



# Urban Patterns: The Textual Making of Race and Space, Chicago 1893-1945

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In 1915, sociologist Robert E. Park described the modern city as “a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate,” a spatial—and racial—imaginary that had already been expressed in Jacob Riis’s portrayal of the Lower East Side as an “extraordinary crazy-quilt” of ethnic immigrant groups in his 1890 exposé *How the Other Half Lives* and that was reinforced in the 1930s by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation “redlining” maps. My research considers how the entanglements of geographic imaginaries and material conditions serve to racialize urban space, emphasizing the role of narrative in both upholding and homogenizing geographic representations but also in critiquing those representations by revealing the very narrativity of their construction. I focus on Chicago in the early twentieth century, where the “Chicago School” sociologists taught literature as a window into the urban

psyche and interacted with local authors such as Richard Wright. This was, significantly, a moment at which Chicago was America’s most iconic and rapidly growing city, a period during which the intersecting histories of American urbanism, immigration, and the Great Migration also laid the groundwork for the city’s notorious—and still existent—segregation. Bringing together narratology and cultural geography, my talk will theorize the relationship between narrative mapping and racialized space by bringing together turn-of-the-century realist novels (Henry Blake Fuller’s *The Cliff-Dwellers* and Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*) with Chicago Black Renaissance short fiction (Marita Bonner’s Frye Street stories).

Sophia Bamert is a PhD candidate in English with a designated emphasis in Writing, Rhetoric, and Composition Studies at the University of California, Davis. She holds a BA in English and Environmental Studies from Oberlin College and an MA in English from UC Davis. Sophia is currently a visiting lecturer at the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at JGU Mainz.