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The College in the 'Most American' City

Ellen Skerrett, *Born in Chicago: A History of Chicago's Jesuit University*

Loyola Press, 2008. 308 pp. \$25.00

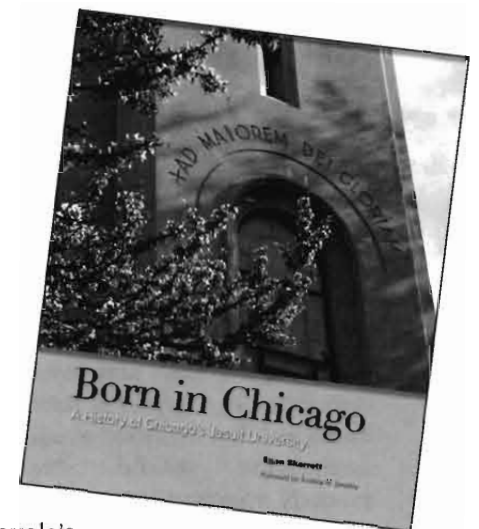
By Gerald McKevitt, S.J.

During an interview on the Charlie Rose Show, Rahm Emanuel, the White House chief of staff, was recently queried about his future. After completing work in Washington, he was asked, is there any other job you'd like to have? His instant answer: One day I would like to run for mayor of the city of Chicago. That's always been an aspiration of mine. Emanuel's response attests not only to his hometown devotion but also to the singular importance of Chicago, the city that foreigners often describe as the most typically American place in America.

A similar enthusiasm for place informs *Born in Chicago: A History of Chicago's Jesuit University*. Ellen Skerrett, an independent scholar and student of urban social history, argues that the history of Loyola University of Chicago cannot be separated from the history of the city itself. It was the potential of Chicago, that central city which seems ever on the

increase, as one Jesuit said in 1857, that led the missionary Arnold Damen, to found Loyola's precursor institutions, Holy Family Parish and St. Ignatius College. Opening in 1870, the college drew clientele from the city's working class immigrant population. Ever since, engagement with the great metropolis has been a constant of Loyola's evolution.

President Alexander J. Burrowes, upon receipt of a donation to the school, once said that a gift to Loyola University was also a gift to the City of Chicago. If Chicago molded Loyola, the university also shaped the city. In the nineteenth century, it met Chicago's educational needs, often preceding the public school system, by instructing its middle- and working-class populations. Loyola contributed to urban political life through alumni such as Carter H. Harrison who, beginning in 1897, served as the city's five-term mayor. The school shaped regional Catholicism through the 125 priests who studied in its classrooms between 1870 and 1904. In 1959, nearly a fourth of Chicago's physicians were alumni of



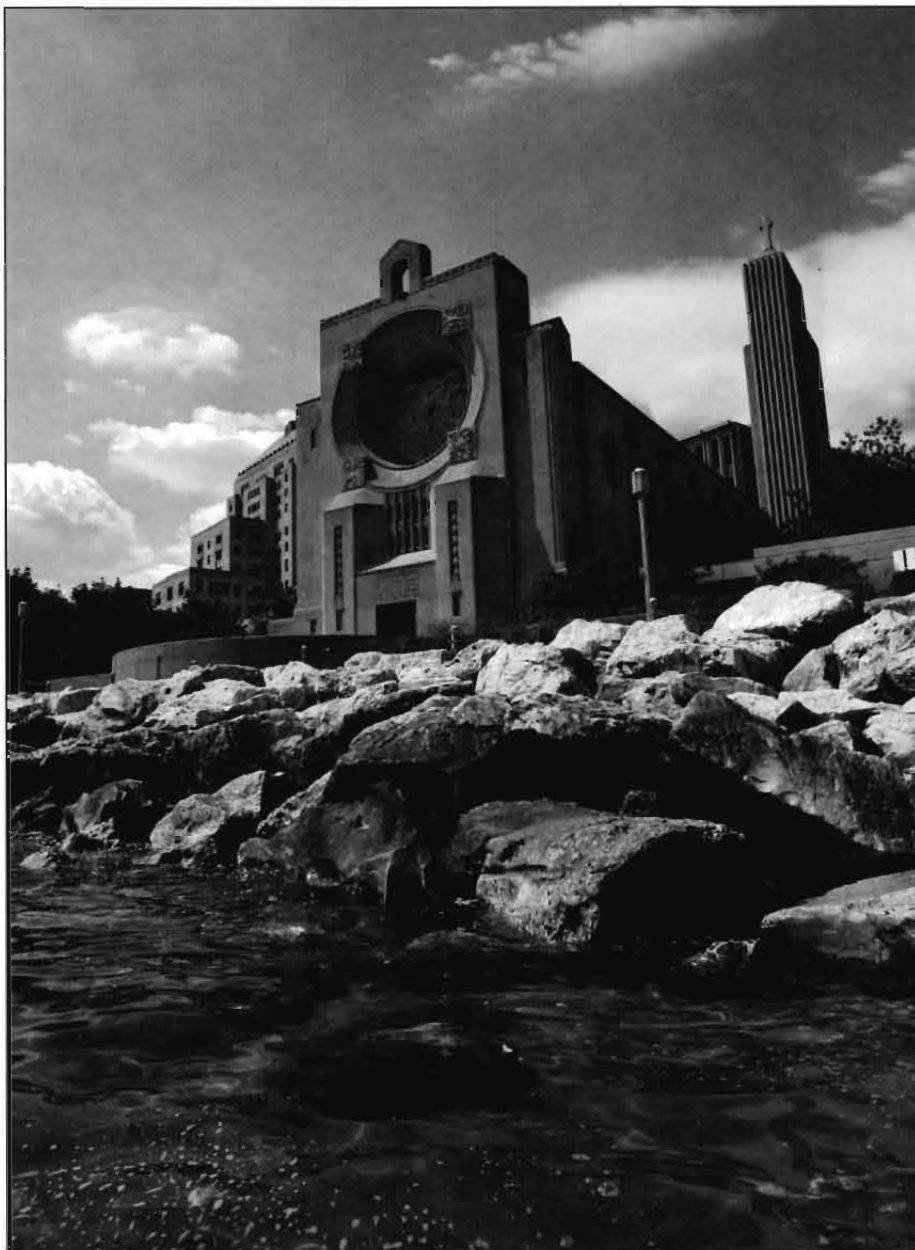
Loyola's Stritch School of Medicine.

In an era when Catholic institutions faced widespread prejudice, Loyola pioneered in promoting good public relations. The cultivation of friends reflected a perpetual quest for funds and public support, but it also revealed the powerful influence of rivals who sometimes tempted Loyola, as one president put it, to drop out of the race. Competition

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from the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, DePaul University, and the University of Notre Dame also prompted imitation, illustrated by Loyola's entrance into the educational mainstream through the inauguration of schools of law, medicine, dentistry, and nursing. The embrace of professional training had profound consequences. By 1935, half of the university's enrollment were women enrolled in its professional schools. Graduate programs also brought an expanded lay faculty, improved academic programs, and oversight by accrediting agencies.

Although there is much that is unique to Loyola's story, there is also much that is familiar. As students of Catholic higher education will recognize, Loyola's evolution paralleled the growth of other Jesuit institutions, revealing comparisons that are richly informative. Like its sister institutions, Loyola began as a preparatory school and high school, and its initial staff was dominated by clerics of European origin. Of the twenty priests and brothers who ran the institution in 1870, only one was American born; although historians might wish the author had explored the implications of the faculty's foreign origin. All Catholic colleges in the United States faced similar challenges: scant resources, religious prejudice, and immigrant students with limited educational aspirations. Pressed by European superiors to implement a curriculum centered on Latin and Greek, Loyola, like most nineteenth-century Jesuit colleges, struggled to accommodate the educational needs of its American clientele by offering commercial training and other non-classical subjects.



Loyola University Chicago.

Context is also important for understanding Loyola's undergraduate curriculum in the twentieth century. For generations, the hallmark of a Jesuit education was a course of studies centered on philosophy and theology. Over time, especially in the 1960s, that program underwent ideological adjustment aimed at

bringing academic practices into greater conformity with modern American higher education. As a result, Jesuit institutions were sometimes accused of abandoning their Catholic intellectual dimension. Skerrett describes Loyola as remaining unapologetically Jesuit and Catholic, but readers would appreciate learning how

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that is so and how the institution maneuvered the challenges confronting Catholic academic tradition in recent decades.

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This is, in part, a bricks-and-mortar story. The acquisition of real estate, the erection of buildings, and the creation of new campuses were integral to Loyola's history from the inception. Determined to create a place that would become the focus of neighborhood life, founder Arnold Damen strategically planted his institution among the city's expanding Irish and German population because it was large enough to fill a spacious church. Rising in a city renowned for its architecture, Loyola prized building design. When superiors in Rome once questioned the grandiosity of

a proposed new structure, Chicago Jesuits countered that the exterior makes a big impression on the American mindset.

Shifting urban dynamics necessitated relocations. Although St. Ignatius College escaped the fire that devastated Chicago in 1871, by the turn of the century a flood of new immigration had so transformed the ethnic make-up of its environs and curbed expansion that the college searched for a new campus. After settling in 1908 on a site in an upscale neighborhood fronting Lake Michigan, a rise in the level of the lake resulted in the loss of nearly two acres of prized campus real estate, a problem that challenged the university for years to come. Skerrett poses rhetorically, Did the bricks and mortar of the college matter? Absolutely.

This book is a welcome addition to the historical literature on Catholic higher education. Drawing on secondary material and archival sources in the United States and Europe, it is well researched. The publication is also nicely designed, although this reviewer regrets the press's decision to bundle multiple references together in a single footnote, making it impossible to discern the source of some quotations. A handsome volume with an abundance of illustrations and informative maps, *Born in Chicago* is eminently readable. Of the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, Loyola University Chicago has long stood apart as been one of the few institutions without a published history. With the appearance of *Born in Chicago* that deficiency has finally been set right.