



The EXIT ZERO PROJECT

Southeast Chicago used to be one of the largest steel-producing regions in the world. Beginning in the late 19th century, the steel mills along Lake Michigan employed hundreds of thousands of people: immigrants from every region of the world; workers of all ethnicities; people searching for a better life.

But that all began to change in the 1980's. One by one, the mills closed, leaving a region devastated by a crumbling economy and a toxic environment left behind by heavy industry. A forgotten region. Even the exit ramp here is numbered Zero.

The Exit Zero Project seeks to recapture the stories of a region traumatized by de-industrialization, and to look towards a future of economic opportunity and environmental justice for Southeast Chicago residents.





THE BOOK

Exit Zero: Family and Class in Post-Industrial Chicago

By Christine J. Walley

University of Chicago Press, Jan 2012

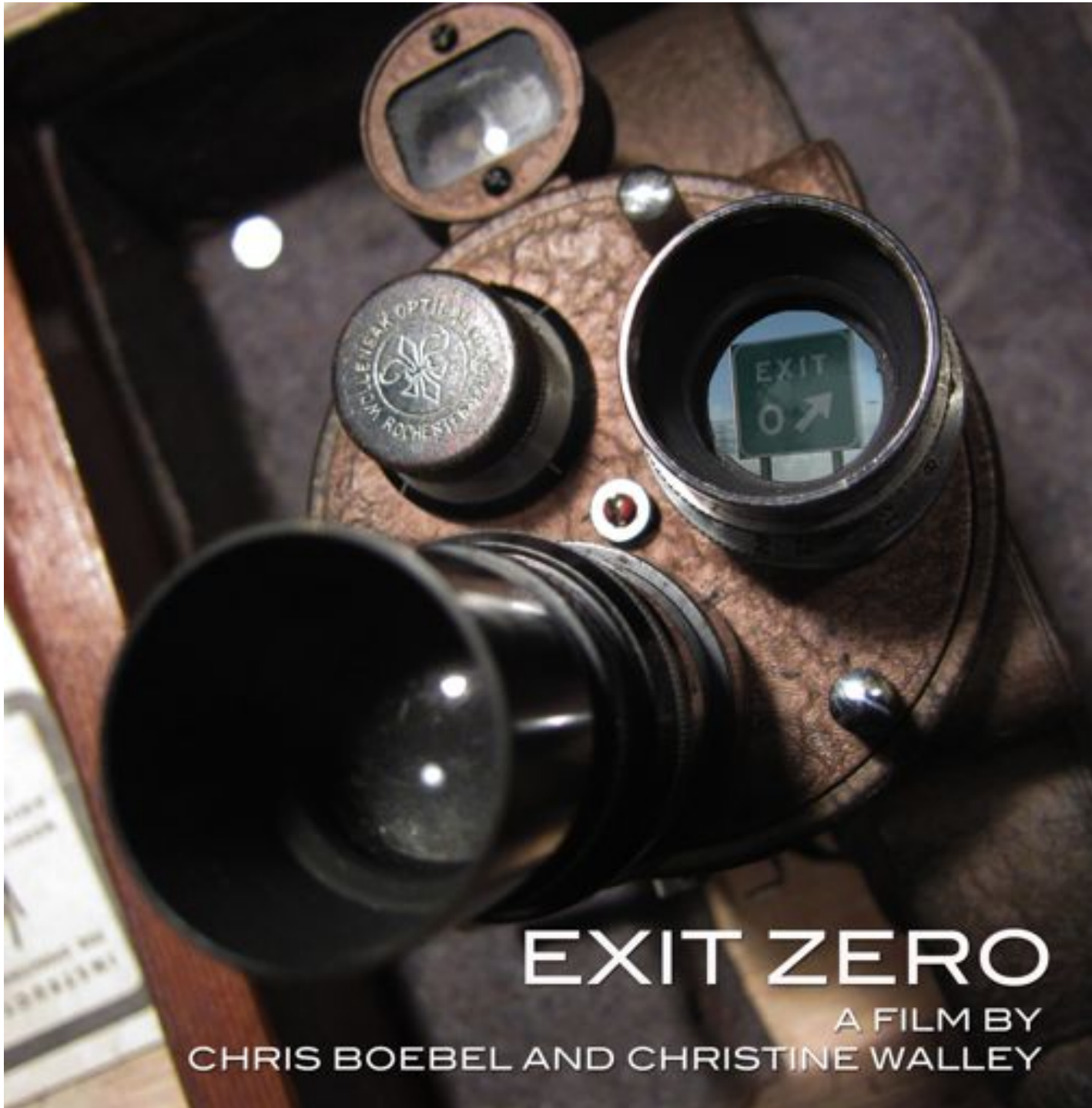
In 2008, Christine Walley's world was turned upside down when the steel mill in Southeast Chicago where her father worked abruptly closed. In the ensuing years, thousands of other area residents would also lose their jobs in the mills—just one example of the vast scale of deindustrialization occurring across the United States.

The disruption of this event propelled Walley into a career as a cultural anthropologist.

In *Exit Zero*, she brings her anthropological perspective home, examining the fate of her family and that of blue-collar America at large.

"How shall we understand the closest details of kinship and household within the political, economic, and environmental settings that condition them? Christine J. Walley offers arresting answers to these enduring anthropological questions. Telling the story of how the demise and collapse of the Southeast Chicago steel industry in the 1980s transformed her family's sense of past and future, she shows us that analyzing class, gender, and race always demands that we weave between the





EXIT ZERO

A FILM BY
CHRIS BOEBEL AND CHRISTINE WALLEY



THE FILM

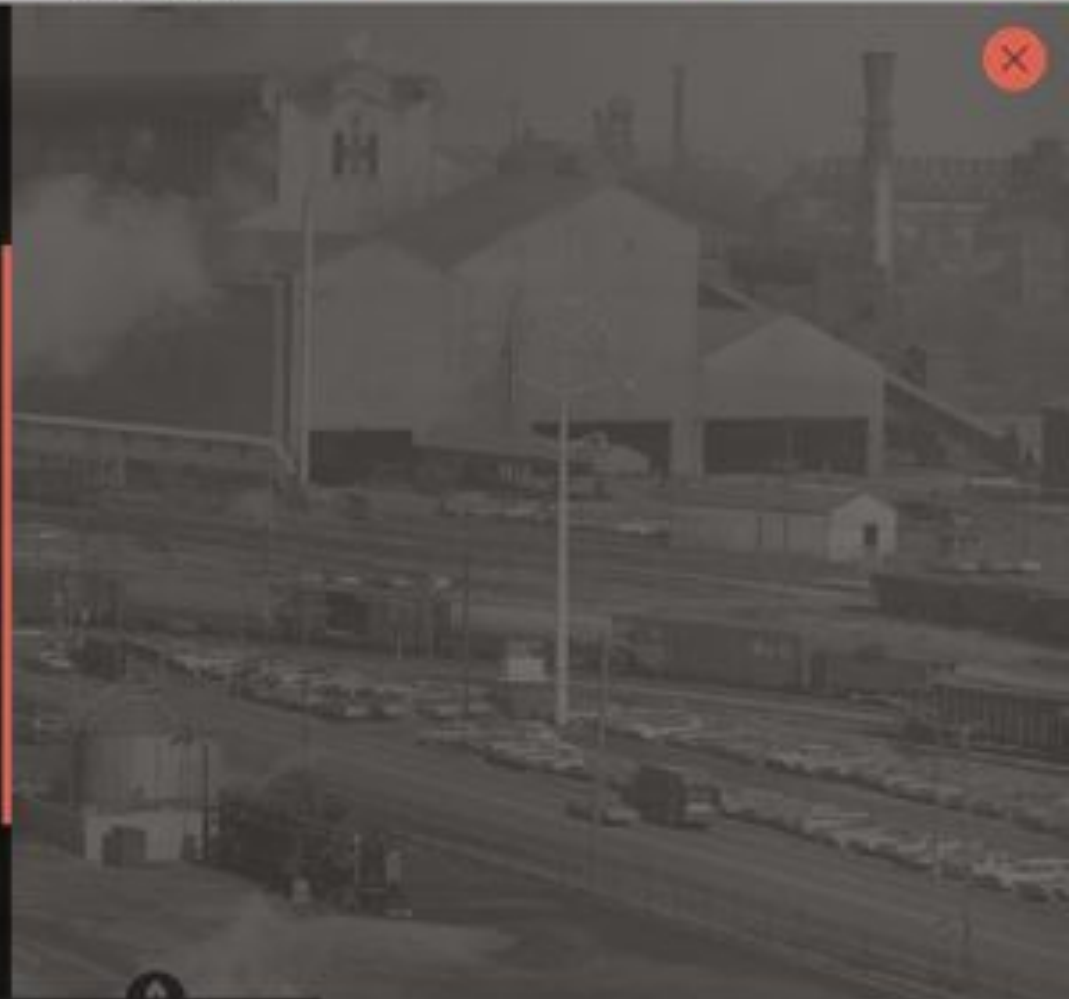
Exit Zero

Produced and written by Christine Walley
& Chris Roedel
Directed and edited by Chris Roedel



Exit Zero is a feature-length documentary film that tells a personal story of the lasting social and environmental impacts of "deindustrialization" and the key role it has played in expanding class inequalities in the United States.

Intertwining home movies, found footage, and a first person narrative, the film traces the stories of multiple generations of producer Christine Walley's family in the once-thriving steel mill community of Southeast Chicago. From the turn-of-the-century experience of immigrants who worked in Chicago's mammoth industries to the labor struggles of the 1930s to the seemingly unfavorable class



THE STRUGGLE
FOR EXISTENCE
FROM THE GRADLE
TO THE GRAVE.



Noon Hour, Illinois Steel Company, South Chicago, Ill.











THE WEBSITE

The Exit Zero Project LLC is collaborating with the [Southeast Chicago Historical Museum](#), [The MIT Open Documentary Lab](#), and [Logosilk Studio](#) to develop an interactive website designed to expand and deepen the storytelling experiences of the Exit Zero book and film.

In keeping with the dramatic physical landscape of Southeast Chicago with its brownfields, wetlands, landfills, and historic neighborhoods, the website will take the form of an interactive map. Visitors will be able to explore the region via this map, by arriving in on specific locations, including former industrial sites, wetlands, and cultural landmarks, and seeing how each site has profoundly changed over time. Viewers will also be able to experience personal stories associated with a particular location, such as those of former millworkers or family members, as well as objects from the Southeast Chicago Historical Museum's collection. These objects include a vast trove of historical documents, photographs and artifacts that tell the industrial and cultural history of Southeast Chicago.

Visitors will also be encouraged to contribute their own stories, photos and artifacts to the collection.

In the United States there is often a deep reluctance to talk about experiences of class. This reluctance makes it difficult to grapple with the consequences of deindustrialization, to think clearly about its consequences, and to imagine a relevant future for those affected. By capturing the stories of a region, The Exit Zero Project seeks to contribute to an expanded conversation about class in America and to new narratives by and for working people.

