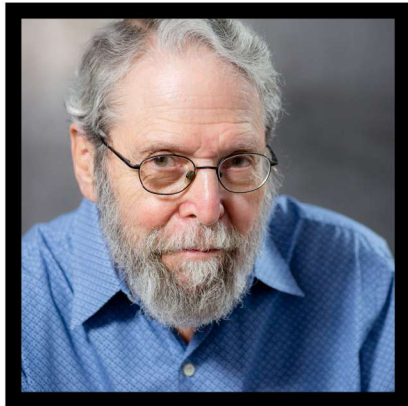


# PILSEN



HOWARD  
RAIK

*When asked how long I've been a Chicago Greeter, I say, "Since before the program started." And it's true! Many of my visitors are international. I speak Portuguese and Spanish so I get to guide people from Brazil, Spain and Central and South America.*

*I've also had the opportunity to accompany TV journalists, bloggers, and travel writers from abroad on walks around the city. Pilsen has also been my destination every year on International Greeter Day.*

To me, Pilsen is one of the most interesting neighborhoods in the city. On the one hand, it has seen dramatic demographic changes over the past several decades, On the other hand, almost every day, we can see vestiges of the past and, at the same time, evidence of new changes. I have focused on the Mexican and Mexican-American presence in Pilsen which, over the past few decades, has gone from about 80% to about 40%, as this community struggles to preserve the cultural identity of the neighborhood.

## SUGGESTED ITINERARY



The **18th Street CTA Pink Line station** is a good place to start your walk. The station is on 18th Street just west of Paulina.

### 1 18TH STATION PLATFORM

The 18th station platform and staircase is a great introduction to what is certainly one of the main attractions in Pilsen: **mural art**. Local artists, following in the footsteps of the great Mexican muralists, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, have, over the decades, expressed one of the principal themes of the Pilsen mural: the aspirations, cultural values and heritage, and social and political concerns of Pilsen residents.

On the platform and staircase of the 18th Street station, you'll see one of the main themes of Pilsen's mural art: reverence for ancient (Aztec and Mayan) culture.

As you leave the station, look to your left; you'll see an image, in mosaic tile, of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico; her image is ubiquitous in Pilsen.

### 2 PAULINA AND 18TH ST

**This mural** is relatively new, installed two or three summers ago by students in the After School Matters Program under the tutelage of their artist/teachers.

The mural is an homage to a young man who fell victim to gang violence in Pilsen. At the same time, it expresses a second theme, reflected here and elsewhere in Pilsen mural art: concern about the impact of violence on the youth of Pilsen.





LA VACA



PANADERIA DEL REFUGIO

### 3 1814 S PAULINA

Cross 18th Street and continue walking south to 19th. Take a look at the church building on your right and note that the writing is in Czech, a reminder of the earlier settlers.

The building, now decorated with murals, no longer a church, houses a **Mexican-American social services agency** (of which there are many in Pilsen, a testament to the value community members place on solidarity and mutual assistance).

### 4 1624 W 19TH ST

Turn left onto 19th Street to view the **murals at Cooper Academy** (Old Orozco Academy). Most of the outer wall is decorated with glass mosaic murals which have been installed year after year since 1991.

A teacher at the school works with students to design and install the panels, most of which depict important Mexicans and Mexican-Americans: historical figures including presidents and revolutionary heroes; artists and entertainers; and contemporary leaders.

### 5 1637 W 19TH ST

Looking across the street from Cooper Academy, you can see several examples of **houses that were built before the street and sidewalk were raised** in the 1850's and 1860's.

You can see the lower floors of these houses several feet below street level.

### 6 1854 S ASHLAND AVE

Continue east to Ashland and turn right. After crossing 19th Street, turn and look back at the mural titled **Increíbles Las Cosas Que Se Ven—Incredible the Things You See**.

Here we see Pilsen immigrants' aspirations, especially for the youth, of life in this country. Cross Ashland to see the mural on the south side of the school, Nuestra Sagrada Familia—Our Sacred Family, which depicts reverence for tradition, diversity, and learning.





## 7 2150 S LAFLIN ST

Continue south on Ashland to 21st Street. Enter the large yard at the southeast corner and walk diagonally toward **Benito Juárez High School**. The school was built after years of pressure on the city by neighborhood residents for their young people to be able to attend a high school in their neighborhood instead of having to travel to distant schools.

The statues in the yard, and beyond to the north and east of the school, of important figures in the arts, were donated to Benito Juárez by various states in Mexico. Continue walking toward 22nd Street (Cermak) past the entrance to the school, to the east wall.

Here you will see a very large mural, *A La Esperanza—To Hope*, whose title, to me, is ironic; this mural is very dark, portraying and decrying the violence that has, at times, beset Pilsen.

## 8 1927 S BLUE ISLAND AVE

Continue walking and take Blue Island Avenue at 19th Street. The mural on the wall at 19th depicts both ancient and modern tortilla making.

In a few steps, you'll come to **El Milagro Tortillería** (Tortilla Factory). They supply tortillas to restaurants and supermarkets all over Chicago and the suburbs. Stop in to see the factory and buy a package of tortillas or walk a few more steps to their restaurant for lunch or a snack.

On Blue Island, take a look at the eagles and stencil-like “Pilsen” signs on the lampposts; the eagle is the national symbol of Mexico.

## 9 1831 S. Racine

Walk east on 19th or 18th Street to see **Casa Aztlan**. (On the way, keep an eye out for large beautiful gardens below street level (at the original ground level) in vacant lots between buildings.) Casa Aztlan was one of the earliest and most important social service centers in Pilsen. In the 1970's it was covered in murals, inside and out, that depicted important Mexican, Mexican-American and other Latin American figures.

In the early 2010s it was bought by a developer who painted over all of the murals, sparking such outrage in the community that the developer invited the original artist, Ray Patlan, back to Pilsen to work with community members to either repaint the original external murals or paint new ones.

The front of the building has been redone and features contemporary figures; the side wall remains unadorned. Still, this is a Pilsen community action success story.





THALIA HALL

#### 10 1807 S ALLPORT ST

At the corner of 18th and Racine, turn left. On the southwest corner of 18th and Allport is **Thalia Hall**.

Once a social and cultural center for Czech immigrants, this beautiful building, which sat vacant for many years, has been remodeled into an upscale bar, restaurant and entertainment venue. In a way, it is symbolic of the gentrification of the neighborhood.

#### 11 1300 W 18TH ST

If you have time, walk north two blocks to 16th Street to see **Galería del Barrio**, a collection of a few dozen murals that decorate the railroad viaduct.

#### 12 1710 W 18TH ST

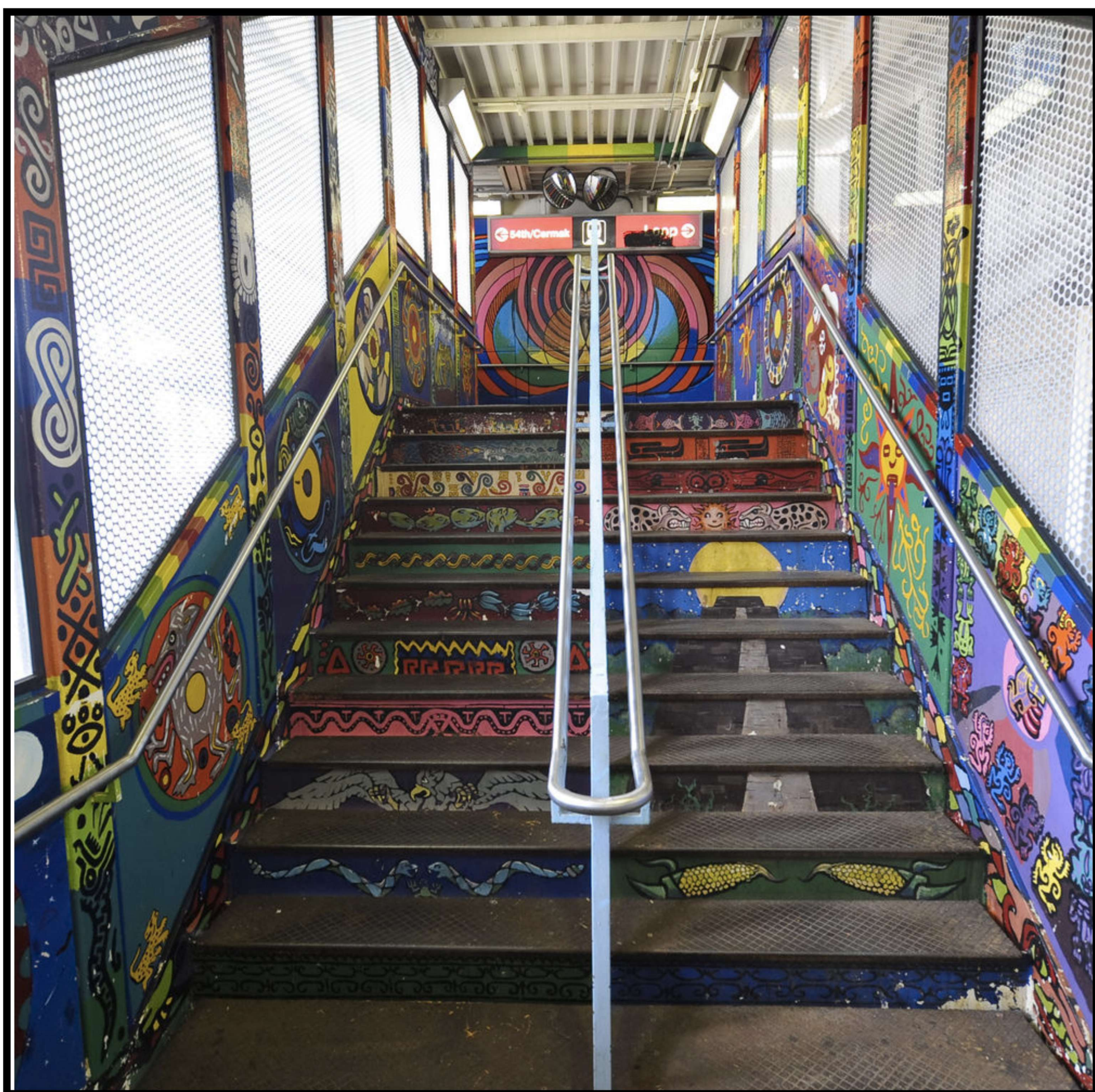
As you continue along 18th Street, check **the alleys on the left**. In one, you'll see a mural and painted lamppost with strong language that reflects community members' attitudes toward the threat of deportation.

In a few blocks, you'll reach the 18th Street CTA Pink Line Station, our original starting point.

#### 13 1828 W 18TH ST

If you go further on 18th, you'll come to **murals on the building across the street from Harrison Park** depicting folk entertainers; further along is the new Orozco Academy, a fine arts and sciences elementary school, whose colorful mosaic murals face the park.

One block south, on the other side of the park is the wonderful National Museum of Mexican Art, well worth a second visit to Pilsen!



PINK LINE STATION MURALS