



SOCIOLOGY

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FOLDED MAP

In Chicago, asking where someone lives is as standard as asking their name. Each neighborhood has its own distinct flare and reputation that signal something to Chicagoans. Some might even say they can guess a person's neighborhood after meeting them. Why? You might ask. The answer is: Residential Segregation.

Tonika Lewis Johnson's Folded Map project started by using photography to capture a divided city. Chicago's grid system creates 'map twins' which are addresses only distinguished by which side of the city they are on. Often, addresses from the northside of town are white residences and those on the southside are black. This allows Johnson to create a visual display of the disparities that exist in Chicago. After sharing her work with the public, she realized that the persistence of segregation was partially rooted in advice:

"It had become very clear to me that people had been told not to go to the south and west side. I started thinking about how that contributes not only [to] the systemic, but also the interpersonal, aspects of segregation."

For the past year, UIC Sociology's Maria Krysan has been partnering with Johnson to figure out ways that their work can complement each other and build on their mutual passion around disrupting segregation. Krysan recently appeared with Johnson, who is now a regular contributor on WBEZ's Reset, to discuss the complexities of residential segregation



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"The [Folded Map] project takes the things that I study as a sociologist that are so often invisible and mundane [and] powerful and makes them concrete and visible. We always look at money and redlining or preferences, but we are learning about the hidden in plain sight things that really shape where people live. Perceptions are one of the ingredients."

Professor Krysan describes the housing selection process as one that begins with 'mental maps'. As we move through the world, we outline the city in our minds. Some places are vibrantly drawn up because we frequent the area, while others are a 'blank slate' because we have never visited them—or they are known only through media images. Rather than explore the unknown, we eliminate entire regions because our networks, experiences, or the media create a negative perception that keeps us at bay. Although we all have an image of Chicago, those images are not the same; much like the 'map twins' showcased in the Folded Map project.

In a city where we are commonly asked about our neighborhood, explicit talk about racial segregation is rare. Instead, race is couched in messages about schools, businesses, and crime. Discussing race and inequality is uncomfortable, which is why the project is so important. Johnson says:

"If you don't have a space where people can hear this kind of conversation and engage with it, then [segregation] just continues to not be addressed. [We] have to address this explicitly. [The conversation] not only deals with the cycle of segregation but the overall investment of our city and how [the city] is being viewed and that is a problem for everybody."

What did you hear about the neighborhoods of Chicago? Please share your story with Tonika and Maria by sending an email to foldedmapthoughts.com. Be sure to mention that you are UIC alum!

- Erielle Jones, Alumni Relations GA
Learn more about Erielle in our next newsletter



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