

THE
ECONOMIC
CLUB OF
CHICAGO

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The Club welcomed author and WBEZ South Side reporter Natalie Y. Moore for the Club's inaugural Author Discussion Series on April 16 at The Chicago Club. In 2016, Ms. Moore published *The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation*, a book that interweaves her personal story of growing up in a middle-class black neighborhood on the South Side with a historical and statistical analysis of Chicago segregation. The book was the winner of the 2016 Chicago Review of Books Award for nonfiction, and a BuzzFeed best nonfiction book of 2016.

After Ms. Moore's initial remarks, Young Leader Tanya Burnell – who first proposed the author discussion series – interviewed Ms. Moore and moderated a Q&A with attendees. Members then broke out into separate groups and discussed the book over dinner.

Ms. Moore opened the program with observations on Chicago segregation since the book was published. She emphasized that segregation is about inequity, power and resources, and that it was not motivated by class, but by race.

“Whenever I'm covering issues around food injustice, violence, affordable housing, public housing, lack of jobs; all roads lead back to segregation,” said Ms. Moore. “We actually do have to have some acknowledgement of what segregation is before we can move [forward].”

As she explained, it's not just the hyper visible examples in history like “separate water fountains,” and “Brown v. Board of Education,” but rather the housing and zoning practices established in Chicago to separate communities by race, and the failed efforts of Chicago Public School integration. While the last chapter of her book cites possible solutions to the problem of segregation, Ms. Moore emphasized that before solutions can be discussed, people in political and economic power need to understand the breadth of the issue and the ways they unknowingly may fuel the problem.

“The first step is getting people to examine the segregation in their own lives in their own choices,” she said. “A very easy way to think about the segregation in your lives beyond housing is [to consider] how you spend your leisure activities. Art, food and culture are good entry points into neighborhoods.”

As an example, she suggested people who love theater try visiting a community theater in a different neighborhood and then going to dinner in that same neighborhood.

“Most people in this region get their information about black people through the news – they see who got shot today or last night and that taints their whole vision of what these communities look like on a national basis,” said Ms. Moore. “We have two extremes: the image of blackness as the perp on the news, someone being arrested, low-income and poor or exceptionalism like Obama, Oprah, athletes, celebrities. There’s a whole invisibility of the black middle and working class in this country.”

After her remarks, Tanya Burnell asked questions both about segregation in Chicago, and Ms. Moore’s process of creating the book. One question she asked Ms. Moore was about her experience writing about such personal anecdotes, especially her revelations around finances and home purchasing.

“It is hard to put yourself out there, especially when you're a reporter and you're supposed to have some distance, but in many ways I'm not breaking new ground,” she said, noting the large number of footnotes in the book citing years of research on the topic. “I knew that regular people weren't reading that kind of [academic] work, and so the personal narrative had to come in. I knew that I wanted to marry the scholarship from the past to issues that were happening today with personal stories.”

Ms. Burnell opened up questions to the audience, where one member asked what her ideal audience is for the book and what she hoped to accomplish.

“Part of the reason why I was attracted to book writing is that I did not have the same restraints as mainstream media. Sometimes when we are writing *about* people rather than *for* them we treat black communities as an ‘other,’ so the balance for me is that I want people to hear themselves *and* I want people to learn,” she said. “You just want to tell the most honest story that you can and if people want to come along on the journey, then that's great, but I couldn't let that override the writing process.”

Once Q&A concluded, members broke out into small group discussions over dinner, and were then invited to come together again for a wrap-up conversation at the end of the night.

If you are interested in purchasing *The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation*, you can find the book [here](#).