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Slaughterhouse: Chicago's Union Stock Yard and the World It Made

Dominic A. Pacyga

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From the minute it opened—on Christmas Day in 1865—it was Chicago's must-see tourist attraction, drawing more than half a million visitors each year. Families, visiting dignitaries, even school groups all made trips to the South Side to tour the Union Stock Yard. There they got a firsthand look at the city's industrial prowess as they witnessed cattle, hogs, and sheep disassembled with breathtaking efficiency. At their height, the kill floors employed 50,000 workers and processed six hundred animals an hour, an astonishing spectacle of industrialized death.

Slaughterhouse tells the story of the Union Stock Yard, chronicling the rise and fall of an industrial district that, for better or worse, served as the public face of Chicago for decades. Dominic A. Pacyga is a guide like no other—he grew up in the shadow of the stockyards, spent summers in their hog house and cattle yards, and maintains a long-standing connection with the working-class neighborhoods around them. Pacyga takes readers through the packinghouses as only an insider can, covering the rough and toxic life inside the plants and their lasting effects on the world outside. He shows how the yards shaped the surrounding neighborhoods and controlled the livelihoods of thousands of families. He looks at the Union Stock Yard's political and economic power and its sometimes volatile role in the city's race and labor relations. And he traces its decades of mechanized innovations, which introduced millions of consumers across the country to an industrialized food system.

Although the Union Stock Yard closed in 1971, the story doesn't end there. Pacyga takes readers to present day, showing how the manufacturing spirit lives on. Ironically, today the site of the legendary "stockyard stench" is now home to some of Chicago's most successful green agriculture companies.

Marking the 150th anniversary of the opening of the stockyards, *Slaughterhouse* is an engrossing story of one of the most important—and deadliest—square miles in American history.

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