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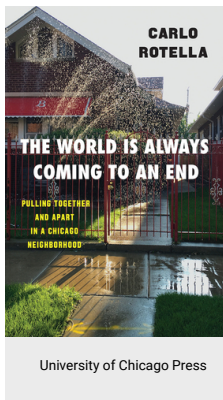
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## Why does South Shore resist gentrification?

Carlo Rotella is a Boston-based author of a new book that explores race, class and history in the lakefront Chicago neighborhood where he grew up.

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### REPRINTS



Between 1960 and 1970, the racial makeup of South Shore, the lakefront neighborhood between 67th and 79th streets, went from 90 percent white and 10 percent black to 28 percent white and 58 percent black.

Carlo Rotella's parents, who were white, bought a house near 71st and Oglesby in 1967. The changing racial makeup of the neighborhood "didn't matter to them; they had found a house they could afford," Rotella said. The house was \$22,000, the equivalent of about \$168,000 in today's dollars. "They were land-hungry, middle-class immigrants who saw that in South Shore they could buy a house for \$22,000 near the University of Chicago," where both were graduate students. Over the next two decades, they would raise their three sons in the neighborhood, in the two-story bungalow on Oglesby and later in a larger house on Euclid in the Jackson Park Highlands section of South Shore.

Now, more than half a century later, Rotella has written a book based on his research and interviews in South Shore, "[The World is Always Coming to an End: Pulling Together and Apart in a Chicago Neighborhood](#)," published by the University of Chicago Press in April. He looks at how the pressures of race and class have shaped the area and the people who live in a neighborhood with many physical gifts, including the lakefront, the South Shore Cultural Center and blocks of classic homes. Rotella is the author of five previous books, a regular contributor to the New York Times magazine and a professor of American studies, English and journalism at Boston College.

It's the second book in recent months to spring out of a childhood in South Shore in the late 20th century. In "[Becoming](#)," former first lady and South Shore native Michelle Obama wrote extensively of her and her family's experiences during the same era of racial change.

This evening, Rotella will speak about his book, Chicago's legendary Bungalow Belt and other issues at the South Shore Cultural Center—two blocks from the house his parents bought in 1967—at [a free event](#) hosted by the Chicago Bungalow Association. We interviewed him last week by phone.

### How would you describe South Shore?

It's easy to underrate just how physically attractive South Shore is. It's got great public transportation, it's close to downtown, and you have Jackson Park. And if you're down by the lake, it's sort of a miracle that there's this inland sea right next to your neighborhood.

### What's going on in South Shore now that drew your interest?

The middle class is being hollowed out. The middle-class blacks who replaced my parents—the cops and firefighters and nurses and people in public unions—are aging out of South Shore, and they're not being replaced. What's left is higher-income people in the co-ops by the lake and Jackson Park Highlands, and lower-income people in the apartments. The separation in South Shore is really income, not race. That's how South Shore is a pretty good microcosm of the country: We moved heaven and earth to make the middle class bigger in the middle of the 20th century, and we've been working pretty hard to make it smaller since the 1970s. The country has been transformed from three classes—working, middle and upper—to two, the haves and have-nots.

### How does that play out in South Shore?

When Dominick's closed on 71st Street (in 2013, as part of the final shutdown of that longtime grocery chain), it was a vanishing species because it was a middle-of-the-road supermarket for a middle-class population. A replacement didn't come in for years (until this spring) because in South Shore there are too many poor people for an upper-end store and too many rich people for a low-end store. And if you look at [reviving 71st Street](#) (a onetime hub of commerce), the question is, make 71st Street attractive to whom? What the haves in the neighborhood regard as blank space, the dollar stores and convenience stores, are servicing the have-nots, selling them both necessities and junk.

### Do you see gentrification spreading into South Shore from crowded Hyde Park, as is happening in Woodlawn?

That's been the story you hear in South Shore ever since white people left: that South Shore will join the rest of the lakefront neighborhoods in "upscaling." But the numbers don't back that up. (In [the latest data](#) from the American Community Survey in 2017, 71 percent of South Shore households made less than \$50,000 a year, compared to about 38 percent regionwide.) There are a few people moving in, but they come for the same reason my parents did: They can afford a house. If this were Boston or New York or San Francisco (all cities [where gentrification is sweeping through neighborhoods faster than it is in Chicago](#)), you'd see people buying up properties, converting apartment buildings into condos, but you're not seeing that in South Shore.

*Letter  
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