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The Red Line

> The city consequently tends to resemble a mosaic of social worlds in which the transition from one to the other is abrupt.
>
> – Louis Wirth[1]

Though we are generally free to go where we choose, there are still certain places we are unlikely to go. We have boundaries that we are unlikely to cross, the result of prejudices, routines, and networks of other people that create these boundaries and put both physical and psychological space between ourselves and others.

Trains, on the other hand, will cross boundaries that people typically will not. The Red Line of Chicago's elevated train, known as the "L," travels a straight line from north to south. Unlike other lines, it doesn't eventually bend to the west and it doesn't split and offer you a choice of branches. Nor does it circle around, like the trains in the downtown Loop, sending you back where you came from. If a Red Line train starts on the north side of the city, there is nowhere to go but south. Coming from the south side, there is nowhere to go but north. Either way, the train crosses a boundary that its riders typically do not.

In Chicago, the boundary between north and south is the boundary between white and Black. It is not a sharp boundary like an international border; there are complexities, such as the racially integrated Hyde Park neighborhood and an Irish-Catholic neighborhood, Mount Greenwood, on the South Side. But everyone in Chicago knows the boundary is there and most accept that the other side is a place you shouldn't go. For a white person in Chicago, the South Side is a void, populated only by stereotypes. When a tourist – usually white – unfolds a map of Chicago, the South Side isn't even shown.

Chicagoans don't travel from north to south or south to north because there is not only a physical distance between these two parts of the city, but also – and much more importantly – a psychological distance. To people on one side

of the city, the people on the other side are simply not like them. That sense of difference puts a space between them. This book is about how and why this space affects thought and behavior.[2]

For a period of my life, I frequently crossed this boundary. On weekday mornings, I would board a Red Line train in my North Side neighborhood to go to work as a high school teacher. On the bitterly cold winter mornings in Chicago, before 6 AM, when the wind would blow off the lake, the train platform on Belmont Avenue was almost deserted. The few people waiting for the train would huddle for warmth under the heat lamps on the elevated platform. The empty train would travel south toward the Loop, eventually abandoning its elevation and going underground, where it would stop under office skyscrapers and a handful of ambitious passengers in suits and ties would get off, ready to be the first to work. Around Washington Street, the train would start to fill up again, but now with people going home from work, and the demographics would change. In Chicago, people whose workday ends at 6 AM are generally not white; they are largely Black and Hispanic. After a while, I was the only white passenger on the train.

As a teacher, I got to work before many people were even awake and I worked until the school building was ready to close at 6 PM. Waiting at 69th and Dan Ryan for my train home, all the tired people waiting with me were Black, heading north to start the workday cleaning and polishing the buildings of the Loop for the white workers from the North Side.

On this evening journey north, somewhere under the Loop, two worlds would briefly meet. South Side Blacks would shoulder out of the train, ready to go to work, and North Side whites would board the train, ready to go home. These two worlds, normally not occupying the same place at the same time, would cross paths as one took the other's place.

At those brief stops, when these groups of people – normally segregated into their different sides of the city – came together, there was a palpable tension. It seemed to me that, somewhere in the back of their minds, these white and Black passengers were thinking about what they might find if they were to stay on the train all the way north or all the way south.

In the downtown Loop there was a mixing of people. On the far South or North sides, there was stark segregation. Over time, I came to believe that Chicagoans kept this image of the distinctly segregated sides of the city in their heads and that it served to organize their world: where they should go and where they shouldn't; how close they felt to different types of people; even whether or not they supported a particular politician.

This book is about how politics is shaped by experiences like those of the "L" riders in Chicago. How the passengers' thoughts and behaviors were structured by the space between their groups – Blacks and whites – and, more generally, how the space between us, wherever we live, affects the way we think and behave every day and affects the way we make consequential decisions, such as whom to trust, with whom to share, and for whom to vote.

I will make the case that for the passengers on the elevated train, one of the most important forces shaping their political and social outlook was the presence of people who were *the other*: for whites, it was Blacks and for Blacks, it was whites. I will argue that their attitudes about the other group were crucially shaped by the geographic location of that group. And I will show that Chicago's "L"riders are just one example of a phenomenon which affects people all over the United States and across the world.

This geographical shaping of attitudes about groups is important because it affects our individual and collective decision-making and, in a democratic society, we must and do make important decisions together, whatever our physical and psychological distance from each other. Black and white Chicagoans, like Blacks and whites in other parts of the United States and like other ethnic and racial groups elsewhere, live largely separate lives: working, shopping, worshiping, socializing, and taking their leisure separately. Most grocery stores, restaurants, and even beaches in Chicago, for example, are either largely white or largely Black. Most people have few, if any, friends from the other group. Despite living separately, we share the same institutions and resources in the public sphere: electing representatives and making decisions on taxing, spending, and matters of law. We use the same roads, water, electricity, and other goods and must decide how these are allocated. The public sphere – government – is like the station under the Chicago Loop where groups come together.

I will try to convince you that socio-geographic space – that is, the distribution of groups on the Earth's surface – has a direct effect on relations between groups and that these effects have political consequences. In broad strokes, the theory I will offer says that the geographic space between groups leads to a psychological space between groups, which, in turn, leads to a political space between them.

There are many examples of this psychological space affecting behavior in the spaces where groups must come together and interact. In New York City, for example, complaints to the police about neighbors making too much noise or blocking a driveway are most common in areas where white and Black neighborhoods come together.[3]

Similarly, but perhaps more significantly, the waves of racialized crime between whites and Blacks in Boston in the 1970s and '80s, including assaults and property damage, occurred along certain streets where traditionally white neighborhoods met expanding Black neighborhoods.[4]

In Northern Ireland, the centuries-old sectarian violence between Catholics and Protestants has a distinct spatial pattern: arson, riots, and interpersonal attacks are most common where segregated Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods border each other.[5]

When the geographic and psychological space between groups is large, we can see its effects across entire societies, shaping how effectively these societies function: Israelis of different religious groups are less likely to cooperate in cities where their groups are residentially segregated than in integrated cities.[6]

And in the United States, white voters in racially segregated counties were less likely to vote for Barack Obama in 2008 than those living in more integrated counties.[7] On a larger scale, countries such as the United States, in which various religions, races, and ethnicities all live but are segregated into different parts of the country, simply don't function as well as less diverse and less segregated countries. They are less likely to solve the collective action problems that need to be solved for a decent quality of life, such as building roads, providing schooling, and helping the needy.[8]

In this book, I explore these and other relationships that demonstrate the powerful impact of social geography on our individual behavior and on the well-being of society. And I ask why? Why does social geography have this effect? My answer is that geography penetrates our psychology – it affects the very way we perceive other groups – and with these changes in perception, it affects our behavior.

WHEN GROUPS OCCUPY THE SAME PLACE

Another way to describe the subject of this book is to say I want to understand what happens when people of different social groups occupy the same location. When two groups – say two religious groups, racial groups, or nationalities – live in the same city or neighborhood, how does this affect the behavior of the individuals making up those two groups? Will they behave differently toward each other than they would have under other circumstances? Will their politics be different?

It's not hard to see how much this matters. As I write this in 2017, liberal democracies in Europe are grappling with immigration from the Muslim world. In the United States, mainstream politics now includes a level of blatant xenophobia that hasn't been seen for some time and elements of that xenophobia hold the reins of power. A contribution of this book is to understand why this xenophobia takes hold.

Today's questions of diversity are, perhaps, unique in their urgency because technological, economic, and political forces are diversifying parts of the world at an accelerating pace, but the problem is of course much older and broader. And, because I will focus on the universality of the way humans react to humans of other groups in the same place, it is worthwhile to emphasize the prominence of the theme of conflict and place throughout human history. Herodotus, a contemporary of Socrates and often considered the founder of the Western study of history, devoted much of his *Histories* to ethnographic accounts of the people of India, China, and northeast Africa, who came into contact with Greeks via their common connection with the Persian Empire. For the most part, what he recounts is conflict. He begins his treatise with a telling sentence about geography and dispute: "The Persian learned men say that the Phoenicians were the cause of the dispute. These (they say) came to our seas from the sea which is called Red, and having settled in the country which they

still occupy…"[9] Much of the Old Testament also concerns the occupation of the same land by two or more groups. Later in this book, I will discuss how this psychological impact of space and social groups appears to be a basic building block of the modern human mind, having evolved in our distant past.

Scholars will recognize that the subject of groups and place has a rich tradition in the social sciences. In the United States, modern social science arose contemporaneously with the great waves of domestic and international migration in the mid-twentieth century and the aftermath of World War II. The new disciplines found it natural to examine the social consequences of different groups, usually Blacks and whites, sharing space in America's great cities. Some very influential social science was developed to examine these changes. The social psychologist Gordon Allport, who will feature prominently in this book, focused much of his 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*,[10] on how the coming together of Blacks and whites in American cities affected their prejudices. A little over 50 years later, when Robert Putnam was honored with an international award for contributions to political science, he started his now famous acceptance speech by saying:

> One of the most important challenges facing modern societies, and at the same time one of our most significant opportunities, is the increase in ethnic and social heterogeneity in virtually all advanced countries. The most certain prediction that we can make about almost any modern society is that it will be more diverse a generation from now than it is today. This is true from Sweden to the United States and from New Zealand to Ireland.[11]

Of course, social diversity, which has concerned so many scholars, can take many different forms. A proper study of diversity involves not only the demographics of who lives in a particular place, but also the study of space; that is, the distribution of groups across the Earth's surface. Are they integrated with or segregated from each other? If they are segregated, are these separate groups near to or far from each other? Chicago, for example, was about 33 percent Black in 2014. But as is obvious while riding the "L," this 33 percent is not distributed evenly across the city. Blacks and whites are starkly segregated. But what if they weren't? Or what if these two populations, instead of living in different parts of the same city – not all that many miles apart – instead lived in two different cities? Obviously, space will shape the experience of diversity.

The central argument of this book is that geographic space structures social cognition – that is, how people think about other people – and this, in turn, structures our politics. In other words, we use space to psychologically organize our social world and this affects our political behavior. In addition to this central premise, I will make two other contributions. First, I will work to convince you that the effect of social geography is large and consequential – that it affects fundamental aspects of our behavior and institutions. Second, I will demonstrate why social geography has this effect on our behavior – that

the effect is direct, working through our perceptions, and not just a result, as most scholarship would have us believe, of interpersonal contact across groups.

Here is an illustration of the theory. Imagine two cities that are identical except that in one city, two groups of people, say Christians and Muslims, live side by side in their neighborhoods, while in the other city, the neighborhoods are strictly segregated, so that Christians and Muslims always live in different neighborhoods. Christians in the segregated city, relative to those in the integrated city, would think that they have less in common with Muslims. They would therefore be less likely than Christians in the integrated city to, say, vote for a mayoral candidate whom they saw as representing Muslims and would make more of an effort to turn out and vote against that candidate.

My theory offers another prediction: say that in one city, Muslims are a small population compared to Christians, while in the other city, Muslims are much more numerous than Christians. Christians in the city with the large Muslim population, relative to those in the city with the smaller Muslim population, would think that they have less in common with Muslims and this, too, would affect their behavior.

Moreover, if this group of Christians live in closer proximity to Muslims in the first city than in the second city, this too will cause Christians in the first city to believe they have less in common with Muslims than do Christians in the second city.

At first glance, this may seem contradictory: how could a group being more numerous or proximate have the same effect as that group being more segregated? But when I go into the psychology behind these three phenomena – the segregation, size, and proximity of a group affecting behavior – I will explain that they spring from the same place in human psychology.

I am claiming that the difference in geography between these two hypothetical cities is *causing* the difference in perception and behavior. Later in the book, I will give a more detailed explanation of what I mean by "causing," but in a nutshell, taking segregation as an example, I am saying that I can show that if you took two groups of people and flipped a coin to determine that some members of each group would live in segregation and others would live in integration, those living in segregation would have different attitudes toward the other group than those living in integration. This ability to demonstrate that a contextual factor, such as segregation, is causally related to behavior has largely eluded social scientists. They have long wished to conduct experiments to establish such effects, but had no way to manipulate city dwellers the way they could manipulate rats or undergraduate students in laboratory studies. The problem is indeed difficult, but not unsolvable. I will later describe research in which I, essentially, flipped a coin to assign segregation. That coin flip – that is, the resulting segregation – changed behavior.

Why does space have this impact? First, geographic space is a very important part of how humans understand the world. We make many judgments about people and things based on where they live or where they are. Just consider

names like Harlem, Bel Air, or the South Side of Chicago and try not to think of any stereotypes about the people who live there. Second, people use this geographic space when considering the differences between groups. Why this happens is somewhat complex, but a simple way to think about it is that people use space as a "mental shortcut" – in psychological terminology, a heuristic – to help them organize the world and decide what they think about other groups.

As a simple example of the psychology underlying this impact, imagine two Anglo American women living in two different cities, but identical to each other in all other respects, including that neither has any Latino friends or close Latino colleagues. One lives in a city in which Latinos and Anglos are segregated, the other in a city in which they are integrated. Imagine, too, that everything else about these cities is identical. The Anglo woman in the integrated city might think – consciously or unconsciously – that she and the Latino people in her neighborhood are much like each other. She might assume that they have similar incomes, shop in the same places, and know some of the same people. However, the woman in the segregated city might think – consciously or unconsciously – that the Latinos in her city are quite different from her. She might assume that they make less money, shop in different places, and don't know anyone she knows. And, importantly, I will show that these perceptions become *distorted by geography* – that the woman in the segregated city will assume Latinos are more different from her than Latinos actually are.[12]

A perception of similarity has consequences: it allows you to coordinate with the other group because you believe you share preferences on how to do things like build roads and teach children. A sense of similarity makes you more likely to trust somebody; for example, to trust that they will do their part to pay to build that road. For the same reasons, a sense of similarity makes you more inclined to vote for a candidate from another group, trusting that she is likely to agree with you about how and why to build roads and teach children. This ability to agree and to trust has ripple effects across societies, affecting the comparative fate of nations, making them rich or poor, harmonious or discordant.

WHAT IF THE SOUTH SIDE WEREN'T BLACK?

A useful exercise for understanding the argument of this book and for understanding much of the evidence I will present is to imagine an alternative journey on the "L" train through the geographic space of Chicago. This exercise also helps us to see why the findings in this book are important, not just to academics, but also to people thinking about how cities should be built and other questions of public policy and to people with an interest in an inclusive society.

What if, on a journey on the "L" train, the southbound Red Line passengers were not white and the northbound passengers were not Black? What if a white person boarded on the North Side and rode south into neighborhoods that just

had more white people? Or what if the southbound and northbound trains both had a mix of Black and white, so that no matter where she got on or off, she would find herself amongst both Black *and* white people?

It is difficult to imagine that the tension that is so palpable at the Loop stations when northbound and southbound passengers come together would still exist in a world in which the color of a passenger's skin wasn't so tightly connected to where she was likely to be found – to parts of the city in which she was seen to belong or not belong. I contend that social tension would be considerably reduced. Specifically, I contend that if Chicagoans were no longer able to use this geographical distinction between north and south and Black and white to psychologically organize their social and political worlds, their attitudes toward the other group would change. Not only that, they would change for the better – less hostile, less suspicious, less uncooperative. There would still be social and political conflict, of course, but it would be different and, I will argue, less severe.

In Chicago, the counterfactual of a world in which a person could take the Red Line from north to south and not see Black people was once a reality, so while it may be difficult to imagine today, we can actually read about it in historical accounts. In the early and mid-twentieth century, Chicago was a much more white city. Famously Black neighborhoods, such as Englewood and Auburn Gresham, were almost entirely white then. But within a very short time, they became almost entirely Black, due to the great waves of Black migration from the South.

What if these Black Southerners had not moved north, displacing white residents on the South Side of Chicago? Or what if there had been a wave of *white* Southerners coming north? What would Chicago politics look like? Would Chicago be as segregated as it is now? If it were not so segregated, how would things be different?

Even without a deep historical examination, we can be fairly confident that things would be different – that the attitudes associated with the geography of Chicago would not be the same. It is doubtful that uttering the words "South Side of Chicago" to a white audience would be packed with meaning the way it is now, conjuring up stereotypes of crime, poverty, and cultural difference. These stereotypes, in turn, are likely to influence the opinions of whites and Blacks when thinking about politics.

Consider the maps in Figures 1.1 and 1.2. The first is a map of Chicago with neighborhoods colored by their percent Black. Here the familiar racial pattern of starkly Black clusters is striking. This is segregation laid bare. It is these Black swaths of the city that are associated with stereotypes and perceptions of difference for non-Blacks. The rider on the "L" train, moving through space, is crossing a neatly defined boundary from one social group to the next.

With the second map, I have done something simple: I had a computer randomly rearrange the population of the city.[13] The difference is as striking as the segregation itself. Your mind no longer has the easy mental congruence

of groups and space and, therefore, the group is perceived as less cohesive. In this non-segregated Chicago, the geographic division of Black and White into South and North is gone. The "L" rider never crosses a boundary that creates a physical and psychological space between groups. Rather, she keeps moving through a continuously changing mix of people. Race and place would be difficult to align in her mind; the physical and psychological space between groups would be diminished. And so we might imagine that, in this counterfactual world, politics, too, might be different. (In Chapter 4, I will show that people actually have social maps like in Figure 1.1 in their minds.)

As it happens, we do not have to rely on counterfactual reasoning to see what the difference might be. As recently as 2004, certain neighborhoods in Chicago underwent a dramatic demographic transformation when government action brought an end to a large portion of the infamous Chicago public housing system, changing scores of blocks that were once almost exclusively Black and poor to white and upper-class. In some areas of Chicago, this dramatically changed local segregation (public housing, circa 2000, is displayed in Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

The demolition of public housing in Chicago in the 2000s is an excellent example of a government dramatically changing the way people live. It is a particularly useful example because, of course, it was the government that, with the best intentions of mid-century urban renewal, built those housing projects in the first place, helping to shape the city's racial dynamics for decades. My evidence shows that by creating a particular geographic space, Chicago's mid-century urban planners were affecting the psychology of intergroup relations. Subsequent inaction helped perpetuate this psychology. But what would have happened if, instead, Chicago had had the political will to integrate public housing, as Boston did in the 1970s, when Blacks were allowed, under police protection, to move into all-white public housing?[14] (In Chapter 5, we will talk to some of the police who oversaw this integration.) This sort of action by the government means that my counterfactuals are less fanciful: because we know about the intentional actions that led to segregation, we also know that, given different intentional actions, a counterfactual world in which cities are less segregated could have or could yet become reality.

In later chapters, we will examine other examples of purposeful action by governments and individuals to reinforce the spatial separation of groups: actions taken by African Americans in Los Angeles concerned about the growing Latino presence in their neighborhood, by the Israeli government building segregated housing blocks that are off-limits to ethnic and religious minorities, and by authorities in Phoenix, where city planning and zoning separates people by ethnicity and income. All of these examples remind us that there is a connection between intentional action – often in the form of public policy – and the way space separates us. It reminds us that we often create

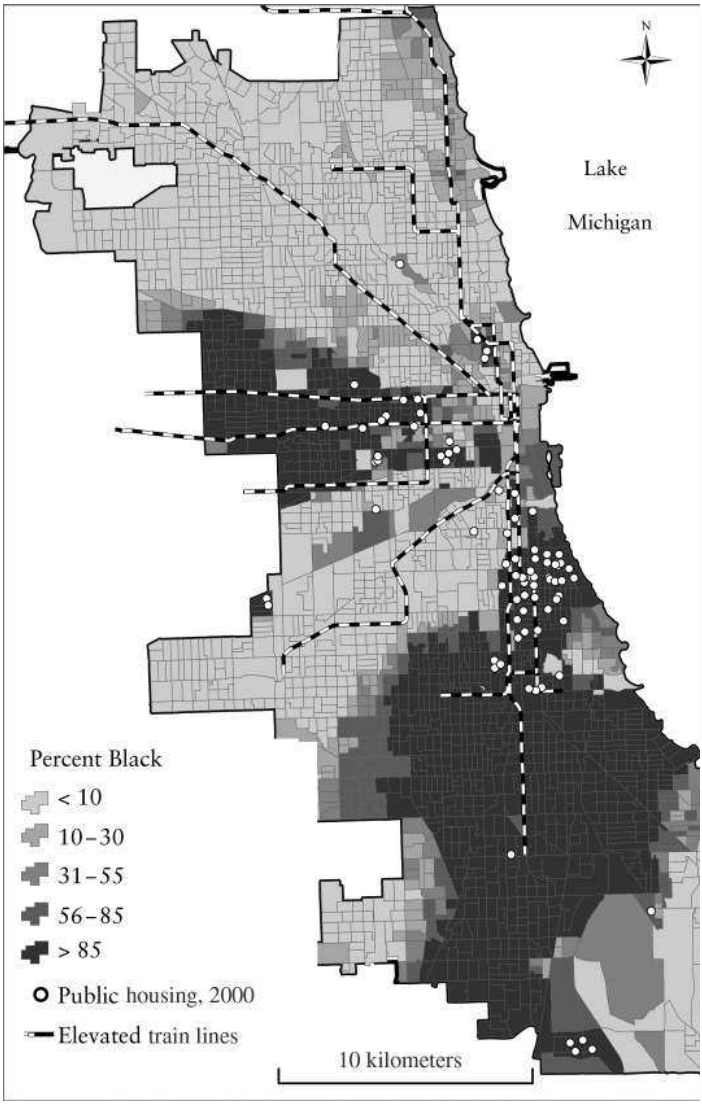

FIGURE 1.1. Chicago, percent Black, 2014.

Units depicted are Census Block Groups. Note that the non-Black population is not all Anglo white – much of the population, especially on the west side of the city, is Hispanic.
All maps in this book, with the exception of Figures 1.4 and 1.5 were created by Jeff Blossom and Devika Kakkar, Center for Geographic Analysis, Harvard University.

our own distance between groups and that understanding this phenomenon is therefore no mere academic exercise, but one that should speak clearly to public policy and to shaping the world as we wish it to be.