...red to white families with the same credit.

Latinx   White   Asian, Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian   Two or More Races   Other

Conclusion

The intention of this book is to propose a distribution of the data to the masses of Chicago. While distributing the book in the format of an accordian book is not *that* practical, the layout of the content would stay the same if it were to be published in an easier-to-handle form. I would want this content widely distributed to my neighbors, as I think it was successful in connecting the unknown histories and contemporary issues of race in Chicago education to the people who have the most voice in creating change. This distribution could be something sent home with students or put in people's mailbox; a free distribution would be important to access for everyone, or else only those interested in the content would buy it. The online flipbook could bring this to even wider audiences on top of a physical book.

Because I was not able to follow through with the Part 2 content, that would be the first step to follow up on. When I first thought of this book, I was really invested in the idea that making a book was important to making this content being something that people wanted to keep around; anything different would be too easy to discard and ignore. The online format does have its immediate advantages, but it will never stand up to the experience of holding a physical book.

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     Teachers Union* (blog). October 26, 2018.
     https://www.ctulocal1.org/reports/schools-chicagos-students-deserve-2.

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