

# STUDY GUIDE

for

## **MAXWELL STREET:** *A Living Memory*

### **The Jewish Experience in Chicago**

A Film by Shuli Eshel

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This complimentary educator's guide offers discussion topics and activities for use before and after viewing. It is appropriate for junior high school through post-secondary educational levels.

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## **Introduction**

The Maxwell Street Market, on the near west side of Chicago, was once the third largest commercial district in the city, but it was no ordinary market. Created primarily by Jews, who came from Eastern Europe starting in the 1880's and became entrepreneurs of necessity, the market grew into a huge bazaar, where virtually every kind of good could be bought. In 1912, the City of Chicago officially recognized Maxwell Street as an open air market and the roadway was set aside during the day as a market area. The market took on a life of its own, attracting large crowds of diverse ethnicity, class, and race, all shopping for the bargains which made Maxwell Street famous. Maxwell Street was known for its hot dogs and corned beef sandwiches—and its African-American blues musicians and street singers. Playing on the streets and sidewalks of the market, they gave it a unique ambience.

In this documentary, the children and grandchildren of the entrepreneurs remember their experiences of Maxwell Street, working in their parents' shops and stores, being on the street. They describe the lessons they learned, lessons that have served them well later in life. Today, the Maxwell Street no longer exists and the whole neighborhood has been demolished. But their memories, complemented by historic archival film footage and rarely seen still images, bring the market to life again.

## **Goals**

Students will:

1. Learn the history of the Maxwell Street market and surrounding neighborhood;
2. Understand the conditions under which new immigrants to Chicago lived and worked in the decades just before and after the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century;
3. Develop an appreciation for the accomplishments of immigrant groups in Chicago;
4. Understand how immigrants learned informally to succeed in the economy;
5. Compare the situations of earlier immigrants with those who come to our cities today and think critically about the similarities and differences;
6. Relate the histories of their own families to those of other immigrants;
7. Develop an appreciation for the connection between place and social history.

## **Themes**

- the values that enabled East European Jewish immigrants and their children to succeed in an urban economy.
- the democratic, egalitarian values embodied in the social interaction of an urban market such as Maxwell Street.
- the importance of preserving a group's history.

## **Vocabulary**

**Bargain** - buying an item at what the customer considers a good (often low) price. Virtually all of the prices at the stands and shops of the Maxwell Street Market were flexible. The seller would either offer a price or have goods marked, but the would-be

customer could counter with a lower price, and this would lead to bargaining/negotiating (see below).

**Bargaining/negotiating** - a process of reaching a mutually satisfactory price for an item for sale, usually by a series of offers and counter-offers between a seller and a buyer. The seller might describe the special qualities of the item, while the buyer might give reasons why the price should be lower. The goal of the peddlers and salespeople in the shops and stores in the Maxwell Street market was to sell a large volume of goods, making a small profit on each item. Perishable goods obviously had to be sold quickly, but even with non-perishable goods, small businesses had incentives to sell them as quickly as possible. Most of them did not have much capital (financial reserves), so the longer goods remained on the shelves or stands, the less income the business operator had for his own needs and to purchase new goods to sell. Thus, bargaining was seen as a necessary feature of doing business. At larger stores run by prosperous entrepreneurs, for example on Halsted Street, only one price was listed and bargaining was frowned upon.

**Card table** - a small flat wooden surface that became a table where goods were displayed (as opposed to a pushcart which was larger and could be moved easily).

**Cheder** - a small room which served as a school where Jewish boys were sent to learn Hebrew and prayers.

**Field's Department Store** - well known department store on State Street, which was a standard setter in the Chicago retail market.

**Flea market** - usually an open-air market at which individual vendors bring a wide assortment of goods, often old or used, to sell by negotiating with bargain hunters.

**Ghetto** - in the past, the term applied to a crowded section found in many European cities, where Jews were forced by legal and social restrictions to reside; as a result, it is sometimes used to refer to any residential area where Jews predominate. In this country, it is generally applied to densely populated, run-down districts within American cities where disadvantaged minorities have been confined by discrimination.

**Holocaust** - the extermination of approximately 6 million European Jews by Hitler and the Nazi regime in Germany during the Second World War.

**Jewtown** - the name that non-Jews often used to designate the shopping area around Maxwell Street; it apparently developed because so many of the shops and businesses were operated by Jews. The Jews did not like the term and often felt it was an ethnic slur, but it appears that it was generally used, mainly by African-Americans, without any negative intent, much as Chicagoans referred to Greektown and Chinatown.

**Kosher hot dogs** – hot dogs made with kosher meat (the slaughtering of animals and preparation of kosher meat is supervised by specially trained rabbis). Leavitt Brothers Restaurant was famous for their kosher hotdogs; later Jim's, famous for the Maxwell Street Polish, took over this site.

**Mah Jongg sets** - attractive sets of the pieces (tiles) used in the game of this name; it became a popular form of recreation among Jewish women who had achieved middle class or higher status.

**Market Master** - an individual appointed by the City to allocate places among the various peddlers who sold goods from stands and carts on the streets of the Maxwell Street Market. Without a master, the market was a free-for-all among eager peddlers and the potential for disorder was great, as people would contest who had a claim on a particular location. A good location would mean more customers, so there were incentives to give the Market Master a small financial inducement to get a better place. Apparently, masters took advantage of this situation to let peddlers “bid up the price” of a preferred location.

**Matzah** - the unleavened (without any yeast) bread that the Jews eat during the Passover holiday.

**Maxwell Street “Polish”**- a large, juicy, flavored sausage or hotdog, often smothered in fried onions, that made “Jim’s,” a fast-food stand at Halsted and Maxwell world-famous.

**Orthodox Jews** - generally this refers to Jews whose daily lives involve observance of a large number of religiously-based commandments assumed to be God-given.

**Peddler** - individual selling various kinds of small goods either carried door-to-door or on a pushcart or stand in the street, often by calling out his wares to residents and bystanders.

**Puller** - a person whose job was to stand outside a shop or store and attract the attention of potential customers who might be walking up and down the streets of the market area. The pullers sometimes literally would “pull” (gently) the prospective customers into the store, while telling them of the great buys within. In some cases, shops were below or above street level and had little opportunity to display their goods, so the puller was crucial for making their presence known to shoppers.

**Pushcart** - a wooden cart usually with a large flat surface on which small goods could be displayed. It could be moved relatively easily from location to location.

**Shabbos** - the Yiddish word for Sabbath; for religiously-observant Jews, this ran from approximately sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday, and was a time when no remunerative work was to be done. While many of the Jewish immigrants came to this country from communities where they observed Shabbos, in America they often felt compelled by their lack of financial resources to make compromises and so they worked on Shabbos. The weekend was a major shopping period for working people.

**Shtetl** - a small East European Jewish village.

**Soda fountain** - a counter with high stools at which people could order drinks (similar to soda pop) and ice cream sundaes. These were common in pharmacies (what we call drugstores today). Generally some of the ingredients (e.g., mixing fruit flavors with carbonated water) were prepared in the store.

**Stand** - a wooden platform on which goods for sale could be displayed; it could be as small as a number of stacked crates or a more elaborate structure that allowed the vendor to stand within and sell over a counter to the customer.

**Stockyards** - at 43<sup>rd</sup> Street and Halsted, the major slaughtering houses of Chicago were clustered; cattle raisers brought their livestock to this area and sold them, while butchers and makers of sausages and other prepared meats came directly to the stockyards to buy the meats they sold in their neighborhood stores.

**Streetcar** - early electric trains that ran on major Chicago streets in the early decades of this century.

**Sweatshop** - small workshops, usually for making items of clothing in relatively large volume, where employees-- men, women and children-- usually worked under poor conditions (crowded rooms with limited air and light) for long hours at piece rates, i.e., getting a certain number of cents for each item completed, as opposed to an hourly wage. As Maxwell Street became known as a major market for cheap clothing, sweatshops opened in the area, often upstairs or in basements of buildings that might be selling the goods produced. The operators of sweatshops often were from the same immigrant group as their workers; sometimes they had come a little earlier and had gotten a foothold in the market and could afford to hire others, who came with no capital, to work for them.

**“Test records”** - inexpensive, often single copy, records made on relatively crude recording equipment by local musicians and street singers; the purpose often was to have a recording that could be given to agents for recording companies in the hopes of being signed to a contract.

**Urban Blues** - a kind of music that evolved from the melancholy and rhythmic lament songs of southern African-American musicians, who usually accompanied themselves on a guitar. On arriving in Chicago and coming to the Maxwell Street area, these musicians discovered the possibilities of amplified guitars and playing with a group using a number of different instruments.

**W.A.S.P.** - White Anglo Saxon Protestant: a shorthand term often used to refer to individuals who were seen as having relatively high economic and social status in this country.

**Yiddish** – the language commonly spoke by East European Jews; it dates from medieval Europe and drew on German, Hebrew, Slavic and other languages, including the language of the country in which its speakers lived. Thus, English words found their way into the vocabulary of American Yiddish speakers, and conversely, Yiddish words have become part of American English, e.g., bagel, chutzpa, shmooz.

### **Things to Consider Before Viewing the Video**

1. Have you ever shopped in an open-air market? Was it different from shopping in regular stores and malls?

2. Do you identify strongly with a particular group? How do you feel in a situation where there are people from many different backgrounds, from different ethnic, racial, and religious groups?
3. Do you know how and when your family first arrived in this country? Who told you about this?
4. What is your definition of success? Have you thought about what you need to do to succeed? Do you discuss this in your family or with your friends?

**After Viewing the Video, Discuss the following Questions and Situations**

1. What was your general reaction to the video? Did you have any particular feelings watching different parts of it? Did you learn new information from it?
2. What are the most important lessons the people in the video say they learned from being on Maxwell Street?
3. Why do you think so many people came to Maxwell Street?
4. Do you think you would enjoy shopping on Maxwell Street or would you prefer to shop in regular stores and malls? Why?
5. Not everyone succeeded in becoming a successful storeowner on Maxwell Street. What do you think might make the difference between those who advanced and those who didn't?
6. Why do you think the butcher said to his son: "I have to work with my hands. You won't do that. You'll learn to work with your head"?
7. Some people, like Morrie Mages, really enjoyed selling goods to people. What kind of personality do you think it takes to be a good salesperson? What kind of enjoyment might "selling" give to the salesperson?
8. What are the differences between "learning on the street" and learning in school? Do you agree with Mr. Genender that a person might learn far more at the market than from books? Why or why not?
9. Why did musicians come to Maxwell Street to play their music? Do you think the music was an important part of the Maxwell Street market? How did the street musicians make the market different from other shopping districts?
10. Why are there few markets like Maxwell Street remaining in this country? Do you think we have lost something significant because of this?

**Follow-Up Activities**

1. Interview a person who lived or worked on Maxwell Street. Find out the person's story: how he or she first came to Maxwell Street and what was most important about it to him or her.

2. Do research about other open-air markets and compare them to Maxwell Street.
3. Make a visit to the successor to the Maxwell Street Market (at Roosevelt Ave. and Canal St.) and write a brief account of your visit and how you felt there.
4. Do research on some of the blues musicians mentioned in the video and try to find recordings of their music. What emotions does their music express?
5. As the video said, "Maxwell Street is gone." Brainstorm about how to preserve the memory and history of Maxwell Street so that people will still be able to learn about it 50 or 100 years from now.
6. Contact a member of the Maxwell Street Historic Preservation Coalition and find out what you and your classmates can do to help preserve the history of Maxwell Street.
7. Interview a person that shopped on Maxwell Street? What did they buy there? How was the shopping different from shopping at malls and department stores today?

## **A Short History of the Maxwell Street Market**

### Introduction

The open air market of Maxwell Street really began as an accumulation of Jewish pushcart peddlers who began selling on Jefferson Street after the Fire of 1871.... As peddlers became more numerous and the population of the area increased, traffic flowed over onto Maxwell St. until, in 1912, the City Council formally certified the Maxwell Street market as the official open air market (Eastwood 1991:21).

The area on Chicago's Near West Side that was home to the Maxwell Street Market is important in the history of Chicago as a port-of-entry neighborhood for many working-class newcomers to Chicago, including Germans, Bohemians, Rumanians, Irish, East European Jews, Italians, Greeks, Mexicans, and African-Americans from the South. This area was also an important locale in the development of 20th-century blues music.

Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe began settling in the area in large numbers in the 1880's and continued coming until 1920. They built a close-knit community in the neighborhood with many synagogues, cultural institutions, and self-help organizations. First as pushcart peddlers and then as renters and owners of small shops and storefronts, they created the market, in large part, and built it into a thriving center of commerce. In a compact area, a very heterogeneous clientele of immigrants bargained, bought goods, conversed, ate, and enjoyed the hurly-burly activity of the streets. Here they acquired a taste for American styles of dress and learned the ways of mass consumption and marketing.

Later when Jewish residents moved out of the area, other groups, especially African-Americans and Mexican-Americans, took their places and participated in much the same processes and experiences. Into the post-World War II period, the district remained intact as a major commercial area, and until the early 1990s, an open-air flea market continued on Sundays, frequented by shoppers from both the city and the suburbs, numbering into the thousands.

Beginning in the 1920s, Maxwell Street became common ground for a wide range of African-American musicians singing both secular and sacred music. For more than half a century, Maxwell Street offered transplanted blacks from the rural South some of the comforts of their former lifestyles, serving as a social center where they could gather during time off from jobs in the city's burgeoning steel mills, slaughterhouses, and factories. As an open air market, Maxwell Street offered bargains from street vendors on all kinds of goods, but the most enduring attraction was music. The area's streets were the primary meeting place for singers newly arrived in the city and the center of the amateur blues activity of Chicago. African-American blues musicians, steeped in the musical traditions of the rural South, performed there, combining southern blues music with electrified guitars and other amplified musical instruments to create a modern, urban blues sound that revolutionized popular music of the post-World War II period.

The historical significance of the area lies not in the occurrence of particular events of note within its confines, but in the vital activity that took place there from day to day. In important ways, the Maxwell Street market district was a microcosm of the larger processes taking place in American urban society: urbanization, acculturation, and socioeconomic mobility of large immigrant populations, and the development of a mass-production, consumer-oriented economy.

### Maxwell Street and the Development of Urban Markets

Markets are the earliest channels for distribution of goods and services in urban economies, and records of markets are quite ancient. The two classic forms of the market, the open place and the covered bazaar, appear in their urban form as early as 2000 BCE. In the early stages of a city's growth, a single, central, open market-place, accommodating commerce of all kinds, was a recurrent phenomenon.

The English market tradition has been dated to the Roman occupation in 43 CE and English markets have been famous for centuries. In America, markets date from the 1600's in New York and Boston. Faneuil Hall in Boston is the oldest market building in the country, built in 1741. Cities such as New York, Boston, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Cincinnati, New Orleans, and St. Louis all currently maintain public markets.

The public market tradition in Chicago dates back to the City's charter of 1837 that called for the City to create and operate markets for the welfare of its people. However, it was not until 1847 that Chicago built its first market at State and Randolph Streets. Chicago's first public street market began in 1881 on Randolph Street between Des Plaines Ave. and Union Park. Maxwell Street was publicly designated in 1912 as a New York-style push-cart market. The last public designation of street market--on State Street between 71st and 75 Streets--occurred in 1931.

Eventually the other markets disappeared or street vendors were excluded by the City, but a Sunday open-air flea market in the Maxwell Street neighborhood continued until pressure from the University of Illinois at Chicago led to its closing in 1994. A smaller Sunday market, called the Maxwell Street Market to capitalize on the famous name, was opened six blocks further east.

### The Early Development of the Maxwell Street Market

Even before the turn of the century, Maxwell Street was already a bustling market area. Jefferson Street had become so crowded with pushcarts that they were forced to move westward along Maxwell Street, which was then wider than Jefferson Street. At that time, there were no fixed stands, only pushcarts, and peddlers moved from location to location day by day. In 1912, the Chicago City Council passed a resolution officially recognizing the Maxwell Street Market and setting apart the roadway of Maxwell Street from Jefferson to Halsted as a market area every day of the week between 6 AM and 7 PM. The city fathers recognized that street markets added greatly to the convenience and health of people living in urban districts; having large numbers of dealers gather within a limited area aided in inspection and enforcement of health ordinances.

The 1912 ordinance also established the position of Market Master. "Peddlers would gather in the vacant lots at 13th and Union streets to await the Market Master's whistle; whereupon riots broke out in the dash for choice locations" (Schulz,1954:12). Officially, the Market Master (or Superintendent, as he was then called) was obligated to collect ten cents from each peddler, but a long-standing complaint was that he collected much more than that. Eventually the position of Market Master was eliminated because of graft and corruption.

Sunday was "the busiest day of all. People [came] from all over the city to supply their wants on Maxwell Street" (Louis Wirth, 1928:232) This was the only day of the week that many working-class people were free to shop.

### Entrepreneurs of the Maxwell Street Market

The origins of the Maxwell Street market are to be found in the pushcart peddlers who began selling on Jefferson before the turn of the century and later expanded onto Maxwell Street. It was the "ghetto" conditions--concentrations of immigrants, houses (typically two-story, often with rear tenements) crowded into relatively few blocks, and a system of back alleys--that provided street peddlers with ideal markets for the sale of their goods. The residents often clustered, block by block, according to the village from which they had emigrated, and the peddlers could tailor their wares to the specific needs and tastes of their customers. In addition to residents' cultural needs, the lack of refrigeration in the households meant that peddlers supplied a real service as they brought residents the necessities of daily living. Vegetable and fruit peddling, which required little capital, was the most common occupation; rag and junk peddlers also made the rounds. (Eastwood, 1991:18)

Most of the peddlers of the neighborhood were East European Jewish immigrants. This occupation and the context were familiar to them. In the little villages (shtetls) from which many of them came, the central attraction was the market place "with its shops, booths, tables, stands, butcher blocks" where peasants came from miles around bringing vegetables, livestock, fish and hides, and in return, would buy city imports, such as dry goods, hats, spades, lamps, and oil. "The tumult of the market-place...[was] one of the wonders of the world" (Howe, 1976:10).

In the Maxwell Street area, on-the-street selling and buying took place at crates, stands, and pushcarts in front of shops. A view from Jefferson Street across Maxwell Street in a photograph from 1904-06 shows a "street nearly impassable because of rotting rubbish" as a line of fruit vendors sell at their stands on Jefferson (Mayer and Wade, 1969:261).

Most businesses in the Maxwell Street Market area followed a similar pattern of development. Initially, individual entrepreneurs sold goods from tables or carts on the street. When they saved enough capital, they moved their business into a storefront or basement shop on Maxwell Street. Success on Maxwell Street often was followed by a move to Halsted Street. After prospering on Halsted Street, most businesses relocated to a different section of the city. "The proprietors of the substantial establishments on Halsted are the graduates of Maxwell, for the most part. The modern business man on Halsted Street represents the ideal of the sons of the push-cart owners on Maxwell Street" (Wirth, 1928:232) .

There was a similar hierarchy in the kinds of businesses: "Roosevelt Road had the wholesalers, Halsted was basically one price with two big department stores, L. Klein and the 12th Street Store, and Maxwell Street was the pushcart, open stand bargaining bazaar but it also had a few small but very busy department stores such as Gabels, Robinson, and Mackevich." (Irving Cutler, personal communication, June 22, 1992).

A number of well-known Chicago businesses had their origins in the Maxwell Street neighborhood, including Keeshins (transportation), Vienna Beef (sausage and beef products), Chernins (shoes), and Mages (sporting goods).

### Ethnic Heritage: The Maxwell Street Neighborhood as the Port of Entry for Chicago's Immigrants

#### 1850-1870: Early Immigrants

Early in Chicago's history, the Near West Side, including Maxwell Street, attracted immigrants because housing costs were low and jobs could be found nearby.

From the 1850's on, the Near West Side was a port of entry for immigrants: first German, Bohemian, French, and Irish and later Eastern European Jews, Greeks, Italians, Mexicans, and Southern blacks. But far from being a 'melting pot,' the neighborhood was always divided along ethnic, economic, and racial lines. (Pacyga, 1986:199)

With the construction of railroads and the development of the trolley car, the Halsted/Maxwell Street area was opened for settlement and commerce (Adelman, 1993 Colloquium). The population began to grow rapidly in the 1850's, and thousands of small frame cottages, occupied by Germans, Irish, and Scandinavians, were built extending to Halsted Street on the west and Roosevelt Road on the south (Erbe, 1984:75). By the end of the Civil War decade, 40,000 wooden frame cottages housed two-thirds of the city's population (Hill, 1976:37).

The earliest traceable ethnic group on the Near West Side was German. The first parish church in the area was St. Francis of Assisi (Hill, 1976:20; Pacyga, 1986:207, 226), dating to 1853. Several other German churches date to the 1860's. Another immigrant group whose presence was marked by an early Church were the Irish, whose Church of the Holy Family, the fourth largest in North America, was completed in 1860. By 1860 immigrants from Bohemia, including Slovaks and Moravians, moved into the area. A small population of free blacks and former fugitive slaves apparently also existed there as early as the 1860's (Cutler, 1982:118; Hill, 1976:35-36).

#### 1870-1890: After the Great Fire

The Great Fire of Chicago of 1871 began in a barn at 137 DeKoven Street, not far from the area that would become the Maxwell Street market. Although the fire destroyed three and a half miles of stores, houses and churches, it burned north and east and so caused only minor damage to the Halsted/Maxwell neighborhood. The Fire actually caused a growth in population and a temporary increase in building and business activity on the Near West Side.

In 1880 East European Jews comprised only a small fraction of Chicago's 10,000 Jews, but after the Russian pogroms in 1881 and repressive legislation directed against Jews, they emigrated to Chicago in great numbers (Cutler, 1982:68). So many of them settled in the Maxwell/Halsted area that it took on the character of an East European ghetto with narrow, muddy streets and overcrowded tenements.

#### 1890-1910: East European Jews

In 1891, the Chicago Tribune described the Maxwell Street neighborhood thus: "one can walk the streets for blocks and see nothing but Semitic features and hear nothing but the Hebrew patois of Russia." East European Jews made up 90% of the population in the Maxwell Street area by 1900. Although people of many nationalities lived in the area, the culture and commerce reflected that of the East European Jews; it was their activity which stimulated the commercial growth of the market.

Housing conditions were extremely crowded; most of the homes were of frame construction on narrow lots, with little light reaching the buildings at the rear of the lots, which faced squalid alleys. Yet, as Cutler (1984:72) notes, in spite of slum conditions, "crime was almost nonexistent and the death and disease rate [among Jews] was one of the lowest of the various immigrant groups." As he describes it (Cutler, 1984:79): "The community in many ways resembled a teeming Eastern European ghetto":

It housed kosher meat markets and chicken stores, matzo bakeries, tailor and seamstress shops, bathhouses and peddlers' stables. Its rich and varied religious and cultural life included synagogues, Hebrew schools, literary organizations, Yiddish newspapers, and Yiddish theaters.

There were more than forty Orthodox synagogues in the focal Halsted/Maxwell area. They were usually small; few of them had more than a hundred members, and members of each

congregation consisted largely of immigrants from the same community in Europe (Wirth cited in Cutler, 1984:79).

A surprising number of prominent Jewish individuals had roots in the Maxwell Street neighborhood. For some of them, peddling on the streets of the neighborhood was their first job (Berkow 1977:10-11). The list includes: Barney Balaban (President, Paramount Pictures); Walter Paley (CBS founder); Benny Goodman (jazz musician); Arthur Goldberg (Supreme Court Justice); Admiral Hyman Rickover (father of the atomic submarine); Colonel Jacob Arvey (influential politician); Abraham Lincoln Marovitz (federal judge); and Barney Ross, King Levinsky, and Jackie Fields (boxing champions). The fields in which they achieved success illustrate the limited mobility routes open to children of immigrants: entrepreneurship, especially in new industries, politics, entertainment, and sports that appealed to the working class, particularly boxing.

### 1920 - 1950: Maxwell Street & Changes in Ethnic Composition

By the end of WWI, members of the East European Jewish community moved west to better housing in Lawndale and other parts of the city. Their place on the Near West Side was taken by primarily by African-Americans and Mexicans (Erbe 1984:75; Cutler 1982:73). World War I closed foreign immigration to the United States, and Chicago's labor supply dwindled. As a result, industrial jobs opened up for southern blacks, who were looking to escape oppressive working and living conditions in the South. From 1916 to 1919, about 500,000 African-Americans emigrated to the North, and in the Twenties, another million followed.

Of all northern destinations, Chicago became the most popular for African-Americans leaving the South. The *Chicago Defender*, the city's black-owned newspaper, was the most widely read paper in the black South, and it afforded prospective migrants a vision of an exciting city with a vibrant and assertive black community. Stories from family members and friends added to a growing anticipation about life in the big city. Yet once they arrived, black migrants worked hard to preserve a lifestyle similar to their former one. Places like Maxwell Street provided the equivalent of the front porch at dusk, or the turn-row at noon, so urban blacks could continue the highly social daily life they were accustomed to.

As a result of the black migration to the area, black "blues culture" sprang up in the neighborhood and established it as a place where blues could be heard, especially at the Sunday marketplace. According to journalist Ira Berkow (1977:387-394), "The blacks have been playing music to entertain -- and some to 'sanctify' souls -- from the time they arrived in Chicago."

During this period, Mexicans also began to move into the area; St. Francis of Assisi Church became an institutional mainstay of the community. In 1927 George Cardinal Mundelein designated St. Francis of Assisi as a Spanish-speaking parish (Pacyga, 1986:215). Italians, who had originally settled in the area decades before, continued to live to the immediate north of the Maxwell Street area and farther north there was a Greek neighborhood which dated back to the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

These ethnic enclaves had their distinctive religious, educational, and cultural institutions. Jane Addams' Hull House, one of the earliest and most famous of the American settlement houses, provided health-related services and educational and cultural programs that were open to all of these ethnic groups, but its efforts with the Greek immigrants who settled nearby were among the most successful in winning community support and involvement in Hull House's program of acculturation. Hull House also reached out—less successfully—to the Italians, although their immigrant clubs did use the Hull House facilities.

### Culture: The African-American Migration and the Development of the Blues

While many see Maxwell Street simply as the open air market for which it is primarily renowned, musicians, historians, and cultural anthropologists see it as the place where the music of the Mississippi Delta found an electric voice in the guise of the many African Americans who migrated into that area in the 1940s and '50s. This voice became the electrified south side Chicago blues sound, epitomized by artists such as Little Walter, Howlin' Wolf, and Muddy Waters, all of whom played on Maxwell Street. The cadences and tonalities of this music later evolved into rock and roll. In short, the musical development that was centered around the Maxwell Street area forms the cornerstone of one of the most important musical and cultural developments in American society in our generation, (Howard Stoveall, personal communication).

During the 1920s, the neighborhood and market-goers increasingly became African-American, and blues music became an important component of the overall culture of the Maxwell Street area. African-American musicians would come there knowing that they could join with other musicians playing on the street, sometimes making good money. Maxwell Street became known specially as a locale for street musicians, those on the bottom "rung" of the entertainment "ladder." They sang the music they brought with them from the South, the melancholy-tinged laments known as "blues." Some later would work their way up and play in established blues clubs and eventually reach the top of the ladder to become recording musicians. Many important blues musicians got their start playing on Maxwell Street and many continued to come even after they became successful to scout out new talent for bands, pick up tunes, engage in friendly jam sessions, and get the latest news from Mississippi.

The area saw the development of a new, amplified blues music: musicians paid store and building owners to run extension cords out onto the street, where amplifiers allowed these players to meld the intimate laments of Southern blues with the louder, more raucous sounds of electric guitars. This amplified blues sound became an important component in the development of rock-and-roll music. According to Bert Way:

“The bazaar atmosphere at the market on weekends took on a new life with makeshift stands catering to the new black population and the sounds of blues musicians, songsters, medicine show entertainers, and southern gospel hymn singers entertaining patrons. Known as 'Jewtown' to the musicians, Maxwell Street became the center for all unknown musicians looking for a recording break.”

In the twenties, Chicago became the home of black recording companies scouting for talent, and many black musicians saw recording as a way to achieve more than local success. There was a large market for what were known as “race records,” but until World War II the companies generally relied on well-known club performers. “After the war the record market opened up with more companies willing to take risks on the many street performers of Maxwell Street.” (Way, 1997)

The reluctance of major companies to pursue new talent worked to the advantage of small, independent record companies trying to cut into the large market of the major labels.

There was a vast pool of undiscovered talent and the smaller companies dipped into it, partly because they were forced to since the majors had a monopoly on the established artists. This undiscovered talent was largely to be found roaming the Maxwell Street market. ... With the quantity of talent on Maxwell Street the new record companies did not have to venture far to pick up new artists. Perhaps the company in the best position to capitalize was no further than the distance that sound can travel. The Maxwell Radio Record Company, founded by Bernard Isaac Abrams and operated out of his radio store on Maxwell Street, only released two records, but its presence provided incentive for the street musicians, (Way, 1997).

Born on Maxwell Street, Abrams in 1945 converted his family's residence at 831-833 Maxwell Street into Maxwell Radio, TV, and Record Mart. He sold and repaired radios and other electronic items, and also sold records. He founded and operated the record label "Ora Nelle," named after Little Walter's girlfriend. Muddy Waters, Johnny Young, Jimmy Rogers, and Little Walter made their first recordings in Chicago there. Some of the recordings were little more than demo records and were made with primitive recording equipment in a back room of Abrams' repair shop. Gospel singers were also recorded there. In 1976, the store moved down the street to 805 W. Maxwell, next to Nate's Deli, a small but well-known restaurant in the neighborhood.

### Why the Maxwell Street Market Ended

Mayor Richard J. Daley chose the Harrison/Halsted area for the new University of Illinois at Chicago campus after consideration of a number of sites, and the major buildings were completed in 1965. Because the land used for the campus had originally been cleared to construct housing for families with modest incomes, the siting provoked great controversy and opposition from the Italian-American community living on the Near West Side. Low-cost housing had been long promised, and disappointment of these hopes sparked demonstrations from the neighborhood. Until this period, Hull House had expanded its structures to include most of this block, but the organization chose not to fight the land clearance and moved its operations further north.

For two decades, UIC and the surrounding neighborhoods coexisted without much interaction. By the late 1980s, the University of Illinois at Chicago was formulating plans to expand its campus south of Roosevelt Road. The University consulted with local businessmen and vendors, but chose not to include them in its development plans. The

State legislature had given UIC the power of eminent domain to take private property in the area for its expansion, and university officials pursued a quiet strategy of buying up deteriorated tenements and individual homes, demolishing them quickly and replacing them with parking lots and playing fields. In the early 1990s UIC made clear its determination to close the Sunday open-air market which had spread out in the cleared areas adjacent to Maxwell Street; the City, now led by the son of the original Mayor Daley, lent its support.

Local businessmen, vendors, their customers, and the relatively few remaining residents of the area were dismayed by the university's plans, but no organization linking these disparate elements emerged to challenge UIC and the City. Major opposition came from a newly formed organization of volunteers, the Maxwell Street Historic Preservation Coalition, which sought to have the market area listed as a district on the National Register of Historic Sites. The Coalition hoped that such a listing would be both a deterrent to further demolition of the historic buildings in the area and an incentive to rehabilitate them for commercial and educational uses.

The university preferred to clear the whole area and campaigned successfully against the National Register listing. At the same time, UIC rejected locally proposed compromises that would have preserved a number of streetscapes of buildings on Maxwell and Halsted Streets. In 2000, UIC signed an agreement with the City to leave standing a small number of commercial buildings on the east side of Halsted Street, and to dismantle a small number of facades to be used later to adorn a parking garage or other new structures.

By early 2002, virtually all of the original buildings were demolished, and the developer selected by UIC was filling in much of the area with townhouses and condominiums, as well as a limited number of dormitories and commercial buildings fronting on Halsted Street. Little remained to remind visitors that this area had once been a vital neighborhood for working-class immigrants to Chicago and the home of a very unusual urban marketplace, as well as the place where urban blues developed.

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