

# Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

## Never A City So Real by Alex Kotlowitz

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- The book is a series of portraits of Chicagoans. Whose portrait did you like best and why?
- Where did the book's title come from?
- Kotlowitz writes that Chicago is a city defined by race. Do you agree?
- What does he mean when he writes that Chicago "dreams America's dream"?
- How did Chicago come to be called the "second city," why and by whom?
- An Italian sociologist is quoted in the book thusly, "Chicago expresses the truth about the United States." How so?
- Where does Kotlowitz locate "the soul of the city"?
- Do you think Chicago is America's most representative city? If not, what is?
- Do you agree with Ed Sadlowski's view that the American labor movement was "a holy crusade"?
- What was Sadlowski's answer to the young student who ripped into people on the welfare dole?
- What is the significance of Sadlowski's rock garden?
- What is George Ryan's connection with Manny's?
- "Word has since gotten out on the West side that Mac Arthur Alexander believes there are second acts in life." What is Mac's story?
- What is a Billiken?
- What does the author think about Chicago's public housing redevelopment strategy?
- What kinds of murals does Milton Reed paint? Why?
- Writing about the Criminal Courts Building, what is the author's view about why the defendants are overwhelmingly African American or Hispanic? What is his answer to "that's who's committing all the crimes"?
- What does Andrea Lynn mean when she says that working at 26th Street has taught her that "the line is thin and anyone can cross it"?
- Why do you think Robert Guinan's work is virtually unknown in Chicago?
- Do you agree with Guinan that Chicago's image is becoming self-conscious?
- How did the Iraqis at Kamel Botres respond to the capture of Saddam Hussein? Do you understand their point of view?
- If GT's Diner was located in your neighborhood would you be one of the neighborhood's "concerned citizens"?
- Why does so much of the book take place in restaurants?



**Skokie Public Library**

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