A Fair to Remember: The Gilding of Chicago at the 1893 World’s Fair

Emma Schaff

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Department of History, Georgetown University

Advisor: Professor Michael Kazin
Honors Program Chair: Professor Amy Leonard

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During junior year of high school, my AP United States History teacher summed up the Gilded Age with three words: “That’s capitalism, baby.” While historians generally advise against boiling down an entire era to a simple phrase, this witticism, coupled with my own Midwestern pride and Chicago heritage, sparked my interest in the Gilded Age and became the foundation of my exploration.

The process of writing this thesis took many months of hard work, research, writing, and rewriting. This final work reflects a skeleton of the ideas I began with, telling of how my interests and arguments shifted as I uncovered the stories of Chicago and the fair. Before sharing these intertwining histories, I need to express my gratitude to those who helped me throughout this process.

First, a huge thank you goes to my mentor, Professor Michael Kazin and my seminar advisor, Professor Amy Leonard. I would have been lost without their continual support, feedback, encouragement, comments, and ideas. Thank you to my fellow thesis writers for setting aside other tasks to read my work and provide comments, and who, most importantly, truly understand the phrase “misery loves company.” Thank you to my friends and roommates for their support and ability to listen to me ramble on about my work for the last nine months. Finally, thank you to my family for reading my chapters and cheering me on along the way. Without the help of these amazing people and the support of the Georgetown History Department, this project would not have been the same.
Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between the 1893 Columbian Exposition and its host, Chicago, in an attempt to situate the fair within the city’s history. First, Chicago’s founding and development leading to 1893 are examined, paying particular attention to the city’s “destiny” to become great, the imagination of its early settlers, and its Gilded nature. The history of world’s fairs and the exposition’s placement in Chicago are then discussed. Finally, the contrasting and complementing elements of the fair are shown to be emblematic of the contemporary trends found within Chicago’s streets.

By connecting the fair to the Gilded Age, this thesis thematically links the event with its host. In doing this, this thesis frames the fair as Chicago’s destiny and climax moment in which the city gained new notoriety. Finally, the lasting impacts of the fair’s legacy to the present day are explored to show how the 1893 exposition should be examined not only in the year it occurred, but rather in the years that both preceded and followed it. In this way, the fair became immortalized because of its continued interaction with the city and country. In examining the fair as a moving actor in Chicago’s history, this thesis offers one view for how such events should be viewed as products of their social spaces, as well as events with lasting importance.
Introduction

Among all the lessons that will be taught by the World’s Fair, there is none that will be more impressive than the object lesson which Chicago herself will be of the greatness, the grandeur, and the rapid advancement of American civilization. Chicago is, more than any other, a representative American city.¹

—Chicago Tribune, 1893

Chicago will be the main exhibit at the Columbian Exposition of 1893.²

—Julian Randolph

The World’s Fair

Between 1 May and 30 October 1893, the world converged on Chicago for an event that dazzled the masses and surpassed prior international exposition. The 1893 Columbian Exposition occupied an area of 1,037 acres across the city’s south side, contained 65,000 exhibits, and hosted 27.5 million national and international visitors, the equivalent of approximately twenty-five percent of the nation’s population at the time.³ The exposition took place during a critical juncture in US history and, designed to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s discovery of America, signaled the country’s attempt to assert itself as a global power. The exposition also reflected the changes occurring in American society—industrial growth, mass immigration, and technological advance—which made the era a “Gilded Age.” Masterfully designed and constructed, the fair combined high and popular culture and portrayed America’s contributions to, among others, the arts, industry, and machinery. Most importantly, the fair took place in Chicago, a city emblematic of Gilded Age America.

During its six-month duration, the fair attracted domestic and international visitors. When they visited, fairgoers experienced the classical White City, which housed massive, neoclassical structures glorifying the American fine arts, agriculture, industry, and technology; the Midway

¹ "As an Object Lesson," Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922), Feb 26, 1893: 37.
³ Miller, City of the Century, 505.
Plaisance, which was fun, exotic, and boasted international exhibits and carnival rides; and the city of Chicago itself, which complimented and contrasted the fair. The fair’s impressiveness stemmed both from its vast size and the shared experience it offered, one in which “hundreds of thousands of Americans saw a large group of buildings harmoniously and powerfully arranged in a plan of great variety, perfect balance, and strong climax effect.” This “strong climax effect,” or the elites statement on high culture, was used to communicate one view of American progress with Chicago situated as the backdrop of the country’s future. The White City offered a vision of the perfect city, a vision absent from reality. Much as the Gilded Age drew attention to the glittering and rotten achievements of capitalism, the structures of the exposition sought to capture attention around the utopian dreamscape it created, while trying to prevent the shadows of poverty, discrimination, and corruption from turning this dream to a nightmare.

In Chicago’s history, the 1893 exposition stands out as a landmark event. It is interesting, though, that it is often the only remembered city event in 1893, a memorable year in many other ways. In 1893, Sears, Roebuck and Company was established, the Art Institute of Chicago opened, William Wrigley invented Juicy Fruit chewing gum, and the Illinois Institute of Technology opened its doors to its first students. 1893 also marked the beginning of the worst economic downturn of the late-nineteenth century. Given these events alone, 1893 is momentous.

Yet it is only because of the fair that Chicago could show off these achievements to the world. The fair legitimized the city’s achievements to the nation, and few visitors failed to report on its impressive state. As Chicago advertised the fair, it also advertised itself, specifically its high class and cultural achievements. Because of this, a dual relationship between the spaces of

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the fair and city was born. The fair was also temporary; it lasted six months and the majority of its structures were destroyed within a year of its completion. Yet the legacy of Chicago—both its achievements and contrasts—lived on. This realization leads to a few important questions: what did the fair mean to Chicago, and vice versa? If hosting the fair is viewed as Chicago’s signaling to the world that the city had risen from the ashes of the 1871 Fire, what place does the fair have in that history?

The 1893 Columbian Exposition was exceptional because it drew the nation and world’s attention to Chicago. Timothy B. Spears characterized late nineteenth-century Chicagoans as “dreamers,” stating, “‘Chicago Dreaming’ refers to the expectations and desires that prompted thousands of small-town and rural Midwesterners to leave their home and make a new start in Chicago… Yet the dreaming…also figured prominently in the city’s general character.”6 Through the fair, the early Dreamers, seen through the actions of the wealthy classes, lifted “the city up from its provincial roots and established it as the cosmopolitan center not just of the Midwest, but also of the nation.”7 Not only this, the idea of “dreaming” up a city connected closely to the way the first settlers imagined the Midwestern outpost and saw its potential long before it was built.

In The Production of Space, Henri Lefebvre states, “(social) space is a (social) product.”8 If, as will be argued, the fair was a product of the environment in which it was held, then the relationship and interplay between the physical spaces of the 1893 World’s Fair—Jackson Park and Chicago—are critically linked with a pride in the rising power of the city. The elite classes, who played a prominent role in the building and financing of the city, communicated this belief

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6 Timothy B. Spears, Chicago Dreaming: Midwesterners and the City, 1871-1919 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), xiii.
7 Spears, Chicago Dreaming, xv.
in Chicago’s economic and cultural prowess. The fair was a product of this history, a tool of the wealthy classes, and its spaces mirrored contemporary social phenomena. As was true in visitor accounts of the city’s darker realities, the fair also worked through contradictions. United by a shared duality of perspective, the fair must be viewed in light of the city’s history.

To explore this dual relationship between the city and the exposition, this thesis will combine the history of Chicago with that of world’s fairs to show how the fairgrounds mirrored prevalent trends of the era. The context of the time period; the fair’s layout and creation, its planners, and their motivations; firsthand visitor accounts; and contemporary pictures, brochures, and pamphlets will be examined. By considering the fair as a social construction tied to its environment, this thesis will show how fairs should be viewed as products of their social spaces. The fair sought to glorify and mirror the city’s best elements, though it also exposed the darker side to the rapid growth of industry. The two sides of the fair—the White City and the Midway—mirrored the two realities of the city. Thus, the fair and the city exhibited a symbiotic relationship: each needed the other to achieve its full potential. With this idea in mind, we can now turn to the intertwining histories of the fair and city.
I. A Gilded Age and the Gilding of Chicago

A. Introduction: Imagining a City

Chicago
Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation’s Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders...

…Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse,
   And under his ribs the heart of the people,
   Laughing!
   Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth,
   half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker,
   Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and
   Freight Handler to the Nation.⁹

Long before Carl Sandburg characterized its national vitality in his 1914 poem, “Chicago,” and before the city ever existed as the “Hog Butcher” for the world, Chicago’s first settlers imagined its potential. Located on the banks of Lake Michigan, the mouth of the Chicago and Des Plaines Rivers, and with expansive agricultural hinterlands expanding limitlessly to the horizon, it was clear that nature made a profitable trade settlement for both waterborne and land commerce possible. Yet, the flat, swampy land of the low-lying Midwest prairie gave early settlers little to celebrate. Native American tribes, including the Potawatomi, Miami, and Illinois, first inhabited the area until the sixteenth century when the French established a fur-trading outpost.

In the early 1670s, with the aim of expanding France’s imperialist and commercial claims, the intendant of New France, Jean Talon, sent a group of explorers to the interior of North America to find a shorter portage between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River.¹⁰

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¹⁰ John E. Findling, Chicago’s Great World’s Fairs (Manchester and New York: Manchester
September 1673, Louis Joliet, a fur trader, and Jacques Marquette, a Jesuit missionary, arrived at the future site of Chicago. Marquette and Joliet were the first to document and map the area and Marquette recorded their journey on the Chicago River: “We had seen nothing like this river, for the fertility of the land, its prairies, woods, wild cattle, stag, deer, wild cats, bustards, swans, ducks, parrots, and even beaver, its many lakes and rivers.” Through careful observations, Joliet realized Chicago lay on the great continental divide, a geographical advantage that could, if developed, give the city access to both the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. In his report to Talon, he suggested that, by building a canal, France could “begin to command the continent.” Joliet was perhaps the first settler to imagine Chicago’s potential. His prophetic vision, however, was not heeded and following the 1763 Treaty of Paris ending the Seven Years’ War, France ceded the area to Britain. In 1783, after the Revolutionary War, the region fell under United States control. Shortly after, the government created the Northwest Territories and settlers poured westward. Chicago would soon be born and Joliet’s prophecy fulfilled.

1. Fulfilling the Prophecy

…The town goes on for miles and miles until it loses itself in the vastness of the suburbs—churches and chapels, storage elevators, smoking chimneys…the areas of the city are distinguished from each other in degrees of cleanliness in accordance with the nationality of the residents. The devil has broken loose in the stockyards: a lost strike with great numbers of Italians and Negroes brought in as strike-breakers; shootings daily with dozens dead at both sides; a trolley car was pitched over and a dozen women were crushed because a “non-union man” was sitting in it…a cigar dealer was killed in broad

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12 Joliet discovered that, when the waters of Lake Chicago (an outlet of water around the southern rim of Lake Michigan created from glacial melt water) withdrew from the Chicago plain, the remaining ridge acted as a drainage barrier, situating the area between two great water systems. Chicago was thus only a few miles from the two principle water systems of the west: the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. These two systems would later be connected by a canal, giving access to thousands of miles of navigable water. See Donald L. Miller, *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1996), 43-5.
13 Miller, *City of the Century*, 45.
daylight, a few streets away at dusk, three Negroes robbed a trolley car—all in all, a unique flowering of culture! There is a swarming interaction of all the peoples of the human race on every street. Greeks are polishing the shoes of Yankees for 5 cents, the Germans are their washers, the Italians do the dirtiest heavy labor. The whole powerful city, more extensive than London—resembles, except for the better residential areas, a human with his skin removed, and in which all the physiological process can be seen going on.\textsuperscript{15}

—Max Weber, 1904

Max Weber’s 1904 account of Chicago paints a shocking and chaotic picture of city life at the turn of the twentieth century, a picture vastly altered from the swampy terrain and Indian settlements Joliet encountered two centuries prior. Weber’s Chicago bursts with human interactions of all types, and his characterization highlights why Chicago is often cited as a textbook example of the Gilded Age city—rapidly developing, industrialized, and home to immigrants, class and labor conflict, corruption, violence, and capitalism. Whether or not this is the vision for Chicago Joliet imagined, it is clear that the city, quite literally, grew up from a swamp.

Timothy B. Spears states that, “Chicago epitomized the fantastic growth and violent contrasts that increasingly came to characterize nineteenth-century cities,” which Weber’s account confirms.\textsuperscript{16} The space of the 1893 world’s fair was a product of the development of Chicago from Joliet to Weber. Thus, to understand the fair, one must first understand Chicago’s growth in light of the trends of the Gilded Age. The fair embodied the city’s electrifying and terrifying nature, as well as its achievements and dark realities. Chicago’s history illuminates the conflicts of the Gilded Era, seen though its elite classes, immigrants, material culture, and industry. Before turning to this history, one must first examine these trends and the idea that Chicago, throughout its history, was “destined for greatness.”

\textsuperscript{15} Quoted in Timothy B. Spears, \textit{Chicago Dreaming: Midwesterners and the City, 1871-1919} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4.
\textsuperscript{16} Spears, \textit{Chicago Dreaming}, 5.
B. A Gilded Age

The Gilded Age, a term coined by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in their 1873 novel *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, was marked by rampant capitalism. Titans of industry emerged and dominated the market, bringing forth an outpouring of wealth while simultaneously and mercilessly crushing competition. The gains of industry were met with equal losses to the immigrant-dominated laboring classes. In the Gilded Age, the American city became the epicenter of contemporary tensions of immigration, imperialism, industry, capitalism, class hierarchies, labor movements, and corruption.

It was an era of rapid growth. In 1900, the nation’s population reached seventy-six million, almost double the population of thirty years prior; nonfarm labor workforce rose from 48% in 1870 to 60% in 1900; and by 1900, there were seventy-eight cities with over 50,000 inhabitants where there were only twenty-five in 1870. From 1860-1900, 440,000 patents for new inventions were issued and the telegraph and telephone revolutionized communication. The transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869, united the United States, and no city played a more instrumental role for cross-continental commerce than Chicago.

A wave of immigration in the last quarter century of the nineteenth century fueled the fire of industrialization. Between 1870 and 1900, the number of foreign-born people in the

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17 Twain and Dudley’s novel, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, drew its title from Shakespeare’s Macbeth. When he is dissuaded from taking a second coronation, King John says, “To gild defined gold, to paint the lily,...is wasteful and ridiculous excess.” Lady Macbeth then plans to frame the guards of King Duncan and says, “I’ll gild the faces of the grooms withal, for it must seem their guilt.” Twain played on these words—gild and guilt—to create the era’s most memorable nickname. See Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 3.


19 Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 11.

20 In 1865, there were 35,000 of completed rail track in the United States; 93,000 in 1880; 164,000 in 1890; and 193,000 miles of railroad track in 1900. In a mere thirty-five year period, the mileage of railroad track in America grew by 551%. See Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 23.
population rose by 86%, leading to competing views of the place of immigrants in society. The ideas of the American “melting pot” or the “pot of American gold” for every hardworking person attracted immigrants, though such success rarely existed. The majority of urban immigrants, especially the “new” immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, lived in slum-like tenement houses and worked grueling hours at low-paying jobs. Many Americans believed these people were un-American, poorly educated, and a threat to society. In Our Country, Josiah Strong, an American Protestant clergyman and leader of the Social Gospel movement, gave voice to the resurgent nativist movement, praised the greatness of individual liberty, and expressed the need for a homogenous citizenry. Strong also supported contemporary theories of social evolution. One such theory was Herbert Spencer’s Social Darwinism, which postulated that, as with species, some races developed quicker than others, and thus evolved to a higher state of civilization. This theory explained social hierarchies in the modern city, echoes of which were found in visitor accounts of the Midway Plaisance.

The Gilded Age was also an era of imagination in both how the country viewed itself in relation to the world, and how city builders re-envisioned the city. Ben Railton characterized the time as a fusion of “the nostalgia for an ideal agrarian past and the potential for a glorious, world-leading future.” This fusion of agrarian and modern was inseparable from Chicago’s identity, and the tension between city and country manifested itself in how rural residents viewed the fair. Americans of the day also imagined their place within this new industrial landscape. In his 1900 novel, Sister Carrie, Theodore Dreiser described Chicago as having a force like “a

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magnet attracting…to itself from all quarters the hopeful and the hopeless.”  

24 Like Gilded Age cities, Chicago embodied the hope of finding new success, despite this dream’s hollow reality.

Finally, the Gilded Age worked through contrasts and conflicts, a fact reflected in the fair. Alan Trachtenberg argued that the era worked through contradictions and that a clearly defined hierarchy was a principle characteristic.  

25 Whether in labor, industry, or immigration, the growing diversity of the population created confrontations across society, such as in labor disputes and strikes, and this incorporation was the driving source of change in the period.

Railton argued the Gilded Age revealed “conscious attempts to construct a unified and coherent vision of American society, usually related to industry and material progress, and the disunified and chaotic realities of an increasingly diverse nation in which many were left out of and behind by that progress.”  

26 Chicago exemplified this and the city’s elites led these “conscious attempts to construct a unified” vision and show it in the fair. The White City represented the perfect city and the “chaotic realities” of the “diverse nation” were embodied in the Midway Plaisance. Visitors also experienced these realities within Chicago itself. In this way, the history of Chicago reflects the imagination of its earliest settlers, which later manifested itself in the fair.

1. A Note on the “Destiny” of Chicago

Chicago’s earliest settlers, as Joliet first articulated, believed Chicago would fulfill a prophecy of greatness and had a “natural destiny” to become great. To understand the interconnected history of the fair and the city, one must first examine these ideas, particularly in

26 Railton, *Contesting the Past*, 14.
relation to the frontier and the westward growth of the United States, a subject upon which many historians have commented.

In the Gilded Age, contemporary thinkers attempted to explain patterns of America’s expansion and the city’s place in this growth. Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 paper, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” first delivered at the fair, offered the most compelling view on frontier expansion in the American west. Turner posited that savage wilderness was overtaken in progressive stages of development, which, through rural ventures, resulted in increasingly urban environments.\(^{27}\) Turner’s thesis broke down spatial evolution from the primitive to that of the trader, the pastoral, the small community, and finally the urban manufacturing center. The “frontier,” or the “zone” of “free land” and “primitive savagery” at the fringe of civilization representative of the American spirit and individualism, was the driving force of growth. For Turner, Chicago was a product of this evolution. As settlers moved westward, he argued, the once undeveloped land underwent the stages in his growth theory, ultimately ending with “the manufacturing organization…and factory system.”\(^{28}\) With this development complete, the Midwestern city became a new jumping point for the country’s continued expansion. This idea, while it offered a dominant paradigm of contemporary expansionist theory, does not fully encompass an idea of the “natural” destiny of Chicago.

William Cronon, one of the most renowned historians of Chicago and one of the most influential environmental historians today, agreed, and framed Chicago’s natural evolution in ways more applicable to this study of the city and the fair. Cronon rejects the application of Turner’s thesis to Chicago, arguing that Chicago’s story missed some of the evolutionary phases Turner described. He argued instead that Chicago’s “growth apparently began with the city

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\(^{27}\) Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (Chicago: American Historical Association, Chicago Worlds Fair, 12 July 1893).

\(^{28}\) Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.”
instead of ending with it.”

The history of Chicago thus fused with the history of the Great West. Cronon stated, “To miss the city’s relation to nature and the country is in fact to miss much of what the city is... A city’s history must also be the history of its human countryside, and of the natural world within which city and country are both located.” Cronon argued that ecological and economic changes made Chicago the entry point to the Great West; Chicago marked the beginning of a frontier for settlement, and not an end of this process. Economic and ecological forces drove this frontier creation, which formed a “single market, a single geography that spanned much of the interior of the continent.” The ecological forces Cronon referred to were the geographical features that made the city apt for water commerce (connection to the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River), farming (the surrounding fertile prairies were ideal), and becoming a national railroad hub and access point to the undeveloped western United States. Cronon’s ecological approach asserted the city’s environment made it exceptional—a claim the city’s boosters, or those who promoted developing land across the country, fervently advanced.

Donald L. Miller added another layer to Cronon’s examination of Chicago’s history. Miller believed that “ecological history must merge with cultural history if it is to encompass the full life of the city.” This framework makes it possible to postulate how Chicago was not only a product of nature, the school of thought advanced by Cronon, but also a product of human endeavors. In a new model of city and empire, commerce and capital drove the city of the late-
nineteenth century. Located at a crossroads of rail and water commerce, Chicago was aptly situated to become the central metropolis of the Midwest and gateway to the new west (as Joliet recognized). Boosters advocated that the city’s commercial marketplace spurred growth, and this relationship also worked in the reverse. Chicago was not the end of a pattern of settlement. Rather, it was a product of emerging markets and continued to grow long after Turner would have thought it conquered its frontier.

To encapsulate the history of Chicago expressed by the fair, the interplay of both physical and human nature are necessary. Chicago’s boosters promoted this destiny, and, leading up to the fair, the city’s elites sought to prove Chicago had achieved greatness through its rapid growth, structural development, and high-class cultural attractions. Chicago and the fair reflect a history of “dreamers,” connected by determination and capitalistic drive. With these theories of development in mind, one can turn back to the story of the city and what happened after Joliet prophesized its success. This examination will reveal how Chicago’s potential stemmed from the vision of its boosters. This vision changed over time: it was first articulated in the city’s growth prior to 1871, and the Great Fire of 1871 allowed architects and capitalists another chance to reimagine its spaces. The 1893 fair represented a third imagining of the city and sought to display a grander, more perfect vision, one rid of the ills of the Gilded Age.

C. The Gilding of Chicago

From 1818-1871, Chicago’s history, like that of many the developing Midwestern cities of the day, was that of dreamers, future-looking settlers, and speculators, popularly known as boosters, who sought to promote developing land areas and profit from doing so. In the fall of 1818, the same year in which Illinois became a state, Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard, one of Chicago’s earliest settlers, arrived. Hubbard believed that the completion of a canal, whose
terminus was to lie south of Chicago and cut through the Des Plaines River, would transform the prairie settlement into a “great city.” Hubbard was right, and by the 1830s, construction of the Chicago canal was becoming a certainty. Combined with the fact that Americans were taking over the land Native Americans once held, Chicago’s ascendancy to a position of urban prominence became a fact, not question.

William Butler Ogden’s election to the position of Chicago’s first mayor in 1833 marked the beginning of the city’s metropolitan history. Yet, according to Ogden, Chicago was in that year “a poor excuse for a city.” This, however, did not stop speculators from imagining a commercial hub rising from the swampy terrain. During the speculative boom of 1835 and 1836, which was particularly intense in Chicago, the *Daily Tribune* reported, “everybody here and elsewhere was induced to buy a lot on speculation. If a stranger came here he was told of the great fortunes made by people in spite of themselves, by the simple process of buying a few feet of dirty swamp water.” “Seeing is believing,’ certainly, in most cases,” *The Baltimore Sun* wrote in 1840, “but in the days of the land fever we who were in the midst of the infected district scarcely found it so.” Chicago began as a boom site where investors bought stake in what was, as reported by the *Tribune*, merely “a rickety city of frame shanties [and] a small city of pushing, hustling, lively people, shut off, as one looks at it now, from half the privileges and enjoyments that make life endurable.”

When considering Chicago’s growth as a product of the imagination of speculators, it is important to note that Chicago was certainly not the only city formed through such practice. The land craze of the 1830s, coupled with a upward push of the business cycle and easing of credit,

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34 Miller, *City of the Century*, 48, 72.
35 Miller, *City of the Century*, 74.
37 “Recollections of the land fever,” *The Sun* (Sep 8, 1840): 1.
38 Luther Van Dorn, "A View of Chicago in 1848", *Magazine of Western History*, 10, no. 1 (May 1889).
sent speculators searching far and wide for land worthy of a future city. As real estate prices rose, speculators bought more. Joseph Balestier, a Chicago attorney, reported in 1840 that the boom created “a chain almost unbroken of suppositious villages and cities. The whole land seemed staked out and peopled on paper.”\(^{39}\) Though obviously self-serving, boosters had to create persuasive arguments to defend their investments, and a discourse emerged among speculators of the era. Examining this discourse reveals the extent to which the city was imagined before it was built. Speculators such as Jesup W. Scott and William Gilpin advanced economic theories of growth and believed the new West would grow out of this relationship between city and countryside.\(^{40}\)

The dominant question of the era among speculators was which of these rapidly growing western cities was destined for greatness. To this question, Chicago boosters answered. They did not base their vision and promotion of Chicago solely on its natural transportation advantages because other cities, such as St. Louis, had equal claims of water superiority. Jesup W. Scott predicted Chicago would double its population in three and a half years, faster than any other city, and that a “lake city…[which] offered a wider field of trade” was destined to become great. “Chicago and Toledo,” Scott prophesized, “are believed to be the true claimants for this high destiny.”\(^{41}\) John S. Wright, another of Chicago’s most vocal boosters between 1850 and 1870, stressed the prominent role the Midwestern outpost would play in the nation’s economy, particularly for railroads. Speculator William Bross stressed the equality of opportunity for all men in Chicago, especially after the Great Fire in 1871.\(^{42}\)

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39 Quoted in Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis, 32.
40 Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis, 34.
41 Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis, 37, 40-41.
42 Spears, Chicago Dreaming, 10-12.
What further distinguishes Chicago in this era from other cities born through speculation, such as St. Louis, was the fervor of its boosters. “Perhaps no city,” wrote Spears, “with the exception of Los Angeles (New York being another case altogether)—has been so much the object of prospective fantasy.”\(^{43}\) The city’s nicknames illustrated this point. Chicago came to be known as the “Windy City,” both for its weather conditions and because its boosters bragged ceaselessly about its merits. It was also called “the Second City” (with New York being the first), because of its intent to become the new center of the United States.\(^{44}\) Given these factors, Chicago seems unique in this era for the determination with which its boosters promoted a vision of urban promise.

From 1833-1871, Chicago grew quickly, emerged as a commercial center in the Midwest, and began to fulfill its “destiny.” In 1837, it was formally incorporated as a city.\(^{45}\) In 1848, the Illinois and Michigan canal was completed, giving Chicago access to the thousands of miles of navigable tributaries the boosters had advocated. 1848 was “evidently a monumental year for Chicago,” wrote the columnist Luther van Dorn in the same year, “it was in that year that plank roads began to be built, that the first telegram was received in the city, that the Board of Trade was organized, that the first bit of railroad was constructed…that the first city building—the market building—was erected.” In 1848, the construction of the city’s railroad began, and Chicago’s central location to transcontinental shipping destined it, as Van Dorn wrote, “to be a great manufacturing point.”\(^{46}\) Driven by eastern capital, rail networks connecting east and west were built and, by 1860, Chicago was the eastern terminus for almost every major railroad

\(^{43}\) Spears, *Chicago Dreaming*, 9.
\(^{44}\) In the lead-up to the fair, the nickname “Windy City” would again be used by New Yorkers in the context that Chicago claims to hold a fair were simply “full of wind.” See Spears, *Chicago Dreaming*, 9.
\(^{46}\) Luther Van Dorn, "A View of Chicago in 1848.”
network west of Lake Michigan. On Christmas Day, 1865, the Union Stockyards opened and, coupled with the completion of the rail system, Chicago became a national hub for cattle, sheep, and pigs, as well as for producers and consumers.48

The completion of the canal and growth of the railway spurred rapid development. In 1837, Chicago had a population of 4,718; by 1870, the population had reached 334,270, seventy times more than in 1837.49 “The site of the city of Chicago is exactly in that part of empire along which moves the ceaseless tide of travel and commerce, eastward and westward, around the earth,” reported the Tribune, and this admittedly somewhat biased statement was indeed mirrored through growth.50 By 1870, Chicago was the busiest railroad center in the country and housed substantial merchant and wealthy classes. Downtown, there existed businesses to fulfill every need and whim, and the mile-long State Street boasted stylish shops, including the 225-room Palmer House Hotel.51 The imagined Chicago was becoming a reality. Leading up to 1870, buildings were erected, sanitation systems improved, and suburbs developed, all in time for one of the most dramatic events in Chicago’s history.

1. Rising from the Ashes

47 The Union Stockyards transformed Chicago’s role in the meat trade. In the 1840’s and 1850’s Chicago’s stockyards became surrounded by homes and buildings. As such, livestock had to be transported through the city’s congested streets to the various handling centers, which not only inconvenienced drivers and endangered people and animals, but also broke up the market. The Union Stockyards presented a solution in the form of a single, concentrated stockyard with a rail terminus leading directly to the yards, thus eliminating the problem of transporting animals through the city. The plan was proposed by Chicago’s nine largest railroads in partnership with members of the Chicago Pork Packers’ Association. The site for the stockyards was a half square mile terrain lying south of the city limits and in the open prairie west of Halstead Street, only four miles from the city center. By 1868, Chicago’s packing industry made up twenty-five percent of the city’s manufacturing output where it had only been twelve percent in 1860. See Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis, 86, 209-211, and Richard Schneirov, Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern Liberalism in Chicago, 1864-97 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 21.
49 Findling, Chicago’s Great World’s Fairs, 2.
50 Consul, ”Chicago: The Metropolis of the West,” 427.
51 Findling, Chicago’s Great World’s Fairs, 2.
On the night of 8 October 1871, flames took violent hold of Chicago and filled the night sky with the dance of millions of yellow and orange flames. The fire started on the city’s west side and was rumored to have begun in the barn of Mrs. Catherine O’Leary (though these claims have never been substantiated). The wooden buildings that dominated the city’s landscape, completely dried out by one of the worst droughts in the city’s history, fed the flames, which burned late into the morning.\(^52\) In looking back at the Great Fire and the city’s construction, one report stated in 1885 that “Chicago was then built as if to invite its destruction.”\(^53\)

The Great Fire brought a tragic loss of life and property, and must be viewed as a critical transition point in the history of Chicago. The Fire decimated two thousand acres of the city, left roughly 18,000 people homeless, destroyed the majority of the city’s commercial area, killed as many as three hundred people, and destroyed an estimated $196 million of property.\(^54\) The businesses of downtown, including department stores, warehouses, and Chicago’s Board of Trade, lay in rubble. Yet the fire revealed the determined and enterprising drive of Chicago’s capitalists to, as speculators had initially, reimagine their city. It also gave them the opportunity to create a coherent city-plan, something that would also be true of the fair. Thus, the fire represented a second reimagining of Chicago. As the city had risen from a swamp, Chicago’s capitalists, including Marshall Field and Philip Armour, were determined to resurrect the city. Shortly after the fire, the *Tribune* predicted, “In the midst of a calamity without parallel in the world’s history, looking upon the ashes of thirty years’ accumulations, the people of this once

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\(^52\) Between 4 July and 9 October 1871, Chicago received less than one inch of rain. See Miller, *City of the Century*, 143-147.

\(^53\) Quoted in Miller, *City of the Century*, 143.

\(^54\) David F. Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893*, (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1976), 45.
beautiful city have resolved that *Chicago Shall Rise Again*.

The opening of the fair on 1 May 1893 symbolically represented this dream to “rise from the ashes.”

The destruction of the fire spurred the city to develop and gave it a blank slate on which to do so. In the 1880s, novelist Charles Dudley Warner stated: “The growth of Chicago is one of the marvels of the world…There is no history parallel to this product of a freely acting democracy.”

One could also add to Warner’s statement that the products of capitalism, both good and bad, also played a key role in this development. While Chicago was certainly not the only city to experience explosive growth in the latter half of the nineteenth century, its rebuilding following the fire happened at an impressive pace. Between 1871 and 1893, Chicago erected 98,838 new buildings, worth almost $450 million in value; the city’s trade volume expanded 900 percent, from $19,153,851 in 1870 to $194,337,838 in 1890; and capital rose about 511 percent.

Chicago began shipping large quantities of meat and goods to France, Great Britain, and Germany, and in 1897, the last tracks of the electronic transportation service, the “L,” were completed, connecting the city like never before. At its center, the L tracks entirely encircled the downtown, now filled with towering skyscrapers, solidifying its nickname: the Loop.

The completion of the L spurred more development through access to land beyond the city, which began to grow outward in rings. As people flooded into Chicago leading up to the fair, the once-agricultural hinterlands became neighborhoods and suburbs.

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57 For example, San Francisco grew from a tiny village into the main city of the West coast in just a decade from 1848-1858.
61 As William Cronan argued, the growth of Chicago’s markets and people mimicked a pattern of city growth proposed by Johann Heinrich von Thünen. In von Thünen’s model, the city expands outward in circles, called
Significantly, much of the architectural talent that rebuilt the city would build the fair twenty years later, and they used the years after the fire to make a name for themselves. Lured to the city to reimagine its space and for an unprecedented opportunity to build, these architects took pride in learning from the mistakes of the previous—and highly flammable—constructions. This group of architects included Louis Sullivan, known as the “father of skyscrapers;” Daniel Burnham and John Root; H.H. Richardson, known for his Richardsonian Romanesque style; and Frank Lloyd Wright, a famed and pioneering young architect known for his philosophy of organic architecture, or creating a harmony in design between humanity and the environment. With the leadership of these creative geniuses, the Loop district resurrected itself, the city became noted for its own “Chicago style,” and the buildings of Root and Sullivan were described by a Boston architect as “products of local genius.” In this way, the fire liberated the city from its primitive constructions and allowed it the chance to make statements through architectural greatness. Sullivan’s statement that the “architect is a product of our civilization” aptly captured the energetic spirit of rebirth felt in the fire’s wake. As the “new” Chicago was a product of this spirit or re-imagination, the fair became the product of these architects’ creations.

As Chicago grew upward in construction, it also grew outward in space as ethnic populations enlarged and divided the city. In 1890, Chicago’s population exceeded one million
people. Among US cities, only New York had a larger population. Of Chicago’s one million residents, less than twenty-five percent were children of native-born white parents.\(^\text{67}\) New and old Chicago and new and old wealth came to exist near one another. This diversity gave the city an inherently divided appearance, which would later be true of the fair. In 1890, Germans and Irish dominated Chicago’s ethnic population, while the number of Bohemians and Poles, as well as the number of Norwegians and Swedes, rose to 100,000.\(^\text{68}\) With growth, the city became sectioned off by industry and ethnicity: Swedes and Norwegians on the North Side near the river with the Germans just north of them; the Irish in Bridgeport; and the “patches” of immigrant vagrants along the river, infamously home to disease, prostitution, crime, and vice.\(^\text{69}\)

![Figure 1. An 1895 population map of Chicago. For an enlarged version of this image, please see Appendix, page 146.\(^\text{70}\)](image)

Population maps of the time neatly showed the concentrations of ethnicities and how they changed from one area to the next (see Figure One above). Germans, Italians, Irish, Swiss, and French—the “old immigrants”—typically inhabited areas in the city’s north side, represented here by the dark navy blue (Italian), green (Irish), pink (German), and white (English-speaking

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\(^\text{67}\) Miller, *City of the Century*, 521.


\(^\text{69}\) Miller, *City of the Century*, 136.

\(^\text{70}\) Samuel Sewell Greeley, Ill. Hull-House. *Nationalities Map No. 1[-4], Polk St. to Twelfth ... Chicago.*, (Chicago: Greeley-Carlson Company and Thomas Y. Crowell Company; and New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1895).
peoples) seen at the top (the North side) of this map. Large populations of Polish, Bohemian, Russian, Chinese, Arabian, and Turkish people—the “new” immigrants—lived more in the city’s south and west closest to the factories. This is particularly clear on the map in the bottom (the South side) populations of yellow (Bohemian), red stripes (Polish), red (Russian), orange (Chinese), and orange stripe (Arabian). To the far right (the East side), a large mass of black color (African Americans), shows the populations living closest to factories or undeveloped land, represented by the uncolored lots.

Like contemporary cities, Chicago felt the ills of urbanization, and gains in wealth were met with equal losses. Rapid growth, accompanied by the influx of immigrants and factories, brought sanitation, labor, and housing problems. Those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, namely factory workers and immigrants, suffered most. The rapid construction was also cheap, which meant tenement houses were hazardous and leaked air; factory workers were exposed to the diseases of their occupation, including polluted air and dirty water; and working class families invariably struggled to make ends meet. The 1880s in particular were marked by industrial growth and factories spewed thick layers of black smoke into the city, causing many to dub Chicago the “Black City,” a name the fair’s planners sought to reverse in the White City. In 1893, traveler H.G. Wells named Chicago’s most supreme characteristic its “dark disorder of growth.”

In response to the ills of growth, rich citizens fled the dirty tenement houses of Chicago’s Downtown Loop and Meatpacking Districts and moved north to the suburbs. Those who could not afford to move—the majority of the population and namely the working poor—attempted to

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71 Greeley, *Nationalities Map No. 1[-4], Polk St. to Twelfth...Chicago.*
74 Miller, *City of the Century*, 196.
alleviate their problems through participation in labor unions.\textsuperscript{75} The rapid growth of the meat packing industry, as well as other industries, increased the presence of unions between 1870 and 1900. In 1870, almost forty-nine percent of Chicago’s population was foreign-born, as well as sixty-nine percent of the work force. The heyday of organized labor in Chicago came in the mid-1880s, when the Knights of Labor organized the Irish and many other unskilled laborers. The membership of this group grew from 2,300 in 1882 to more than 40,000 in 1886, after which membership declined in to the 1890s.\textsuperscript{76} Various strikes throughout the 1870s and 1880s further made clear that working classes harbored bitterness toward those in control of capital. The Haymarket Square Riot on 4 May 1886, an influential labor protest leading up to the fair, left seven policemen dead in the wake of a bomb’s blast, bringing criticisms to labor groups.\textsuperscript{77}

Leading up to the fair, class lines were drawn, and the common laborer could hardly relate to the elite class anticipation of the fair. Immigrants, particularly the Chinese and those from Southern and Eastern Europe, including Bohemians, Lithuanians, Poles, Turks, and Russians, were viewed as threateningly foreign and un-American. Any imagined vision of uplifting Chicago and proudly displaying its history seemed to forget the plight of these citizens, and, more importantly, sought to ignore them. Daniel Burnham’s White City would provide a vision of a perfect city, yet the reality of Chicago lay just beyond its exhibits.

\textsuperscript{75} A note on labor unions in this era is needed. In his book \textit{Labor and Urban Politics}, Richard Schneirov paints the picture of Chicago’s labor movement’s history alongside a narrative of the development of modern liberalism. Within this framework, Schneirov views the enduring effects of the labor movement from the end of the Civil War to the 1900s as a byproduct of Chicago’s history, where immigrants and ethnic groups influenced the landscape of unions. For example, the influx of immigrants in the 1860s created a labor surplus, which gave employers more power. The 1871 fire caused the employment of the manufacturing work force to more than double, which swamped trade union efforts to organize. Thus, the percentage of the workforce involved in labor unions fluctuated throughout the last part of the century. More importantly, there were a diverse group of labor movements during this time leading up to the fair, the majority of which were separate from anarchists and socialists, groups viewed as the primary threat to society. For example, the Knights of Labor, founded in 1869, had a particularly strong influence in the city and a large Irish-American membership. See Schneirov, \textit{Labor and Urban Politics}.

\textsuperscript{76} Schneirov, \textit{Labor and Urban Politics}, 90-1.

\textsuperscript{77} Findling, \textit{Chicago’s Great World’s Fairs}, 5.
By 1893, Chicago’s wealthy classes were flourishing and the city’s laborers suffering under the domain of capitalism meant to benefit only a minority. Philip D. Armour of the Union Stockyards, Marshall Field, Potter Palmer, George M. Pullman, and Cyrus McCormick became some of the most notable faces of this elite class, and took it upon themselves to ensure industry flourished. In response to social ills, Chicago’s wealthy citizens also embarked on a crusade of city improvement, witnessed through the flowering of museums, educational institutions, libraries, and social settlement houses, the most famous of which was founded by Jane Addams in 1889. These institutions would be proudly displayed at the fair in hopes of reversing eastern prejudices.

By 1893, Chicago had transformed and no longer resembled a provincial city. Having rebirthed itself from the ashes of the 1871 fire, the city was now a thriving metropolis, and ready to declare itself to the world as such. The city boasted the amenities and horrors of the modern day: skyscrapers, art, museums, business centers, sports teams, and transportation systems, as well as poverty, slums, and violence. Still seen by some as an undeveloped and uncivilized backwater of the United States, the Chicago of 1893 wanted to prove its enterprising and commercial spirit. “Chicago is Chicago,” Henry Blake Fuller wrote in 1893, “It is inevitable; nothing can stop us now.” Chicago encapsulated American determination, power, and potential—as well as the harsh realities of capitalism, poverty, and class conflicts—and these images would be infused into the 1893 fair.

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II. Building the White City in the Windy City

When Coleridge sang to Mount Blanc in the Vale of Chamouni, ‘Thou risest from forth thy silent sea of pines,’ his inspiration probably came from much the same enthusiasm which long afterward reechoes from the lips of those who remember the Jackson Park of two years ago—a marsh of tangled undergrowth and a waste of ill-tempered oaks, from which have arisen the stately structures of the Exposition.

—Daniel Burnham

Daniel Burnham’s high praise for the spaces of the 1893 world’s fair mirror the history of Chicago. As Chicago grew from a swampy prairie into a metropolis and experienced a rebirth after the 1871 fire, the fair was born from the “tangled undergrowth” of Jackson Park. In this light, the history of the fair is a product of the history of Chicago. When they built the fair, the planners attempted to build a masterpiece void of imperfections of the Gilded Age. Chicago and the fair are thus linked and their spaces mirror one another. This chapter will explore this relationship through an examination of the history of, and America’s involvement in world’s fairs, the exposition’s placement, and the days leading up to the fair.

A. The World’s Fair

According to the Bureau of International Exposition (BIE), a world’s fair “is a gathering of people from many parts of the world, at which they demonstrate their products and their arts, and promote their homelands.” The modern string of world’s fairs began in London in the mid-nineteenth century in the midst of the Industrial Revolution, though tradeshows and loosely organized expositions had been occurring since ancient times. Since their inception, fairs existed as expressions of national pride. From their beginning in 1851 until 1928, there was no international governing body determining where the next fair would be or how many would

occur. Rather, countries could choose to stage a fair, invite other nations, and fund the fair through national donations and participation fees. The 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago was an example of this.

The 1851 “Crystal City” of London was the first world’s fair and represented a new era of expression. London’s exposition was a chance for countries to express that they were apart of the developed world, particularly through the display of arts, manufactures, and inventions. More importantly, organized fairs allowed countries to assert their prestige on the international stage and communicate their status as a cultural, manufacturing, and commercial superpower. Reid Badger stated London’s fair “was the first conscious attempt to give comprehensive expression, in a concrete and popularly accessible form, to the major forces and concerns which underlay nineteenth century Western culture in general and mid-century British culture in particular.”

This idea of creating a “conscious” expression was fundamental, and would play a role in Chicago. London’s fair was viewed as a monumental success. Winston Churchill declared it “the marvel of the decade,” and the fair set important precedents for future expositions, such as unveiling architectural wonders and showcasing machine inventions. Eleven world’s fairs followed London in rapid succession: New York in 1853, Paris in 1855, London in 1862, Paris in 1878, Baltimore in 1878, Philadelphia in 1876, Chicago in 1893, St. Louis in 1904, San Francisco in 1915, and Barcelona in 1929. In 1928, thirty-one countries founded the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE). Located in Paris, the BIE sought to limit the number of world’s fairs. Any country that joined the BIE agreed to participate in all BIE-sanctioned expositions, which gave legitimacy to the events and created a more standard procedure for hosting. The BIE still exists today and is responsible for “registering” expositions, which makes them official. “Official” exposition may occur only once every five years, and the next “international expo” is scheduled to take place in Dubai in 2020. See “Expos Q&A.” World’s Fairs. World’s Fair, Inc.


London’s fair dazzled its six million visitors with its enormous glass and iron structure—the 108-foot tall Crystal Palace built by Joseph Paxton—that earned the fair its nickname and set the tradition of creating a grand structure at fairs. The 1889 Paris exposition famously unveiled the Eiffel Tower. Machine inventions were also very important to fairs. The Bessemer steel process was shown in 1862 in London; and the telephone and typewriter in Philadelphia in 1876. See Badger, The Great American Fair, 3-8.
1867, Vienna in 1873, Philadelphia in 1876, Paris in 1878, Sydney in 1879, Melbourne in 1880, London in 1886, Paris in 1889, and Chicago in 1893.\textsuperscript{86}

Between 1851 and 1893, the United States’ relationship with world’s fairs changed drastically, reflecting the expansion of American nationalism and resources. Initially, the United States failed to make substantial appropriations for exhibits, including at London in 1851 and Paris in 1855.\textsuperscript{87} A French visitor in 1855 reported he was “cruelly disappointed….Who would have believed that this great American people, which seems to have atrophied all the artistic parts of human nature in order to concentrate on agriculture, industry, and commerce…would have fallen down in the great exhibition of 1855!”\textsuperscript{88} As time passed, though, the United States changed its tune. By the 1889 Exhibition in Paris, appropriations had risen to $250,004.66, up from $2000 at London in 1862.\textsuperscript{89} Particularly notable were political arguments behind this increase in appropriations. While arguing for participation in Paris in 1867, General Nathaniel Banks of Massachusetts stated: “it is in our power to represent the social and political character of the country…and thus place before the world an enlarged view of the condition…of American civilization.”\textsuperscript{90} Banks’s argument proved persuasive, and $212,603 were awarded to the 1867 exposition, more even than the next exposition in Paris twelve years later.\textsuperscript{91}

Domestic exhibitions, notably Philadelphia in 1876 and Chicago in 1893, affected European impressions of America. Philadelphia, the nation’s first world’s fair of a grand scale, focused on American machines, including Bell’s telephone, the refrigerator, the sewing machine,

\textsuperscript{86} Badger, \textit{The Great American Fair}, 131.
\textsuperscript{87} Ladee Hubbard, "Mobility in America: The Myth of the Frontier and the Performance of National Culture at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893" (University of California, Los Angeles, 2003), 187-8.
\textsuperscript{89} It is also important to note that the US historically appropriated the most amount of money to fairs in Europe, particularly Paris. These appropriations make a comment on where the US saw value in creating an exhibition abroad. See Badger, \textit{The Great American Fair}, 132.
\textsuperscript{90} Curti, “America at the World Fairs, 1851-1893”, 835.
\textsuperscript{91} Badger, \textit{The Great American Fair}, 132.
and Edison’s duplex telegraph. A British visitor noted that American artisans’ “brains superintended every aspect of the industrial process;” a Belgian civil engineer was awed by the new Corliss engine; and French commissioners stated Americans “possessed the power of invention in the highest degree.”

When looking at these early fairs, it is important to consider the framework they laid for Chicago. Historians Nancy E. Gwinn and Robert W. Rydell provide a helpful lens for viewing fairs between 1850 and 1900, which they characterized as “Victorian Fairs.” The Victorian Fair sought to exhibit culture as “the badge of achievement and power” and attempted to do so within the context of civilization, and particularly civilization attached to commerce. Another important aspect of the Victorian Fair was “the idea of universal culture…defined, in part, by European opposition between civilization and savagery.” Imperial thought and discourse dominated fairs of the Victorian era, and their spaces were emblems of industrialization and urbanization.

In applying the framework of the Victorian Fair, one must clarify the terms at hand. World’s fairs were distinct products of western civilization, with “civilization” in this context referring particularly to Western Europe and the United States. At “world’s” fairs, only “civilized” nations decided who was included and what achievements were worthy of display. More importantly, these “civilized” nations, often the same ones pursuing aggressive imperialist agendas before the turn of the twentieth century, possessed the power to state who still needed to become so. The “savage” stood in stark contrast to this civilization, and, at Chicago’s fair, were

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92 The New York City Exposition of 1853 was largely regional. It attracted only a few foreign exhibitions. See Badger, *The Great American Fair*, 16-17.
96 It is worth noting that there was a fair held in Sydney in 1879 and in Melbourne in 1880. Though not European or American, these were developing and industrialized cities at the time, and still fit within the definitions being outlined.
labeled as such. The Midway Plaisance, which housed the displays of African, Latin American, and many Asian countries—those deemed at the fringes of civilization—was intentionally removed from the White City.

Given these definitions, the 1893 exposition fits squarely in the lens of the Victorian Fair. Chicago’s fair expressed who was savage and civilized, and these distinctions manifested themselves in the exposition’s physical layout. The spirit of the White City was one of progress and high culture, while the Midway spirit was low-brow, savage, wild, chaotic, and fun. Chicago’s fair thus remains embedded in and emblematic of the Victorian Fair structure because it attempted to comment on the state of the “civilized” world, both in the fair and in Chicago.

B. Winning the Fair

Chicago has shown that she possesses the public spirit necessary to give the Fair the widest international character and dignity.  
—Century Magazine, December 1891

Chicago was in many ways a representative city. Its rapid growth in the second half of the century reoriented the United States to accord the Midwestern hub a position of commercial and economic prominence. For its wealthy industrialists and elites, an exposition presented the opportunity to advertise this success to the world. The Columbian Exposition of 1893 was the thirteenth world’s fair and the third American one, and the fight to host proved intense. Given its design to be of an unprecedented scale, the host city was of utmost importance. Winning the fair affirmed the city’s worth to elites, and validated the early prophecies of the Chicago Dreamers. This section will examine how Chicago won and the vision it proposed. Understanding this history helps situate the fair: the fair had to be in Chicago and Chicago had to host the fair to solidify its impact.

Beginning in the mid 1880s, following the success of Philadelphia, the idea of hosting an American world’s fair to honor the four hundred year anniversary of Columbus’ arrival aroused interest. In this era, there was no international body deciding the next world fair’s location. Rather, a city or country made a proposition and invited other countries to participate. After declaring its intention to host such an exposition, the United States established a national competition to find the ideal location.

Chicago entered the fight in 1889, following the Chicago Club’s 1888 creation of a citizens’ committee that resolved to “form an organization in order to hold a world’s fair in the city of Chicago to commemorate the discovery of America by Columbus.” In July 1890, the mayor, DeWitt C. Cregier, initiated the public movement after “appoint[ing] a citizens’ committee of one hundred to lend the impetus of a powerful organization to take the steps necessary to insure success.” This committee, known as the Chicago Committee, was comprised of the city’s most powerful commercial names: Potter Palmer, the hotel magnate; Philip Armour of the Chicago-based meatpacking company Armour & Co.; and Marshall Field, founder of the department store that bore his name. These wealthy businessmen, as they had sponsored Chicago’s growth, would also ensure its destiny to host the fair through political

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98 Interestingly, scholars agree there is no absolute clear origin for the root of the desire to host a fair in Columbus’s honor. Daniel Burnham confessed, “I do not know who first advocated holding a World’s Fair on the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus.” Interest in hosting a fair arose independently and anonymously in several cities, culminating in the American Historical Association’s appointment of George Bancroft as chairman to lobby to Congress to obtain a charter for a fair commemorating Columbus. See Charles Moore, Daniel H. Burnham: Architect, Planner of Cities (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 31; and Thomas S. Hines, Burnham of Chicago: Architect and Planner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 74-5.

99 Badger, The Great American Fair, 46.

100 Higinbotham, Report of the President, 7.

101 Other wealthy members of the committee included George Pullman, industrialist and engineer of the Pullman sleeping train cars; Martin A. Ryerson, a famous businessman and art collector; Cyrus McCormick, an inventor and founder of the McCormick Machine Company; Joseph Medill, owner of the Chicago Tribune and the city’s mayor after the 1871 fire; and Lyman J. Gage, a financier and presidential cabinet member. Miller, City of the Century, 379.
persuasion and fundraising, particularly through the sale of stock. Ultimately, their success in garnering public support, including a pledge to raise ten million dollars, would prove decisive.\(^{102}\)

Chicago advertised itself as an ideal city, citing its central location, accessibility by railway, history of hosting conventions, and moderate summer weather—despite some degree of falsity in this particular claim—as key factors. More importantly, Chicago, as stated by Chicago Committee president H.N. Higinbotham, not only was the “terminus of thirty-eight great railroads,” it offered foreigners and Americans an “unusual opportunity to become acquainted with the remarkable development of [the US] west of the Alleghany Mountains.”\(^{103}\) As the new center of American commerce, Higinbotham argued Chicago most embodied the country’s spirit of growth—a spirit previously advertised with the city’s “destiny.”

New York, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C. emerged as the most serious rivals for the fair, though ultimately the competition came down to New York and Chicago. New Yorkers believed that, as the largest commercial center and most accessible seaport to foreigners, they deserved the fair. New York newspapers warned that Chicago lacked a cultural tradition and against the “nonsensical claims of that windy city. Its people could not hold a world’s fair even if they won it.”\(^{104}\) This characterization explains another source of Chicago’s nickname. In response to these criticisms, Higinbotham stated a New York fair would “arouse among foreigners but little desire to know our country,” and that in Chicago “more readily than in any other city, could a site be secured which should be adequate to the purposes of the exposition, together with accommodations for the comfort and convenience of visitors within reasonable

\(^{102}\) In 1889, Chicago’s subscription list of stockholders pledged to raise five million dollars for the fair. During the Congressional hearings in 1890, St. Louis and New York newspapers, in an effort to delegitimize the claims of Chicago to host the fair, called into doubt the legitimacy of Chicago’s ability to fulfill this promise. In response, the Chicago committee pledged ten million dollars, which helped solidify the Congress’ confidence in awarding Chicago the fair. See Badger, *The Great American Fair*, 51-2.


The Chicago Tribune also rebuffed New York as “the meanest city in America” and “not an American city,” in the way Chicago represented the country’s new enterprising spirit. This debate between Chicago and New York highlighted the national tension between East and West. Chicagoans argued their city was representative of the “great and breathing West” and an exhibition would “go right to the heart of every farmer in the country.” In harping on its centrality, the Tribune wrote in 1889, “As all roads go to Rome, so all railroads go to Chicago.” Only Chicago could unify the nation, and not just “the thin fringe of people on the Atlantic seaboard.” Finally, it was often noted that, although largely regional, because New York hosted 1853, another city should have the chance. Chicago had, as its boosters predicted, become a commercial center and promoters used this to advocate for the fair.

“The people of Chicago were proud of their city,” wrote Joel Cook, a reporter for the London Times, “All the leading citizens of Chicago seemed to have thrown themselves into the work, and are devoting heart and soul to it.” Cook’s report recognized the city’s determination, and between August 1889 and April 1890, Chicago’s “leading citizens” did everything possible to prove this to Congress. In 1889, the Chicago Committee sent E.T. Jeffrey, chairman of the committee on Grounds and Buildings, to the Paris Exposition and incorporated his report on Paris’s successes in their proposals. Promotional stickers circulated the city and businesses publicly voiced support.

In 1890, Congress decided on Chicago and sanctioned their decision with an official government charter, stating:

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105 Higinbotham, Report of the President, 10.
106 Badger, The Great American Fair, 48-52.
108 Badger, The Great American Fair, 49.
An Act to provide for celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of America by Christopher Columbus by holding an International Exposition of arts, industries, manufactures and the products of the soil, mine and sea, in the City of Chicago, in the State of Illinois… [The exhibition] should be of a national and international character so that not only the people of our Union and this continent, but those of all nations as well, can participate and should, therefore, have the sanction of the Congress of the United States.  

In this charter, it is important to note how Congress explicitly stated the event be of a “national and international character,” realized later in the White City and Midway relationship.

The charter also organized the fair’s management in great detail. Still slightly skeptical about Chicago’s ability to undertake the fair, Congress, in Sections Two through Nine, created a body to supersede the governing power of the Chicago Company, as the local Chicago Committee was known. This structure, used at previous fairs, ensured the federal government’s authority. The World’s Columbian Commission, known as the National Commission, had final say in matters concerning construction, finances, spaces, and planning. Section Five gave Congress power to approve the site of the fair, stating “that said site so tendered and the buildings proposed to be erected thereon shall be deemed by said Commission adequate to the purposes of said Exposition.”

Not surprisingly, conflict arose between the National and Chicago Committees; one had national legitimacy while the other had local connections. Because of this, in the summer of 1890 the National Committee organized a smaller executive committee to act on its behalf. The group’s headquarters were in Chicago and George R. Davis, an Illinois Congressman, was appointed director-general for the exposition.

The charter also made provisions for foreign participation. On December 24, 1890, President Benjamin Harrison formally invited foreign nations to the fair. In doing so, he embarked on an international advertising campaign of unprecedented scale. Run by Moses P.


111 Findling, Chicago’s Great World’s Fairs, 8.
Handy, the campaign sent out “[no] less than 2,000 to 3,000 mail packages, freighted with information” each day.\(^{112}\) The campaign was wildly successful and “the Exposition received exhibits from sixty foreign nations, states, and colonies…valued in the statements of the exhibitors at $14,797,693.”\(^{113}\) Another thirty nations, colonies, or principalities also displayed something at the fair. To put this in scope, a contemporary fair guidebook reported, “The true magnitude of the World’s Columbian Exposition can only be realized when it is stated that…the space allotted to foreign nations alone exceeds the \textit{total space} of any previous World’s Fair.”\(^{114}\) By inviting foreign nations and defining their place in the grounds, Chicago would become an imperial host, a topic that will be discussed more in Chapter Three.

The exposition also set spending records. The federal government allocated ten million dollars and before the fair opened, an unprecedented sum of money had already been spent. In 1891, \textit{Century} Magazine reported, “the Local Directory and the National Commission estimate the amount to be expended upon buildings and surrounding, under their immediate control, at $18,000,000…more than double the amount expended for the same purposes at Philadelphia in 1876, and more than three times that at Paris in 1889.”\(^{115}\) To make the spaces of the fair breathtaking, the planners needed capital of an equally breathtaking amount. Thus, the proposed scale of the 1893 world’s fair secured its legacy long before the fair began.

Before construction could start, the organizing committee needed to find the fairgrounds. To be successful, the grounds needed to be both large enough to hold the exhibits and easily accessible. Chicago’s Jackson Park, consisting of 686 acres and located eight miles south of downtown, fit the necessary criteria. Along with the addition of Washington Park, the proposed

\(^{112}\) Burg, \textit{Chicago’s White City of 1893}, 88.


\(^{114}\) "Rand, McNally & Co.’s Handbook of the World’s Columbian Exposition,” 22-3.

fair would encompass 1,037 acres, more than three times the size of any previous exposition. Thus, the location was set: Stony Island Avenue defined the western boundary, 67th Street to the south, Lake Michigan to the east, and 56th Street to the north.

With the idea approved and the location set, Chicago took the necessary steps to transform the park, an exceedingly daunting task given its swampy, marsh-like, and tree-covered nature.

In these early phases of construction and planning, Chicago’s wealthy again played an instrumental role. Thomas W. Palmer, voted president of the World’s Columbian Commission, contributed much goodwill toward the exposition and Bertha H. Palmer (having no relation to Thomas) served as president of the Board of Lady Managers. A strong leader with boundless energy and a social conscience, Bertha Palmer drove the creation of the Woman’s Building.

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116 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 83.
which helped significantly to reverse gender biases in this time. Chicago’s elites also helped secure national funding. In February 1891, congressional debate arose around the belief that the planners were too extravagantly spending funds. Senator John Candler of Massachusetts submitted a proposal to “[cut] down the salaries and expenses of the commission,” which many believed “started out with ill-judged plans and reckless expenditures of money.” Others, though, were convinced of the validity of Chicago’s efforts after learning about it. The Tribune wrote that Congressman Breckenridge of Kentucky “was not a friend of the Fair originally and voted against Chicago every time. But,” now that the exposition was on its feet, Breckenridge believed it “would be a great enterprise…and to strike out the appropriation made to it the pending bill would do great harm.”

In response to this debate and to justify national government funding, in December 1891, the city’s merchant princes formally invited Congressmen to visit the fair’s spaces to examine firsthand the “work of preparing for the World’s Columbian Exposition.” During this visit, they were invited to stay at the Palmer House hotel, a symbol of Chicago’s elite culture and high-society. The city’s leading businessmen, including Marshall Field, Norman Williams, Potter Palmer, George Pullman, Lyman J. Gage, J. W. Doane, William T. Baker, and Thomas W. Palmer, personally signed the invitation, stating the visit would “increase Congressional interest” and understanding of “the magnitude of the Exposition at Jackson Park.” Gage wrote, “Seeing is believing, and the cause of the World’s Fair would be more advanced by one visit to the site at Jackson Park and the buildings thereon than all the speeches that could be made in Congress this

120 “Spends Too Much Money,” 1.
session. I hope the project discussed will be carried through." Ultimately, the visit helped silence the congressional debate over national appropriations and secured government support. These efforts of Chicago’s elites proved the legitimacy of their cause and propelled the fair’s construction.

As planners finalized construction plans, the city buzzed with excitement and civic pride. The Chicago Times recalled that the days before the exposition presented “a picture of extreme intellectual activity…Men and women were talking and planning great things. Clubs for discussion, for study, political reform, were springing up on every side.” For the elite classes, the fair was Chicago’s fair, and would be used to elevate the city’s national and international status. More importantly, in taking on the job of erecting the fair, Chicago promised to make something of unprecedented grandeur. As quickly as they rebuilt from the fire, the fair’s planners vowed to create a similar rebirth from the swamps of Jackson Park. With little more than two years until the fair’s scheduled opening, though, the task at hand was mammoth, and a team capable of achieving the goal was needed.

C. Building the Fair

It was a cold winter day. The sky was overcast with clouds and the Lake was covered with foam. We looked [Jackson Park] over. Robert Peabody climbed up on a pier and called down: ‘Do you mean to say that you really propose opening a Fair here by ’93?’ ‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘we intend to.’ ‘It can’t be done,’ he said. ‘The point is settled,’ I replied. —Daniel Burnham, a record of a conversation from 10 January 1891

Creating a world’s fair was no small task and its construction required the work of thousands of workers and a collection of the best architectural and landscaping minds of the day.

122 “Invited to Chicago,” 1.
In particular, two men stand out in this construction; Frederick Law Olmstead, the fair’s landscape architect, and Daniel Hudson Burnham, the fair’s lead architect and chief of construction.

Frederick Law Olmstead, arguably the most memorable landscape architect of his day, first made a name for himself designing New York’s Central Park in the mid-1850s. Following the wild success of this design, Olmstead gained national acclaim and went on to design parks around the country and spearhead the conservation movement. Most notably, Olmstead’s designs sought to connect cities to their green spaces through interlinking pathways and the full utilization of the present natural elements. For Olmstead, the fairgrounds would become one of his greatest achievements.¹²⁵

When he agreed to the job, Olmstead knew the enormity of the task at hand. Years earlier, he had proposed a plan for renovating and clearing Washington and Jackson Parks. In the years that followed, no intelligible improvements occurred and when he viewed the parks again on the 1890 invitation of James Ellsworth, a wealthy local businessman and member of the Chicago committee, Olmstead noted this depressed state. “The place was forbidding in the extreme,” wrote Daniel Burnham’s biographer Charles Moore of the space, “The land, made by the Lake, consisted of three ridges of sandbars parallel with the shore; the intervening swales were covered by boggy vegetation. The few oak trees that found lodgment on the two innermost ridges stood with branches mutilated by the gales sweeping in from the Lake. The soil was subject to flooding and the sandy sub-soil was water-soaked.”¹²⁶ To render the space buildable, Olmstead needed to dredge the swampy park, replace the rocky soil to preserve the ground, and import thousands of foliage items. Despite this wretched appearance, the task’s overwhelming

¹²⁵ Miller, *City of the Century*, 380-1.
nature, and a slight feeling of apprehension, Olmstead saw the promise that lay beneath the swamp, much as Chicago’s earliest settlers had. Excited by the prospect of remaking six hundred acres of land with lagoons, waterways, canals, and fine architecture, and viewing the empty parks as his own blank canvas, Olmstead began work immediately.

To work in partnership with Olmstead, in September 1890 the organizing committee named Daniel Burnham chief of construction and John W. Root the supervising architect. As a young boy, Burnham did not excel in school, though he harbored a passion for drawing. In 1868, his mother wrote in her diary that Burnham was determined to be “the greatest architect in the city or country.” After arriving in Chicago in 1855, Burnham first worked as a draftsman apprentice for William Le Baron Jenney. Through his experiences working for Jenney, traveling around the country, and working for a number of architectural offices in the Chicago, Burnham developed a repertoire of tools that helped him play a prominent role rebuilding the city after the Great Fire.

When Burnham met John Root in the 1860s, the two formed a fast friendship and partnership. Founders of the firm, Burnham & Root, the pair quickly gained fame designing some of Chicago’s skyscrapers, including the Rookery in 1886 and the Monadnock building in 1891. Upon Root’s sudden death in 1891, though, Burnham assumed full control of the fair, and stepped into a new role. In his partnership with Root, Burnham was viewed as the organizer and businessman, and Root the creative force. When Root died, “it was questioned by many if the loss of Mr. Root was not irreparable,” wrote James Ellsworth in a letter to Charles Moore. Though Root’s death delivered a heavy blow to Burnham and presented a challenge, it ultimately

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released his creative genius. Later, Ellsworth reported the death “brought out qualities in Mr. Burnham which might not have developed” and “one would never realize anything of this kind...or ever know from his actions that he ever possessed a partner or did not always command in both directions.”

Burnham desired to give the fair its own architectural signature. To do so, he hired the best American architects of the day, including Richard Morris Hunt, George B. Post, the firm McKim, Mead, & White of New York, Peabody & Sterns of Boston, and Van Brunt and Howe of Kansas City. Burnham also chose the local architects Adler & Sullivan, William L. Jenney, Henry Ives Cobb, Burling & Whitehouse, and Solon S. Beman to design some of the fair’s major structures. Of his selections, Burnham wrote, “Such success [of the buildings] is not so much dependent upon the expenditure of money as upon the expenditure of thought, knowledge, and enthusiasm by men known to be in every way endowed with these qualifications; and the results achieved by them will be the measure by which America, and especially Chicago, must expect to be judged by the world.” Burnham’s team, all widely recognized for their qualifications, thus converged on Chicago for the chance to build Burnham’s dream city to be “judged by the world.” Many of the architects, sculptors, and painters, so dedicated to their task, even lived on the fairgrounds in a shack Burnham built.

To make this dream city, Burnham created a master plan for the arrangement of the grounds, as well as for the supporting infrastructure of sanitation, transportation, sidewalks, lighting, and security. Burnham aimed to fashion a mini city—the White City—with a “Beaux-

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131 Findling, Chicago’s Great World’s Fairs, 9-10.
132 Daniel Burnham Memorial to the Grounds and Building Committee, In Charles Moore, Daniel H. Burnham, 38.
Arts” style of architecture, reminiscent of Venice, and consisting of a group of white buildings surrounding a large basin.\textsuperscript{134} Given Burnham’s distrust of the human disorder and Gilded Age capitalism, his vision sought to eliminate the chaos inherent to the city’s streets, showcase the spectacular lure of “White Chicago,” and distract visitors from the city’s “black realities.” Burnham’s Court would bring the viewer back to a time of “poetic nostalgia” and pure forms; it was an intentional and perfect construction representative of a pure rebirth of the modern city.\textsuperscript{135} Burnham created the White City as his masterpiece and used it to leave a legacy on city planning.

Burnham’s plans contained three main sections: the classical and Greco-Roman inspired White City; the exotic, chaotic, and foreign Midway Plaisance; and the industrial Machinery Hall, which would display the country’s contributions to science and technology. Burnham’s final plan broke these three main sections into seven distinct areas: the Basin and canal; the wooded islands and lagoons; the Government location; the Federal State location, housing, among others, the Fine Arts Building; the Midway Plaisance, which would contain the model villages of international nations, concessions, Ferris Wheel, and other amusements; the outdoors area, which would include livestock, outdoor agricultural exhibits, and the Anthropological Buildings; and the rail yards, storehouses, and workshops.\textsuperscript{136} In 1891, \textit{British Architect} magazine reported that “the great central feature of the exhibition will be a grand avenue about 1,800 feet in length, extending westward from the lake…In the middle of the grand avenue, and extending for its whole length, will be a great basin [and]…at the inner or western end of the basin will be a

\textsuperscript{136} Burg, \textit{Chicago’s White City of 1893}, 81.
monumental fountain, emblematic of the Republic.”137 This report described Burnham’s White City, the object upon which Burnham’s construction team labored ceaselessly, harnessing a similar determination as the Chicagoans who had raised their city from the ashes of the 1871 fire.

A discussion of the fair’s construction cannot be complete without an examination of the laborers who built the fair. As was characteristic of the Gilded Age, labor strikes, the growth of unions, and class divisions were manifest and prevalent. Chicago, especially given its explosive industrial growth, coupled with the fair’s demand for construction workers, was fertile ground for labor strife. While elites helped secure the capital and talent to implement Burnham’s vision, the fair’s construction workers experienced a vastly different reality. Their experience provides a first glimpse of the competing tensions (the fair’s vision and the reality of its environment) inherent to the Gilded Age. For planners, each day leading up to the fair’s opening in May of 1893 was precious. Unskilled workers from around the nation flocked to Chicago to fill the surplus of available jobs beginning in late 1889.

This mass migration of workers had a few effects on labor. First, the influx of so many unskilled laborers threatened to undermine local unions. In 1889, right when the fair needed to gain mass popular support, labor appeared to be the answer. In an 1889 agreement with planners before the state legislature and Congress, labor leaders agreed to subscribe to stock shares and organizers consented to hire only union labor and arbitrate all disputes. Not only this, the commission’s board included two new labor representatives, one of whom was Lyman Gage.138 The first challenge to this agreement came in the arbitration of strikes for an eight-hour day and minimum wage of $1.50 for fair workers. During arbitration, Gage and Mayor Cregier found that, while it could sanction the eight-hour day, the agreement actually did not have the power to

dictate to contractors whom they should hire. Naturally, the fair’s public and local unions were outraged. Union leaders felt conned into supporting the fair when their own demands were forgotten and promises disregarded. In an era where labor unions and capitalists constantly banged heads, this case affirmed labor leaders’ belief that the wealthy cared only about themselves. From the time of this decision in March 1891 until the end of the year, strikes slowed construction proving how, even in constructing the White City—a city whose goal was to erase the problems of the Gilded Age—there was no escaping the reality of labor strife.

Secondly, the surplus of labor presented logistical challenges to the city. With each passing day leading up to the fair’s opening in May 1893, hundreds of workers arrived from East and West with no place to stay and eager for a job. The ranks of the unemployed swelled and by August 1893, the Tribune reported that an estimated ten thousand idle men sought work at the city’s packinghouses. Local unions attempted to aid the unemployed to little avail. Many, frustrated, hungry, and in desperate need of work, took to the streets and marched on city hall, further spurring elite mistrust of the working classes and unions, and justifying their creation of the Columbian Guard and police forces to keep the fair clean of such strife. After the fair closed, all of its workers lost their jobs, swelling the city’s total unemployment to over 100,000, a topic that will be discussed more in Chapter Four.

Though labor was the most controversial challenge facing construction, the fair’s progress was slowed by weather, accidents, fire, and lack of material. The planned and looming

139 Schneierov, Labor and Urban Politics, 286-7.
140 Strikes consistently plagued construction. Another notable strike occurred just one month before the fair’s opening on 1 May 1893. The carpenter’s unions struck for better hours and wages, threatening to close shop if their demands were not met. In response, and violating an agreement previously reached that workers could only work an eight-hour day, planners told the unions the exposition would open on time. Should this not be the case, they stated, it would be left to “the public to fix blame therefor.” The strike ended after one day, again proving the interests of fair planners and elites to not only open on time, but pursue whatever agenda necessary to ensure labor protests were silenced. See Keeler, “The White City and the Black City: The Dream of Civilization,” 113.
141 Schneierov, Labor and Urban Politics, 333.
142 Schneierov, Labor and Urban Politics, 333.
dedication ceremonies in October 1892, followed by the scheduled opening in May, seemed to be approaching at light speed. Pressure increased, the fair’s progress became the subject of daily newspaper reports, and teams worked ceaselessly to meet their deadlines—a goal they barely managed to achieve. By the time construction was finished, Olmstead had spent $500,000 to dredge the park and $325,000 to landscape it; 3,000 water closets, 2,000 urinals, and 1,500 lavatories were ready for use; more than 30,000 tons of staff\textsuperscript{143} were used to create the fair’s structures, which would be policed by the 2,000-man Columbian Guard.\textsuperscript{144} With each passing day, the fair looked more like the city of Burnham’s dreams than the swamp from which it rose and, as this transformation neared completion, Chicago prepared to dedicate and open the fair.

D. The Eve of the Fair

Section Nine of the United States government act creating the fair stated the “Commission shall provide for the dedication of the buildings of the World’s Columbian Exposition in said City of Chicago on the twelfth day of October, eighteen hundred and ninety-two, with appropriate ceremonies, and said Exposition shall be open to visitors not later than the first day of May, eighteen hundred and ninety-three.”\textsuperscript{145} The dedication ceremonies, which took place six months before the fair’s opening on May 1, gave the country a taste of what was to come. Though planned for ninth of October, the ceremonies moved to the twenty-first because New York City planned to celebrate its anniversary on October 12, a problem because it meant President Harrison would be in New York. To ensure the president’s attendance, and seeking not

\textsuperscript{143} Staff is a combination of plaster, cement, and hemp similar to fiber. It is lighter than lumber and designed for temporary structures. See Bolotin and Laing, *The World’s Columbian Exposition*, 20.

\textsuperscript{144} Bolotin and Laing, *The World’s Columbian Exposition*, 20.

to admit defeat in the face of losing priority to New York, the planning committee further justified that the twenty-first was closer to the day Columbus actually arrived in America.\footnote{146}

The dedication ceremony was the first sign of the monumental event about to unfold. Leading up to Friday, October 21, Columbus Day ceremonies in schools, religious services, and a grand ball, sponsored by, among others, Marshall Field, George Pullman, and Philip Armour, were planned and over $250,000 were appropriated to the dedication exercises alone.\footnote{147} On Friday, a grand procession, accompanied by numerous speeches, signified the official recognition of the fair. More than 100,000 invitations to the ceremonies were issued and the dedication exercises took place in the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, the largest building at the fair.\footnote{148} 140,000 people watched director George R. Davis sing lofty praises of the exposition:

\begin{quote}
The ceaseless, resistless march of civilization, Westward, ever Westward, has reached and passed the great lakes of North America, and has founded on their farthest shore the greatest city of modern times. Chicago, the peerless,…And that this city was selected as the scene of this great commemorative festival was the natural outgrowth of predestined events. Here all nations are to meet in peaceful, laudable emulations on the fields of art, science, and industry…and to learn the universal value of the discovery we commemorate:…the nearness of man to man, the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of the human race.\footnote{149}
\end{quote}

Before the fair even opened, Chicago was already the source of high praise and the fair was the city’s “predestined event,” as Davis recognized. To Chicago’s wealthy classes, the fair coincided with a climax moment—the moment that Chicago’s “destiny” to become a great city was realized. Through these dedication ceremonies, a distinct vision was portrayed. At the fair, not all nations would be meeting in “peaceful, laudable emulations” and not all “brotherhood of

\footnote{146} Unfortunately, President Harrison was still unable to attend on the 21st because of his wife’s ill health. See Badger, \emph{The Great American Fair}, 83.\footnote{147} Badger, \emph{The Great American Fair}, 83.\footnote{148} Higinbotham, \emph{Report of the President to the Board of Directors of the World’s Columbian Exposition}, 161.\footnote{149} Quoted in Burg, \emph{Chicago’s White City of 1893}, 104.
the human race” would be celebrated. The fair was a construction, and its spaces, like predecessor fairs and the ideal of the Victorian Fair, would exhibit the thoughts of the “civilized” peoples of the world, as shown through Chicago’s elite classes.

On April 25, 1893, the eve of the fair, the *New York Times* reported the arrival of “about fifty Algerian men and women,” in New York City, who then took cars to Chicago.150 It was noted they:

> Came ashore with loud shouts and singing, as if in procession to sacrifice to their gods…playing strange instruments making such awful music…There were drums…and one or two stringed instruments of primitive construction. Almost every one of the party had the front half of his head shaved…[A] dance lasted for nearly ten minutes and at its conclusion…the whole crowd broke into a weird, fierce song.151

In contrast to praising the “brotherhood of the human race,” the arrival of other races revealed a contrast. These people were “strange,” possessed “primitive” things, and maintained “weird” rituals. Midway visitors would view these people as primitive and savage.

On the eve of the fair, while many sang praises, many city residents lived in despair. In April 1893, just days before the fair’s opening, 35,000 people lived in Chicago’s Packingtown district, popularly known as the “Back of the Yards.” These people lived and worked among the shadows of the city’s slaughterhouses and slept to the sounds of animals, and the overpowering smell of carcasses, and everyday saw swarms of flies, blood, and trash.152 These residents, far removed from the White City, embodied the dark reality of Chicago.

On the eve of the fair, construction laborers, hoping to take advantage of the waning time left to build, attempted to pressure planners for better treatment, an action bemoaned by the *New York Times*: “Chicago during the preparation for the World’s Fair has been a peculiarly favorable

151 “Algerians For the Fair,” 8.
152 Miller, *City of the Century*, 218.
field for this kind of tactics [of labor protest]. The demands of the men employed upon the grounds and buildings became so exorbitant that a stand was finally taken against them, and the last effort of the labor leaders to cause a strike was a failure.”\textsuperscript{153} As common with the times, and explained above, labor unions were viewed as a threat, and their demands were ignored if they slowed construction or threatened the goals of the planners.

On the eve of the fair, Chicago was also breathing with excitement, making final preparations, and preparing to welcome the crowds to the fair’s opening. On April 29, President Grover Cleveland arrived, was taken around the city by Mayor Harrison, and it was said that “The President cannot complain that the welcome which he received from the people of Chicago lacked warmth.”\textsuperscript{154}

On May 1, the fair’s opening ceremonies were held amid severe rainstorms and before a crowd of 200,000 people in Jackson Park.\textsuperscript{155} Even rain could not keep the city from coming to view the opening of the White City.\textsuperscript{156} President Cleveland gave a brief address, in which he stated the fair “illustrate[s] the growth and progress of human endeavor in the direction of a higher civilization….We have built these splendid edifices…[and] we have also built the magnificent fabric of a popular government…we exemplify in the noblest sense the brotherhood of nations.”\textsuperscript{157} Like in the dedication ceremonies, the fair was portrayed with grand descriptions. Given the turnout on opening day, it was clear that the fair, like Chicago, would have a “magnet”

\textsuperscript{156} Though it is humorous to note that the \textit{Chicago Tribune} reported on 30 April 1893, in response to a string of rainy days and the predicted weather for the opening ceremonies, that the “American people will learn…that their parades, festivals, and all outdoor ceremonials should not be held during either March or April and that it would be safest to postpone them to June.” For anyone who has experienced Chicago in March or April, this is a very wise and humorous statement.
effect. Everyone wanted to visit the fair to experience this “brotherhood of nations,” though the reality in both the fair and the city would be much different.

In 1893, Harper’s Weekly writer Julian Ralph extolled Chicago: “America is Great and Chicago is her Prophet.” In winning the fair, Chicago promised to “make it the Greatest Show on Earth.” The 1893 Columbian Exposition combined the unique history of Chicago with the concerns of the rapidly industrializing and urbanizing United States. Like predecessor fairs, Chicago was a product of its historical context and social circumstances. “Chicago is the most active, the boldest, the most American of cities in the Union,” wrote Paul de Rousiers, a French traveler, in 1892. Through the fair’s spaces, Chicago’s would prove how it was the “boldest” in the Union and highlight its progress. The fair’s planners had the opportunity to use the fair to offer a vision of the ideal city, though this vision also revealed how damaging the ills of industrialization could be. These facts would come to light during the fair’s six-month duration.

158 Quoted in Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 47.
160 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 47.
III. Fair Days

I could no more describe the impression made upon me by the Exposition than I could pick up one of the buildings and carry it off on my shoulders. It was simply a journey into fairyland.  
—Professor Thomas Lounsbury, English, Yale University, 1893

Its air is dirt.  
—Rudyard Kipling on Chicago, 1907

If the White City was a “fairyland,” the city of Chicago was its antithesis, and the quotations reveal this contrast. Visiting Daniel Burnham’s fair meant visiting Chicago, and one cannot examine the fair without examining how its history became linked to the city’s. When visitors walked through the White City, they experienced the sensation of walking through a planned utopia and could even briefly imagine the inequalities, foul-smelling stockyards, and rampant crime of Chicago did not exist. Yet, of course, this daydream was just that. The White City, like the glories of the real Chicago, were only part of the fair. The Midway Plaisance, distinctly separate from the White City, gave the first hint of the realities of capitalism and contrast at work in the city, and was home to the often-described exotic and barbaric international amusements. Finally, the fair also played out in the city’s streets, a dark juxtaposition to the exposition. This chapter explores these tensions to expose how the fair was comprised of two realities that were linked to the experiential realities present in the city.

A. The White City

The more I see of the Fair the more I want to see of it…It is not like any other country I have ever seen. As soon as you become a day-inhabitant of the White World, you are emancipated from the troubles of the earth. It has a strange effect.  
—Mary Hartwell Catherwood, Author, 1893

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161 “Literary tributes to the world’s fair,” The Dial, XV (Oct 1, 1893): 176.
163 “Literary tributes to the world’s fair,” The Dial, 176.
When visitors toured the White City, the perfection they saw was often overwhelming. As a construction, the White City offered solutions to the problems of the modern city, the “troubles of the earth;” exemplified what a “good” city was, embodied in the term “White;” and presented a technological vision for the future. The White City is best viewed as the city’s elites statement of greatness and embodiment of the idea of “Chicago Dreaming.” As Chicago had risen from the ashes of the 1871 fire, the fair rose from the swamps of Jackson Park. The author Paul Bourget said, “The Fair is like Chicago…That such a great city of white beauty should have been reared from level areas of wooded waste is a miracle.” This section will focus on these achievements and their mirrors in Chicago.

1. A Perfect City and the Future City

In the meticulously planned White City, Daniel Burnham and Chicago’s elites made a definitive statement about the future of civilization. As Burnham noted, the White City aimed not to portray popular themes of the time, but rather to communicate the ideal, set a new standard for American architecture, and inspire city improvement and planning movements. Burnham wrote his structures “would present to the profession here an object-lesson so impressive of the practical value of architectural scholarship and of strict subordination to the formulas of the schools, that it would serve as a timely corrective to the national tendency to excessive experiments in design.” Burnham sought to declare to the world that America, led by Chicago, was a cosmopolitan and architectural leader.

164 “Literary tributes to the world’s fair,” The Dial, 176.
The White City earned its nickname because of its structures’ color, and housed fourteen main buildings, each designed in the neoclassical and Beaux Arts styles. As Burnham envisioned, the uniformity of the design and color of the structures, as well as their impressive size, created an architectural harmony unlike anything in the modern city. Edmund Mitchell wrote in *Engineering Magazine*, “the City of White Palaces in Chicago has never had a compeer as regards architectural magnificence… Never in history had such an architectural panorama been conceived by the brain and fashioned by the hand of man.” The “architectural panorama” Mitchell specifically referred to were the buildings grouped together around the Grand Basin at the center of the White City. Known as the Court of Honor, this collection of buildings comprised one of the exposition’s most memorable scenes.

![Figure 4. An east-facing view of the Statue of the Republic and Grand Basin in front of the Peristyle.](image)

166 The fair’s architecture combined both classical and neoclassical styles. The neoclassical style was known for its ancient Greek and Roman motifs, and the Beaux-Arts style emphasized examples of Imperial Roman architecture. The two styles were employed in the fair’s planning and realization of Burnham’s vision to create a “unified composition.” Many of the fair’s architects, especially those from the east, had attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the contemporary leading architectural school in the world and the root of the style’s name. Though Burnham never attended the school, he was intrigued by the proposals of the easterners to utilize a more classical, yet grand and exciting, style. The Beaux-Arts style was known for employing Neo-Baroque decorative elements, symmetry, statuary, classical architectural details, such as pillars, and rusticated and raised first stories. See John E. Findling, *Chicago’s Great World’s Fairs* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 14; and Thomas S. Hines *Burnham of Chicago: Architect and Planner* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 270.


The Grand Basin was over 2,000 feet in length and bounded on all sides by the fair’s most breath-taking structures. Looking from east to west, the grand statue of the Republic, over 250-feet tall including its base, stood at the eastern end of the basin. The Republic stood before the 150-foot tall Peristyle, made up of forty-eight Corinthian columns, and gave a view to Lake Michigan behind it. Trumball White reported the Republic, designed by the New York architect Daniel Chester French\(^{169}\) for the exposition, was “of perfect symmetry.”\(^{170}\) The statue’s “hands are upraised above the head. In her right hand she holds a globe on which an eagle rests with outstretched wings. The hand carries staff with Phrygian cap, the symbol of liberty.”\(^{171}\) The White City, embodied in the Republic, portrayed the best virtues of American society.

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\(^{169}\) French was later commissioned to design the Lincoln Memorial, one of the most iconic symbols along Washington, D.C.’s National Mall.


\(^{171}\) White, *The World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893*, 70.

\(^{172}\) Map of the buildings of the White City. Google Images.
To the right of the Republic, moving from east to west, was George B. Post’s Manufacturing and Liberal Arts building, the Electricity building, and the Mines and Mining building. The Manufacturing building measured 787 feet by 1,687 feet and was Chicago’s response to Paris’ Eifel Tower, unveiled at the 1889 fair. The Manufactures building was the largest at the fair, the largest roofed building ever constructed, and a source of praise for the fair’s planners.\(^{173}\) Next door to the Manufactures building, the Electricity building offered a glimpse into the future and displayed the achievements of “wizards.”\(^{174}\) The exhibits within showed “everything in connection with the marvelous power, electricity, discoveries in which, some people claim, are yet in their infancy and the rapid advancements in which are destined ultimately to revolutionize the world.”\(^{175}\) During the fair, the Electricity building unveiled the double-stopper electric fluorescent light bulb, used to illuminate the night in an unprecedented way, and the alternating current, both signs of a bright future.

To the left of the Republic, moving from east to west, stood the Agriculture building and Machinery Hall. Machinery Hall, officially called the Palace of Mechanic Arts, introduced machines of the past and future. The interior space contained exhibits showing off Eli Whitney’s cotton gin, sewing machines, the world’s largest conveyor belt, pianos, books, a collection of tools used to build schools, railroads, street cars, bridges, and buildings, as well as displays of utilities for sewage removal, sanitation, and clean water.\(^{176}\) Machinery Hall was also the fair’s power plant and had an “electric power generating station on a very large scale…to give power to all of the lighting of the fair.”\(^{177}\) This combination of machines and tools awed visitors.

\(^{174}\) “Chicago by Day and Night: What to See and How to Find it” (Chicago: Lake City Publishing Co, 1893), 245.
\(^{175}\) “Chicago by Day and Night: What to See and How to Find it”, 245.
\(^{176}\) Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 126.
Directly across from the Republic stood Richard Hunt’s Administration building, fronted by the Columbian Fountain. The fountain was created as the “apotheosis of modern liberty” and water flowed from all directions through a host of allegorical figures in statue form. The fountain was particularly breathtaking at night, when electric lights illuminated the water and surrounding buildings. A railroad terminus containing thirty-five tracks lay directly behind the Administration building, through which all visitors arriving at the fair’s western entrance passed. This was the main entrance and the Administration building, whose 277.5-foot tall dome was taller than the United States Capitol, dominated the view as one came in.

The other buildings of the White City included the Agricultural, Fisheries, Forestry, Horticultural, Anthropology, Woman’s, United States Government, and Transportation buildings. It is important to note the details of the organization of the White City because its careful construction inspired praise and was an architectural and city-planning feat never before seen. Halsey Ives, the organizer and conductor of the exposition’s art department, wrote that “the real art work—the design—was the ensemble” of the fair, and Harvard University’s president, Eliot Norton, noted the architectural plan of the buildings “produce[d] a superb effect in the successful grouping in harmonious relations of the vast and magnificent structures.” The power of Burnham’s architectural plan created a legacy.

The sheer size of the construction imposed “itself upon the imaginations of most visitors as their first and enduring impression.” Size, scope, and scale were distinguishing factors of the White City, but its effect and power stemmed from the execution of Burnham’s plan.

178 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 120-1.
179 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 119-124.
180 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 125.
181 Quoted in Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 119.
182 Ladee Hubbard, "Mobility in America: The Myth of the Frontier and the Performance of National Culture at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893" (University of California, Los Angeles, 2003), 182.
Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, a famed New York City art critic of the day, further commented on the success of the space:

The harmonious unity of these vistas… depends, in the first place, upon the existence of a definite, well-considered ground-plan for the Fair. No building, no fountain, bridge, or statue, looks as though it has been set down at random….the scale has been as carefully considered as position…We should never had so beautiful a Fair if features like these had been left to chance…Taken as a whole the formally disposed southern portions of the grounds are of course the finest—the portions which have won our Fair the name of the ‘White City’ and of the ‘Venice of the West.’ Here…we learn the meaning of architectural unity on an extensive scale.\(^{183}\)

Perfectly planned, the White City offered a contrast to the feeling of chaos in the city.

The White City was perfect in more than just architecture; it was a miniature metropolis that seemed to have corrected the problems of the modern day. The space held its own sewage, water, and electric power plants; fire, street cleaning, and police, known as the Columbian Guard\(^{184}\), bodies; government group; and urban transportation system. Unlike in the real city where hundreds died each year from train, trolley, or streetcar accidents, the fair’s railroad was elevated and electric, and posed no danger to pedestrians. The buildings were arranged with precision and spatial harmony, and were connected by picturesque and spacious walkways. These walkways, as well as the streets, were free of litter and under close surveillance by the Columbian Guards. When visitors got hungry or thirsty, they could seek refuge in the plethora of cafes, restaurants, and department stores, all stocked with the latest consumer goods.\(^{185}\)

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\(^{184}\) The Columbian Guard was a force of more than 2,000 men specially recruited and trained for the exposition. They were specifically responsible for crowd control, and protection of exhibitions and exhibitor’s property. They also provided all of the police and fire services and maintained order, discipline, and law. Concerned about the threat of class conflict, the planners also created a secret service police force. This group was comprised of approximately two hundred men, led by John A. “Black Jack” Bonfield, a famed (or infamous from the perspective of radicals and labor groups) Chicago police officer of the 1880s and 1890s. Bonfield was particularly known for bringing new technology and greater brutality to the Chicago police. See Norman Bolotin and Christine Laing, The World’s Columbian Exposition: The Chicago World’s Fair of 1893 (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1992), 20; and Donald L. Miller, City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1996), 492.

\(^{185}\) Miller, City of the Century, 491-2.
White City exhibited a faith in the nation’s growth and appeared almost like a prophecy telling the visitor what the future had in store and how cities would look. Of course, the White City was a construction, and one the fair’s planners designed with the goal of eliciting this exact response—of spreading the realization of what Chicago could achieve. Thus, the White City was the purest vision of rebirth and echoed the dream of those who rebuilt the city after the fire.

After visiting the fair, John Coleman Adams, a progressive graduate of Tufts College’s Divinity school, reported on the ideal city he observed: “We saw a great many features of what an ideal city might be, a great many visions which perhaps one day become solid facts,” he wrote. Every night in the fairgrounds the “patient attendants did their best to clean up after [the visitors] and to present the grounds fresh and bright for the new crowd next day….Why may we not,” he questioned, “at once take a hint in our every-day towns from this city of a few weeks?”

Unlike the dangers of the modern city, “the White City presented yet another hint of possibility of every great city, in the remarkable safety it afforded its temporary visitors.” Finally, Adams noted that “water was there for the thirsty, free as air,” a fact, he suggested (and it is important to note that Adams supported temperance) would reduce alcohol consumption, permitted only in restaurants, through allowing everyone access to water.

While he stood he awe, Adams also noted the unrealistic aspect of the construction he viewed. “Of course every dweller in the great city will recognize the fact that these particulars represent just what most of our larger cities are not…[no]body expects to see those great buildings reproduced anywhere else.” Adams’s observations point to the obvious, yet sometimes forgotten, fact that the White City was a temporary construction. Unlike the modern

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city, the best architectural talent of the day planned the White City and Chicago’s wealthy classes financed it. The fact that people recognized its unrealistic nature gave Burnham’s construction its “fairyland” characteristic. The White City was unattainable at the present moment.

William Dean Howells also saw the fair as a far-removed utopian reality. Howells, a well-known novelist and essayist, was skeptical of the modern age and capitalism. He promoted an Altrurian society based on Christian socialist principles, which was briefly realized in the short-lived utopian commune in Sonoma County, California. After visiting the fair, Howells reported, “the fair city is a bit of Altruria: it is as if the capital of one of our Regions had set sail and landed somehow on the shores of the vast inland sea, where the Fair City lifts its domes and columns…It’s story…records the first great triumph of Altrurian principles among this people in a work of peace…”  

189 Howells was impressed by the fair as an expression of the harmony of all people and as a vision of the future. Chicago was the realization of “that largeness, loudness, and fastness, which New York has persuaded the Americans is metropolitan.” Like Adams, though, he recognized this anti-reality as a fleeting utopian vision hard to obtain in reality. The White City was the only place in America where, as Adams wrote, “the American citizen could feel so much of the pride of popular sovereignty” and “walk abroad with uplifted head, in the comfortable assurance that the city belongs to him and not to the corporations and the

189 Altruria refers to the Christian utopian country of Howell’s book, A Traveler from Altruria. In this utopia, there was no money, and therefore no division between the rich and poor and all citizens were equally entitled to anything they needed. Because the residents lived in harmony, there was no need to cheat or rush work, and each finished product resembled a work of art. Howells was a clear critique of the unregulated capitalism of the Gilded Age and, throughout his travels, sought to find instances of his dream. Howell’s praise of the exposition was almost unparalleled. He was so impressed by the White City as a realization of his Altrurian dream, that he claimed the fair was the “first embodiment of the Altrurian ideal…[and] the earliest achievement of a real civic life.” For Howells, the striving toward this reality was an imperishable ideal, and Chicago’s fulfillment of this vision would serve to consummate and catalyze the Altrurian dream. William Dean Howells, “Letters of an Altrurian Traveller.” The Cosmopolitan Magazine, Vol. XVI (December 1893); Printed in Neil Harris, ed., The Land of Contrasts 1880-1901: The American Culture (New York: G. Braziller, 1970), 346-360.

In creating a thing worthy of unparalleled praise, despite the fact that this was only possible because of corporate financing and political support, Chicago’s elites could share their pride in Chicago with the world.

2. The Metropolis of the West

Mariana Griswold Van Rensselear wrote in 1893: “Through the voice of the city of Chicago America herself declares: Lo, it is not Mammon you should worship, but the light-bringing, health-giving gods of intelligence, refinement, and beauty!” Van Rensselear’s statement shows how the fair spoke through its host. The fair was a “city within a city”, and a “culture within civilization,” and must be examined in the historical moment it appeared. The fair’s planners not only used the White City to make a grand statement of what a “good” city looked like, they also sought to highlight the best aspects of Chicago. Though the White City was a temporary construction, Chicago lived on, and this was a moment to make the city’s beauty known.

The 1893 guidebook, Chicago by Day and Night, declared that Chicago was the “Paris of the West,” and a city in which “all tastes may be promptly satisfied, all preferences catered to.” When they advertised the fair, Chicago was also advertised as a cosmopolitan attraction.

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Chicago is the “Metropolis of the West,” an 1893 fair advertisement proclaimed. Lady Liberty stands next to a globe overlooking the city and in the ribbon she holds, which is the leftover fabric from a masthead, symbolic of Columbus’ arrival in America, the words “art,” “science,” and “industry” are written. Visitors came not only to experience the fair, but also to see the Metropolis of the West. Between 1890 and 1893, Chicago experienced a frenzy of construction and built skyscrapers regarded as “masterpieces of modern architecture,” including W.L.B. Jenney’s Manhattan Building, the Lieter Building II, Monadnock Building, the Woman’s Temple, the Masonic Temple, the Schiller Building, and Adler and Sullivan’s Auditorium Building. Edmund Mitchell noted that perhaps “of more supreme interest” than the exhibits was the city’s “architectural features that mark a distinct epoch in building engineering with its teeming and polyglot population, with its phenomenally rapid commercial growth, with its web of concentrating railways, with all its feverish energy and enterprise.” For many, Chicago’s own merits warranted a visit.

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195 “Chicago of To-day: The Metropolis of the West”, in The White City: Chicago’s World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, Chicago History Museum.
196 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 53
In the same period, the Chicago Art Institute began receiving recognition for its exhibits and growing collections.\textsuperscript{198} Music also flourished; Theodore Thomas, the famed conductor, directed the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 1891-1905 and is credited with bringing “serious music” to the city.\textsuperscript{199} In the years leading up to the fair, Chicago experienced a literary flowering and was a publishing center of the country for names such as Rand, McNally & Company; A.C. McClurg & Company; and Belford, Clark & Company. The Chicago Public Library, Newberry Library, and University of Chicago Library also contained hundreds of thousands of volumes “paid for through the subscriptions of wealthy Chicagoans.”\textsuperscript{200}

Chicago’s elites advertised these attractions to make clear that, as they could in New York, cultured classes would find satisfaction in the city. Kansas Senator John J. Ingalls remarked how the fair demonstrated that Chicago was no longer provincial and Cosmopolitan writer John Brisben Walker wrote the exposition spurred “our civilization and the advance in the liberal arts…forward by a quarter of a century.”\textsuperscript{201} The novelist Robert Herrick declared the fair was “the fete day of our world, the big backbone of America, when it proclaimed to everybody that in spite of all the waste and ugliness and makeshift character of its civilization it had preserved its love of the ideal, of beauty and could accomplish it too—could achieve anything!”\textsuperscript{202} The writer Henry B. Fuller wrote, “Chicago, having been in the world for some fifty or sixty years, is now finally of it.”\textsuperscript{203} William Dean Howells, in a conversation with a banker, encountered the opinion that “no other American city but Chicago could have brought this to pass…I doubt if any other community could have fancied the thing in its vastness; and the

\textsuperscript{198} Burg, \textit{Chicago’s White City of 1893}, 57.  
\textsuperscript{199} Burg, \textit{Chicago’s White City of 1893}, 61.  
\textsuperscript{200} Burg, \textit{Chicago’s White City of 1893}, 64-5.  
\textsuperscript{203} “Literary tributes to the world’s fair,” \textit{The Dial}, 176.
vastness seems an essential condition of the beauty [of the Fair]...That’s a rather charming thing about the Fair, and I suppose it’s rather Chicagoan.” In these accounts, the fair and Chicago are linked. Together, they sparked a surge of nationalism rooted in Chicago’s achievements.

Henry Adams (1838-1918), a historian, professor, and traveler, provides one of the best-known accounts of the fair through both his letter correspondences and biography, *The Education of Henry Adams*. While often critical of the fair and suspicious of the motives underlying it, as well as critical of modernity and new technology, Adams’ accounts highlighted the fair’s effects. He wrote:

> My two days were hardly enough to take it in...A man who has passed his life, and has come well to the limit of activity of his generation, always thinking and despairing of seeing his age rise to the creation of new art, or the appreciation of the old, cannot all of a sudden see his idea take shape in a form far more magnificent than he had ever dreamed it, without being for the moment stunned by the shock...Chicago asked in 1893 for the first time the question whether the American people knew where they were driving...On reflecting sufficiently deeply, under the shadow of Richard Hunt’s architecture, he decided that the American people probably knew no more than he did...Chicago was the first expression of American thought as a unity; one must start there.

For someone so opposed to the growing capitalist nature of the city, Adams’ awe of the fair is surprising. Perhaps Adams’ respect of the White City stemmed from its equalizing nature and the experience it offered all visitors. “Education ran riot at Chicago,” he wrote, “at least for the retarded minds who had never faced in concrete form so many matters of which they were

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205 Henry Adams was known for his opposition to modernity and capitalism. Even he, though, was awed by the fair’s beauty. He was particularly bewildered in how Chicago had “turned” on him by, despite being something made by money, creating a place “of beauty.” In a letter to a friend in May, 1893, Adams notes this: “no matter-of-fact human being could have imagined that Chicago would suddenly, without apparent cause of consequence, lavish millions on millions of money, and infinite effort, in order to produce something that the Greeks might have delighted to see, and Venice would have envied, but which certainly is not business.” See Henry Adams to Franklin MacVeagh, 26 May, 1893. In J.C. Levenson, Ernest Samuels, Charles Vandersee, and Viola Hopkins Winner, ed., *The Letters of Henry Adams: Volume IV: 1892-1899* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 103.

The grand displays of the Machinery and Manufactures buildings allowed all a taste of futuristic inventions, and everyone could gaze upon some of the finest American works of art in the Palace of Fine Arts. The fair leveled the unequal playing field of the Gilded Age. Each visitor could tour the exhibits and experience its splendor free from discrimination. In this way, for Adams, the fair defied the capitalist system and could be a model for change. Adams believed that Americans could feel “proud” in the White City and that “if the new American world could take this sharp and conscious twist towards ideals,” it could “rupture” the historical pattern of capitalism. Chicago, Adams claimed, was leading the country forward.

It is easy in reading the praise of the White City to forget this was only one perspective and aspect of the fair. While the city’s growth was impressive, it was also uneven. The fair was a symbolic rebirth for the image of Chicago, an image promoted by the elites. While wealthy Chicagoans could brag of their city’s achievements, this was not the whole truth; a much darker reality lurked behind the White City’s hollow facades in the Midway and in the Gilded Age city.

### B. City of Contrasts

The White City was the embodiment of perfection. Yet it also sought to mask the contrasts also at work in the fair. There was an indisputable difference between the Midway Plaisance, popularly known as the Midway, and the White City in location, cost (the Midway cost $0.50 entry fee and the White City was free), and what was displayed. The Midway presented an antithesis to the White City: its visitors came to be awed not by architectural, but

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209 It is worth noting that Chicago was not the first fair to use concessions as a source of revenue. At Philadelphia in 1876, formal concessions were not allowed on the grounds. The Paris fair of 1889 set a new precedent and had amusement concessions, including both food and international exhibits and villages, who had to pay to reserve their space. In many aspects of planning its fair, Chicago sought to emulate the Paris model. Recognizing the amount of profit to be made from a concession-based area, Chicago planned an extensive Midway. See “1893 World’s Fair: The Midway Plaisance,” *Living History of Chicago and the Chicago Digital Library*. 

rather by the exotic.  

The Midway was home to the “barbaric,” “irrational,” and “uncivilized,” all elements unwelcome in the White City, and was popularly viewed as a “living museum” or “ethno-zoo.”

Because of this, the Midway revealed the trends of an imperialist era.

Before further describing the Midway, a note on these imperialist views and how they shaped the Midway is needed. The Midway was a product of Western civilization, or that of Western Europe and the United States, and expressed their racial views of the day. Karl Marx wrote of Western views of non-Western people that “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” This was true on the Midway; the fair’s planners, through allocating one space for foreign nations to exhibit themselves and approving their participation, ensured that many cultures were viewed as “other” or “lesser.” Edward W. Said provided an explanation of this tendency of the West to create racial hierarchies using the term “Orientalism.” Orientalism, Said stated, is “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western Experience…The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”

For Said, this relationship between Western (Western Europe and the United States) and non-Western (Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East) was one of interdependence; the cultures of each group defined the other materially, psychologically, and economically. Yet, this relationship was also hierarchical. Said stated orientalism is also the West’s “corporate institution for dealing with the

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210 Burnham and Frank Millet, the Director of Decorations, tried to counter this effect by “enlivening” the White City through more outdoor shows and contests. Ultimately, though, they could not rival the animation of the Midway. See Miller, City of the Century, 498.


214 In his work, Said specifically focuses on the experience of Great Britain and France in dealing with the Orient, especially given their commercial and cultural enterprises in India and Southeast Asia. Said also uses the term “Orient” to refer to the East, specifically Asia, Indonesia, India, and the surrounding countries. Though not the focus of his book, I find Said’s descriptions particularly applicable and transferable to the Midway and American experience, and have expanded and applied them as such. See Said, Orientalism, 3-8.
Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by
teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating,
restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."\(^{215}\) This statement is especially applicable to
the Midway, where fair organizers exploited the characteristics of native peoples, especially
those from Africa or Asia, and labeled them as “savage.” In this view, the Western voice
dominated all perceptions of and reactions to these foreign peoples, a fact which, as will be
shown below, was inherent to the Midway.

The Midway (see Appendix for map) was the mile-long stretch of land running from the
eastern edge of Washington Park to the western edge of Jackson Park. The eastern edge
connected visitors back to the White City. In contrast to the planned and architecturally
overwhelming nature of the White City, Midway visitors spoke of the “Midway spirit.”\(^{216}\) The
Midway included concessions, games, rides, George Ferris’s Ferris Wheel, and a host of
international booths that made it characteristically exotic, chaotic, polyglot, irrational—given the
unlikely occurrence that visitors could experience these thrills and scenes in the same location—,
and fun.\(^{217}\) Visitors flocked to the Midway “to see these people of every hue, clash in outlandish
garb, living in curious habitations, and plying their unfamiliar trades and arts with
incomprehensible dexterity…There were three thousand of these denizens of the Midway
gathered from all quarters of the earth, many of them led by the desire to visit this wondrous
land.”\(^{218}\) The Midway was its own creation, and defined by its international character.

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\(^{217}\) As I laid out in Chapter Two, I am using the terms “exotic,” “uncivilized,” and “savage” especially in reference to
non-American or European countries. In this time, these terms were often used in a racist and derogatory way to
refer to these people deemed “lesser” than the commercially powerful nations of Western Europe and the United
States. For more discussion of how I define and use the terms “uncivilized,” “exotic,” and “civilized,” refer to

Quoted in Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893*, 218.
From its inception, international participation in the fair was important to the planners.\textsuperscript{219} In 1890, President Harrison invited the world to the fair, “In the name of the Government and of the People of the United States, I do hereby invite all the nations of the earth to take part in the commemoration of an event that is preeminent in human history…[by] sending such exhibits to the World’s Columbian Exposition as will most fitly and fully illustrate their resources, their industries and their progress in civilization.”\textsuperscript{220} This call for participation, as well as the work of fair representatives in the summer of 1891, attracted the world’s attention. Over sixty foreign nations, states, and colonies agreed to have an exhibit at the fair, and many more displayed themselves through various exhibits in the buildings of the White City.\textsuperscript{221}

The effect of foreign participation was fantastic. For many visitors, the Midway was their first encounter with the foreign or “uncivilized.” The Midway included representatives from “England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Russia, Poland, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Italy, Spain, and Portugal in Europe; from Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, Morocco, Egypt and Cape Colony in Africa; from Palestine Persia, India, Siam, Burma, China, and Japan in Asia; a handful of South American countries, some island nations of the Pacific, and Australia.”\textsuperscript{222} Trumball White observed that the Midway was sometimes called the “‘side show,’ but in truth includes a maze of exhibits of the most interesting character.”\textsuperscript{223} The New York Times reported there is

\textsuperscript{219} It must be noted that some countries were awarded the chance to build national pavilions on the north end of the fairgrounds near the State exhibits. Countries with their own state building included Germany, Japan, Sweden, and France, and they attempted to build these pavilions in a style reflective of their national culture. Of Japan’s effort Burnham said the Japanese did “the most exquisitely beautiful things with their building on the Wooded Island. See Findling, Chicago’s Great World’s Fairs, 26.
\textsuperscript{221} Higinbotham, Report of the President to the Board of Directors of the World’s Columbian Exposition, 193.
\textsuperscript{222} White, The World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893, 564.
\textsuperscript{223} White, The World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893, 561.
“more color and life to the square inch [in the Midway] than anywhere else in the grounds,” for exhibits such as:

- Street in Cairo, Turkish village, Tunisian and Algerian section, Tower of Babel, Pompeian house, panoramas of the Volcano of Silanea and the Bernese Alps, Morocco section, Moorish palace, minaret tower, Japanese bazaars, Libbey glass exhibit, Irish cottage industries, ice railway, Hagenback animal show, German village, Ferris revolving wheels, East India settlement, Dutch settlement, Dahomey village, Javanese settlement, captive balloon, Bohemian glass factory, Austrian village, Vienna Café, and minor lunch, music, beer, and wine concessions.²²⁴

Though listing the countries and exhibits is exhaustive, it is necessary to understand the attraction as a whole: unlike the White City, the Midway was a lesson in contrasts, splendors, and jarring sites from all manner of people and practices from around the globe.

*Current Literature* magazine reported, “The Midway Plaisance is simply a mile of fun…[with an] essentially amusing character….those will get the most out of it who approach it in that spirit—not ashamed to acknowledge that they are in the pursuit of pleasure…it makes a most delightful relief from the mind-wearying exhibits in the big buildings in the main park.”²²⁵ Visitor reports confirmed this fact. On the Midway, one could “buy carpets, embroidery, silver inlaid work, arms and armor, pipes, slippers, bone and ivory work, all sorts of articles of silk, cotton, and wool, and even native idols [of Africa] of all sizes and degrees of ugliness.”²²⁶ They could also have a dance with native people in the Cairo village, one of the most popular attractions on the Midway, walk through the intriguing Javanese village where three hundred natives from Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Samoa, Fiji, New Zealand, and the Sandwich Islands lived in eighty native dwellings, or dine on German-style cuisine and Bavarian beer.²²⁷ As if in a

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dream, visitors could wander from the “abode of barbarous color and Oriental voluptuousness to the neighboring Irish village of cool gray stone…[and] not far away is the village of the Javanese, built of bamboo poles and palm-leaves…The Eskimo, too, have a village.”

As the White City did, the Midway inspired a feeling of awe, though an awe of people, not structures.

As an imperialist construction, the Midway allowed all visitors the chance to judge the foreign cultures they viewed. Said noted that “Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.” This relationship was further dependent upon a place where “a discourse…[that] is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power,” such a political, intellectual, moral, or cultural power, existed.

The Midway was such a place. Visitors, journalists, authors, scientists, elites, and capitalists alike could visit and make comments on what they saw “with little resistance on the Orient’s part.”

All nations were invited to the fair, but they were not all invited to speak for themselves.

As a space, the Midway consisted of two visions—the idealistic and the reality. An 1893 comic illustration with the title “All Nations are Welcome to the World’s Columbian Exposition,” shows Uncle Sam and Lady Liberty towering over the foreign exhibitioners and shepherding them into the fair (see Figure Seven below).

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The comic is useful for showing the contrast between real and ideal. In the ideal sense, all nations are welcomed, though Uncle Sam directs where to go. They are welcome only to the place the United States allows them, and to celebrate an event President Harrison dubbed as an “event that is preeminent in human history.” Although a nice-sounding ideal, the arrival of Columbus and western civilization also represented the beginning of an era of colonialism, commercial exploitation, and subjugation of indigenous peoples to the Western, or “civilized,” ideals portrayed in the White City.

Edmund Mitchell further spoke to the ideal of the Midway and the “sentiments of brotherhood…in the air. At Chicago, German and Frenchman, Englishman and Russian, Turk and Bulgarian, met together on every festive and ceremonial occasion, and came to know each other…and to regard each other as warm personal friends.” The ideal of the Midway was the fraternity of nations, although it is important to note that most of the nations Mitchell mentioned are European (or European-ish). Yet, most people who visited the Midway did not regard it as

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the “brotherhood” of all nations coming together. The Midway was less about brotherhood and more about eye-catching entertainment, wonderment, and commercial gain. While the ideal is not to be discounted, the Midway represented commercial exploitation of foreign peoples to benefit the fair’s planners. To visit the exhibits on the Midway, fair-goers had to pay a fee, which the planner’s hoped would help pay off remaining debts and increase dividend gains. The role of money on the Midway distinguished it from the White City. François Edmond Brauwaert, commissioner of France at the time of the Columbian Exposition, noted this relationship and how foreign nations had to pay large sums to exhibit themselves:

Money,—that is the most difficult thing to obtain in connection with an Exposition…the organizing group still hopes to receive dividends. They are relying for this largely on the concessions that they have granted, on a profit-sharing basis, in the…Midway Plaisance…You cannot imagine the number of persons who count on making a magnificent fortune in the less than six months that a celebration of this kind lasts.233

Unlike the White City, Bruwaert observed the prominent role money played in the Midway’s mission, which was not made to communicate a dream reality.234 Rather, it existed to benefit the fair’s bottom line and the nations were chosen because they could afford “monopoly contracts at very high prices,” to sell goods and in turn give back a percentage of their profits.235 The planners sought to benefit from foreign exhibitors’ gains.

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234 The fair had an admission cost of $0.50, and it is particularly interesting that the Midway was designed to be profitable. For example, two round trips on the Ferris Wheel cost $0.50; the Turkish village $0.50-$0.75; the German Village and Museum was $0.15-$0.25; the Chinese village cost $0.25; and the Cairo Street cost $1.25-$0.025. See Bolotin and Laing, *The World’s Columbian Exposition*, 107.

235 As an example of these “monopoly contracts,” Bruwaert noted that it was rumored a “tradesman pays 500,000 francs for the exclusive privilege of selling ‘peanuts.’” Through these contracts, the seller paid to have the right to sell, and hoped to sell enough of their product to make a profit, after paying twenty-five percent of their gross profit back to planners. Within these types of agreements, many foreign exhibitors and concessions sellers were unable to make a profit themselves. Finally, it is humorous to note Bruwaert’s impressions of some of the concessions he observed. Peanuts, Bruwaert said, were a “sort of pistachio that is quite popular in Chicago.” Popcorn, he observed, was “a little bag…of toasted corn” used “to keep children quiet.” Bruwaert, “Chicago et l’Exposition Universelle Colombienne,” Printed in Pierce, ed., *As Others See Chicago*, 334-5.
B. Franklin Lieber further reported on the Midway’s commercial nature in a letter to the *New York Times*:

The fourteen main buildings, and some thirty-odd of the buildings of States and Territories, as well as fifteen of foreign countries, are free to everyone. The Midway Plaisance, although in the fair inclosure, is altogether a distinct feature and separate thing…and a price from 10 to 50 cents is asked for each of the exhibitions…The public…is not aware that these attractions are all private enterprises and are not integral parts of the fair proper…[where] the expense entailed has been so great that no doubt a great loss will be sustained by many of the exhibitors.  

While Lieber’s report takes an angry tone, he aptly points to the fact that the planners, in exploiting the foreign people, made money while the villagers faired poorly. These Midway participants also lived there during the duration of the fair with no funds provided for their survival. They not only had to pay for their spot, any profits given to planners further hurt their own gains. A *Harper’s Weekly* writer commented: “It is the degrading nineteenth-century so-called civilization that has ruined these poor people. They came here, simple-minded, humble, willing to add their share to this exposition by leading the lives they lead at home….All we had to do was to open our eyes…But we contaminate them with our degrading spirit of gain.” The reality of the American drive for capital gains, a problem seemingly absent from the White City, was manifest on the Midway.

The Midway also communicated an imperial reality in which fair-goers could judge nations as “savage” or “civilized.” In exploiting this dynamic, the fair’s planners used the Midway to show Chicago as the host and colonizer of foreign nations. Though the exhibits claimed to have ethnological purposes, the Midway represented foreign nations in a commercial spirit of entertainment. A weekly program of the fair’s special entertainments advertised “war, religious, and ceremonial dances by savage tribes” every Thursday; and on Tuesdays, visitors

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could witness “boat races by all nations savage and civilized.” The fair’s planners intentionally labeled some nations, especially the African tribes, savage. “We may see at this Midway Plaisance,” wrote the *Los Angeles Times*, “that millions are yet between savagery and civilization, and that a stupendous work has yet to be accomplished before the race, as a whole, shall be fit for self government and a permanent civilization.” In the modern city and the White City, Chicago offered a vision these nations could follow to achieve “civilization,” though at the fair they were a spectacle.

The Cuban writer Aurelia Castillo de González, who traveled to Europe and the Americas writing for *El País* of Havana, reported on her experience at the fair as a Latin American woman. On one side, Castillo de González saw Chicago as a model of what Latin American cities—ironically deemed savage at the fair—should become. She was particularly impressed with the democratic institutions she observed: “In this country with an interrupted democratic tradition and an immense popular mass, as soon as public services are instituted it seems to me that they serve…to furnish services to the greatest number…In Chicago and in St. Louis, I saw that this separation [of people] doesn’t exist.”

Democracy was the fair’s and Chicago’s greatest attraction and lesson. As a traveller and intellectual, Castillo de González understood the vulnerable place of Cuba and other Latin American countries and saw modernity and democracy as one way to fight against the imperialism of the age. For this purpose—and also for insight into new machine inventions—Chicago was a good example.

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On the other hand, Castillo de González was ambivalent about the fair’s imperial nature, which communicated the prevailing metaphor of racial hierarchies. “I can imagine that Chicago is an Eiffel Tower and that all of our Latin American cities crawl painfully below. My place is not that of above but the other and with nightmarish anguish I wish—not to change things here…—that all in this beautiful continent [Latin America] could become Eiffel towers, without the view of the unfortunate people below.” The fair portrayed the ideal city and a city of contrasts. In this relationship, Castillo de González pointed to Chicago as the imperialist. While she had also visited the Paris exposition of 1889, Chicago was, for Castillo de González, particularly impressive because it had emerged from the ashes of the fire. Though she had visited many cities during her tour, including New York, and seen examples of qualities Latin American cities could emulate, she viewed Chicago as the image of “modernity-right-now,” which could quickly be applied at home. Castillo de González recognized that not all was perfect in Chicago (such as the wealth disparities), yet she attempted to flip the discourse of imperialism on its head to give Latin American countries a way to positively relate to its colonizer. To crawl out from the shadow of imperialism, Latin American countries had to emulate Chicago’s definition of modern ideals, even if that meant accepting the discrimination inherent to this.

American blacks present a final case of the imperialistic and contradictory nature of the Midway. The most interesting contrast on the Midway and of the fair was the fact that the only exhibit of Africans on the Midway was the Dahomean village of half-naked natives, and the Haitian Pavilion, not even a group of African Americans, was the only spot of semi-prominence for blacks on the grounds. This fact upset Frederick Douglass, who was already enraged that no black men (or nonwhites) were onstage during the dedication ceremonies. Douglass wrote:

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242 Quoted in Fojas, “American Cosmopolis…,” 276.
243 Fojas, “American Cosmopolis…,” 274.
244 Miller, City of the Century, 499.
“the inauguration ceremonies, glorious as they were, there was one thing that dimmed their
glory…[They] spoke of human brotherhood, human welfare, and human progress. It naturally
implied a welcome to every possible variety of mankind. Yet, I saw, or thought I saw, an
intentional slight to that part of the American population with which I am identified.”

Douglass believed the fair’s directors excluded and ignored the accomplishments of over
eight million African Americans, and sought to represent them through the “barbaric rites
[of]…African savages brought here to act the monkey.” Douglass, with the help of Ida B.
Wells, published a pamphlet about the exclusion of colored Americans at the fair, an inherent
contradiction to the open and inviting (albeit racist) nature of the fair. Though ready to openly
declare other nations of the world “savage,” the fair’s planners, characteristic of the
discriminatory attitude of most Americans of the day, did not afford the black man a place on an
American construction. In 1890, blacks made up a little more than one percent of Chicago’s
population, and Illinois legislation in 1884 outlawed racial discrimination. For Douglass, this
fact, and the fact that blacks lived and worked in Chicago like its ethnic populations, confirmed
his belief that blacks were targets of discrimination. While legislation favored them and their
jobs contributed positively to the city, blacks, unlike any other group, lacked fair representation.
The fair was a “whited sepulcher,” Douglass said, which reflected the country’s desire to
continue to act as an imperialist to its own people.

In closely examining the Midway in relation to Chicago, it becomes clear there were two
fairs occurring in the summer of 1893: the exotic Midway and the cultured White City. One
trumpeted the ideal city and the other displayed the contrasts among races inherent at the time.

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245 Frederick Douglass, quoted in Burg, Chicago’s White Fair of 1893, 108.
246 Frederick Douglass, quoted in Miller, City of the Century, 499.
247 Miller, City of the Century, 501.
248 Miller, City of the Century, 503.
The White City was the achievement of Chicago and sought to glorify its best, while the Midway was the achievement of capitalism, commercialism, exploitation, imperialism, and the subordination of “lesser” races. It also revealed the tensions of the day—discrimination towards blacks and the persistent fascination with the other—and allowed visitors to get intimately close to “barbaric” peoples, without having to experience any real danger.

In one view, the Midway and White City complemented one another; they both fixated on display and entertainment, though this happened through people and buildings, respectively. On the other hand, the Midway was the antithesis of the White City, and transformed Chicago into one of the most imperialist cities of the day. While wealthy Chicagoans could boast of their city’s achievements, the Midway presented the contrasting reality for many foreign peoples. More importantly, the Midway provided a transition from the White City to the chaotic scenes of Chicago’s streets. If the fair is viewed as a crowning moment in Chicago’s history for lifting it to the status of a modern metropolis, one must also consider the reality of this modern metropolis. Chicago’s dark realities underscored and contrasted the image of the White City and were emblematic of the trends of the Gilded Age.

C. The Dark City

Any one could write of what was going on at the World’s Fair…few took the trouble to describe what was going on behind the scenes.249

—Ray Stannard Baker, 1893

It is essential to the illusion of a fairy city that it should not be an American city of the nineteenth century…to fall into this confusion was to lose a great part of its charm, that part which consisted in the illusion that the White City was ten thousand miles and a thousand years away from the City of Chicago, and in oblivion of the reality that the two were contiguous and contemporaneous.250

—Montgomery Schuyler, 1894

249 Ray Stannard Baker in a letter to his father. Quoted in Miller, City of the Century, 517.
250 Montgomery Schuyler, “Last Words about the world’s fair” Architectural Record, III (January-March 1894): 300.
Baker and Schuyler’s observations speak to what has been noted: the fair had two sides. The White City presented a utopian vision and was created in both the absence of the problems of the modern city, as well as to mask these problems. The problems the White City sought to hide existed in multitudes in Chicago’s streets, and fully understanding the fair means understanding how it was interacted with the city’s history. Like the fair, Chicago had its own White City, as shown through its cultural achievements, and housed a plethora of foreign populations. Like the fair, the realities of these two elements in Chicago opposed one another.

Chicago’s Loop district was its own animal full of life, abounding with people and pulsing with energy. People of all ethnicities could be found scurrying across cobbled and uneven streets. The constant roar of the L trains and the bangs of construction hammers deafened bypassers and drowned the shouts of shoe-shiners, businessmen, workers, and protestors. Men dressed in fine suits smoked cigars on street corners while discussing important matters, and wealthy women climbed in and out of their carriages to the department store of Marshall Fields on State Street. Cable cars snaked their way through the congestion of horses, sewage, people, and merchants who filled the streets. It was a city that never slept, as Frank Norris noted in his 1903 novel, *The Pit*: “It is nearly 1 A.M., yet the office buildings on both sides of the street were lighted from basement to roof...Every office was open, and every one of them full of a feverish activity. The sidewalks were almost as crowded as though at noontime. Messenger boys ran to and fro, and groups of men stood on the corners in earnest conversation.”

Chicago was, as reported by another observer, a “congeries of different nationalities, a compost of men and

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251 Marshall Fields’ department store encompassed the “mood of the modern metropolis.” At the time, Marshall Field’s was the largest retail store on earth and employed over nine thousand workers in peak season. The store became the recreational home to Chicago’s wealthy women, who would wile away afternoons among the store’s fifty-three high-speed elevators, post office, medical dispensary, splashing fountains, light courts, café, and aisles of clothing. Women were known to find themselves “in fairyland” while at the store. See Miller, *City of the Century*, 255-6.

women of all manner of languages. It is a city of millionaires and of paupers…Its members came here to make money…[and] the quest of the almighty dollar is their Holy Grail.”

While downtown, one could see men clad in clown’s clothing carrying “dentist’s signs in which sets of fixed teeth six feet wide opened and closed and clacked,…red-coated Hussars in front of hotels,” as well as a constant “array of wonders.” The Loop of Chicago embodied the spirit of capitalism and immigration of the Gilded Age.

The Loop was “literally, as well as metaphorically, the heart of the city,” wrote Hobart C. Chatfield Taylor, and was a gathering place where “is found everything material or aesthetic which the inhabitants of our three ‘sides’ enjoy in common.” The “sides” Chatfield-Taylor referred to where the North, West, and South sides of the city (the East zone being the Lake), recognized as Chicago’s three main zones. As the business and transportation center of the city, the Loop was the one place where the typically divided classes and ethnicities of these zones mingled. In this way, the Loop was like the Midway for the diversity of people and sights to be found, as well as in the racial and cultural hierarchies it demonstrated.

Chicago in the 1890’s, like the fair, was a city dependent on perspective. As described, it was hustling and bustling, poor and rich, conflicted and peaceful, and divided and united all at the same time. Where one belonged among the chaos of city life hinged on where one’s place in the social order. In his famous novel of the 1890s, Sister Carrie, Theodore Dreiser compares those who came to the city to “moths in endless procession to bask in the light of the flame.” This “light of the flame” represented the potential the city offered and, from the perspective of the wealthy, Chicago was thriving. Chicago’s wealthiest names, such as George Pullman and

253 Quoted in Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 72.
254 Quoted in Miller, City of the Century, 299.
255 Quoted in Miller, City of the Century, 266.
256 Dreiser, Sister Carrie, 46.
Marshall Field, lived along the stunning Prairie Avenue in the South Loop district, or in more exclusive splendor on the suburban North Shore of the city, a short train-ride away from the chaos of the Loop. The city’s elites dined at the most exclusive restaurants, were members of the Chicago Society club, wiled away afternoons shopping, and frequented the city’s theater and party scene—all elements that painted a picture of the achievements of Chicago’s own White City. Chicago’s capitalists also reaped the benefits of rapid industrialization. By 1890, Chicago’s six agricultural equipment factories produced one-seventh of the output of all machines made in the country; Marshall Fields, who began his career with $400, was valued at $25,000,000 in 1890; and the Illinois Steel Company, formed through the merger of three large producers, rivaled the steel production of Pittsburgh. The successes of Chicago’s wealthiest citizens represented a lifestyle that appeared perfect and worthy of emulation. For the rich, the city was full of opportunity.

When Mable Treseder, an eighteen-year-old girl from Viola, Wisconsin visited the fair, she learned firsthand how Chicago was a city of perspective. In one account she marveled at the city’s achievements and in another commented on the chaos of the downtown: “It was worse than the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel. Humdrum noise and confusion existed all day and all night long.” During her visit, Treseder was further awestruck at the mansion of Potter Palmer and the breathtaking views from the skyscrapers of downtown. To her, Chicago seemed more civilized than anything she had encountered. As she toured Evanston, the suburb directly north of Chicago, Treseder noted that it was “where the wealthy retired people of Chicago live, their places of business being in the duty and smoky city.”

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257 Gilbert, Perfect Cities, 52.
258 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 50.
260 Treseder, “A Visitor’s Trip to Chicago in 1893,” 27.
observed, of the “dusty and smoky city,” presented a jarring contrast to Evanston’s mansions: “Our eyes witnessed some of the contrasting sights of the great city where want, misery, and crime hold sway and where poverty deals out a full measure to all. It would fairly make one’s heart sick to see the distress manifested on some of those wretched alleys and lanes...Broken, dingy windows, rickety stairs, and tumbling houses are only minor characteristics.”

As Treseder observed, for most of the “moths” who came to feed on the light of the city, the Chicago of 1893 was a city of contrasts. Dreiser wrote that “the entire metropolitan center possessed a high and mighty air calculated to overawe and abash the common applicant, and to make the gulf between poverty and success seem both wide and deep.” This “gulf between poverty and success” manifested itself in how people lived, worked, ate, and dressed. Those who did not live on Prairie Avenue found Chicago was full of uncertainty, and that success was often limited due to class and ethnic divisions.

Despite the fact that almost eighty percent of the Chicago’s population in 1890 was derived of foreign parentage, certain professions seemed reserved for the American-born. For example, native-born workers almost exclusively filled positions as lawyers, telephone operators, agricultural laborers, college professors, teachers, and typists. Among the emerging middle class professions of clerking and sales, there was more ethnic diversity in a percentage approximately equal to that of Chicago’s foreign population. In the most dangerous, lowest-paying factory jobs, though, a large percentage of the workers were of foreign birth. Opportunity was clearly a restrictive term. Like the diversity of the Midway, the diversity of

264 For more discussion on population maps and ethnic divisions, refer to Chapter One, Section A: “The Gilding of Chicago.”
Chicago was overwhelming, and the city evoked a theme of “survival of the fittest,” though this contest seemed to have a pre-determined winner.

For those not deemed “winners,” life was difficult and unprofitable. The average salary for factory workers was below any substantial amount for a family and most immigrants lived in slum-like tenement houses. 266 In the worst of these slums, tenement houses were up to five stories tall and housed upwards of one hundred and fifty people in only six flats. Water quality in these buildings was often so poor that residents not only refused to drink it, they also often refused to bath in it in fear of tuberculosis, small pox, or other diseases. So bad was the water that some Italian mothers were said to feed their children beer. 267 The streets offered little no refuge from the filth inside the tenement house. In the neighborhood surrounding Jane Addams’ Hull House, 268 the streets and alleys were often filled with putrefying rubbish piled more than a story high and clogged with manure, road kill, and garbage. Rat filled boxes of garbage were often said to be “the first objects toddlers learned to climb.” 269

Fair visitors noticed these dark realities that lurked beneath the gleam of Chicago’s new skyscrapers. Far removed from the shining light of Chicago’s White City, the city appeared more gray. With the development of factories, Chicago began burning more coal, so much coal that the city appeared notoriously dirty, under a cloud of smoke, and was nicknamed, among others, “The Coal of the West” and the “Gray City.” 270 The British author H.G. Wells observed, “Chicago burns bituminous coal, it has a reek that outdoes London, and right and left of the line rise vast

266 For a more detailed breakdown of the city’s ethnic groups, see Chapter One, Figure One.
267 Miller, City of the Century, 457.
268 While the city’s elites sought to improve their image for the world, Jane Addams was the first to found a settlement house to benefit the city’s immigrants and working poor. Hull House, located in the West Loop on Halstead Street, was situated in one of the city’s ethnic neighborhoods and sought to improve and enrich the lives of recently arrived European immigrants. Each day, Hull House offered courses in everything from city-skills to art and drawing. Most importantly Addams advocated for more social equality and spearheaded a movement to clean up the city and better the communities of immigrants. See Miller, City of the Century, 419-425.
269 Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House, Quoted in Miller, City of the Century, 424.
270 Gustaitis, Chicago’s Greatest Year, 24.
chimneys, huge blackened grain-elevators, flamed crowned furnaces and gauntly ugly and filthy factory buildings…Chicago is a dark smear under the sky.”  

Giuseppe Giacosa, an Italian journalist and playwright, further noted, “During my one week, I did not see in Chicago anything but darkness: smoke, clouds, dirt, and an extraordinary number of sad and grieved people… from the standpoint of immediate sensations, Chicago is not pleasant, and for the person who comes directly from Europe, if the smoky fog hits him on the back…he will find it positively abominable.”  

Not only was the smog disruptive to visitors in the city, the reality for the “sad and grieved people” Giacosa found laboring in the factories was even more bleak. Giacosa stated the workers were treated like the “subhumans” of previous centuries, and lived in “a nation which knows no ease, the Americans accept the inequality of labor in order to attain a relative equality of goods.”  

In this era, inequality of labor referred to a work system where the foreman was king and laborers, often at risk of losing limbs, worked excessive hours to keep their jobs.

Chicago was not only a “dark smear” for the color of its air, but also for the dark realities of its corruption, violence, and slums. An 1893 Chicago guidebook warned:

“It is not insulting the intelligence to warn [the visitor] against the unscrupulous persons who will beset his path, for they are so numerous and make their appearance at such unexpected times and places that the very smartest of us all are occasionally in danger of being victimized. There are probably more ‘crooked’ people in Chicago at the present writing than any other city in the Union and it is altogether probable that this number will be largely increased during the progress of the Fair.”  

The fear of the crooks of Chicago was prevalent in many visitors’ minds. The fear was so real, in fact, that the same guidebook advised how to avoid theft: “A very good rule to go by is to preserve a polite manner to all strangers, but not to enter into confidential relations with any man.

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273 Quoted in Miller, *City of the Century*, 217.
274 “Chicago by Day and Night: What to See and How to Find it,” 81.
who hasn’t been introduced to you by some one whom you thoroughly know.”

For visitors, knowing the dangers to expect and how to avoid them were of utmost importance. Chicago presented real danger and threatened one’s morals.

The populations coming from Chicago’s rural hinterlands especially feared the city’s dangerous and corrupting influence. After the 1871 fire, surrounding rural towns viewed Chicago’s rapid growth with suspicion. They ultimately concluded that such rapid growth happened through a corrupt process, in which “it is the producer who foots the bill” of construction. This resentment fed the rural anxiety that city people were nothing more than thieves. Because of this, many country people were hesitant to allow their children to visit the fair. When one man from Michigan was asked if he planned to visit the fair, his response was an unrelenting no: “That world’s fair is nothing but a great big fake, got up for the sole purpose of enabling Chicago people to rob innocent people from the outside who may go visit it.”

These fears were grounded in truth, and danger often even crept in to the fairgrounds. As detailed in the Security Department’s Report, 954 arrests and 438 convictions were made; 135 ex-convicts spotted; 408 people attempted to climb over the fence on to the grounds; 539 “shadowy, suspicious” persons were reported; and thirty children were reported missing, of which only twenty were returned to their parents, between 1 May and 30 October 1893.

Not only did the petty crime within the fair frighten rural visitors, the violence of the city loomed. Giuseppe Giacose stated “the dominant characteristic of the exterior life of Chicago is violence.”

During the fair, hundreds of visitors were never heard from again, fifty of whom

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275 “Chicago by Day and Night: What to See and How to Find it,” 84.
277 Quoted in Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis, 353.
fell victim to the murderer H.H. Holmes,280 one of the most notorious and monstrous murderers in Chicago’s history.281 Danger was a reality in Chicago. In its propensity to be the biggest and best at everything, the Chicago of 1893 was one of the most violent cities in the country. “Even death must be called in to testify to the greatness of the city,” one account stated. Already in the United States there was a fear of “lawlessness,” driven by the fact that, as the Tribune reported, the number of national murders in 1892 increased fourteen percent from the previous year, to 6,792.282 In Chicago alone between 1 January and 30 June 1892, a reported 790 murders occurred.283 The Atlantic Constitution commented on Chicago’s violence, “If, late at night, an individual is seen walking in the middle of the street with one hand in his overcoat pocket, it’s fair to assume that he is armed with a big revolver and is likely to use it on any honest citizen…[and] the audacity of burglars is astounding”284 While these accounts obviously contain some bias, they point to the very real fear of violence in the city, which further exposed the city’s divide. Elites viewed violence as the fault of immigrants who not only were dirty, but also failed to assimilate to American culture. This fact points to the duality of perspective of these two groups: the wealthy, who helped to build and finance Chicago, had a very different relationship to the city than immigrants, who came to make money and in search of a better life. These people, who often lived in their own ethnic communities, experienced the city in a more disconnected way and had less motivation to assimilate to the so-called “high-culture” of the elites.

280 H.H. Holmes was the alias for Herman W. Mudgett, who is a large subject of Erik Larson’s Devil in the White City, which provides a captivating account of his activities in the city during the fair. In 1892, Holmes built a eighty-ninety room building, used to house fair visitors—particularly women—at Wallace and Sixty-third streets. Known as Holmes’s Castle, the building was a labyrinth of trapdoors and secret rooms, and was the site of horrific murders and experiments. See Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 231.
281 Miller, City of the Century, 507.
283 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 67.
“Chicago,” a visitor from London wrote, “makes a more amazingly open display of evil than any other city known to me,” and this evil extended into vice and corruption. As was already stated, Chicago advertised itself as the “Paris of the West” where “all tastes may be promptly satisfied, all preferences catered to.” These were not just the tastes of the wealthy or cultured, but also the grotesque and illegal. For the rural visitor, this reputation for sin and vice presented the biggest threat. In Chicago there were six to seven thousand saloons and ten thousand prostitutes. The same guidebook, though never mentioning the brothels by name, gave allusion to the activities happening behind the scenes. The author, who recognized himself as a “man of the world, recognizing the desire of the average man to be amused when the cares of business are done…aims to instruct the uninitiated wayfarer in the paths he may follow with the most satisfaction to himself.” Chicago, it was clear to the reader of this guide, was a city abounding with vice, though some areas were even deemed too dangerous for any pleasure-seekers. The “Cheyenne,” a district “bounded by Harrison Street on the north, Twelfth Street on the south, Dearborn Street on the east, and Fifth Avenue on the west,” was quoted as “an excellent neighborhood to let alone, however curious you may be.” This neighborhood “might almost be called a negro colony, so many colored people reside in it; but there are also large numbers of foreigners—the scum of the large cities of Europe…[who] herd together like animals.” In this area, police were constantly troubled to control the men—and particularly the “negro women…of whom the police have a wholesome dread.” The descriptions of this neighborhood not only portray the city’s clear divide and distaste for the poor, blacks, and

285 Miller, *City of the Century*, 508.
288 “Chicago by Day and Night: What to See and How to Find it,” 23.
289 “Chicago by Day and Night: What to See and How to Find it,” 201.
290 “Chicago by Day and Night: What to See and How to Find it,” 201-2.
eastern European immigrants, they also reveal the highly racialized and imperialistic language used to characterize particular groups, especially in relation to crime and vice.

The worst of the city’s described vice, rumored more dangerous than the Cheyenne, lived in the Levee, nicknamed Hell’s Half Acre, located in Chicago’s South Loop district between eighteenth and twenty-second streets. Known as the city’s red-light district and famed for its prostitution, it seemed every building there was a saloon, brothel, or casino, and “games of every description were conducted openly and in defiance of the law,” Clifton R. Wooldrigde, a Chicago detective, reported.291 In this area, Daniel Burnham’s White City seemed far away. The Levee, perhaps, was the climax of the contrast between the highest ideal and the lowest reality of the time.

When visitors came to the fair, they also saw Chicago. Located just beyond the fairgrounds, many viewers observed the city with the same feelings of awe, anticipation, and horror as they did the Midway and the White City. A journalist of the era wrote Chicago was “somewhat too careless of appearances, with dirty streets and smoke-filled atmosphere;…paying less heed to culture than to profits, unmindful, at time, of good form…yet big-hearted, open-handed, self-reliant, and moving forward with the strides of a giant to great destiny.”292 The fair represented a striving for perfection; the city represented the reality. And the growth of the city—both positive and negative—represented the American city. Chicago, through the fair, became enlivened. Visitors took pride, awe, and shock in its spaces. As a unified event, both the fair and Chicago contained White and Dark realities.

During the fair’s six-month duration, Chicago became the temporary home of national and international visitors. The fair’s effect was not only in its spaces, but also in its interaction

291 Quoted in Miller, City of the Century, 508.
292 Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis, 368.
with the city. When it closed, the wealthy had something to celebrate: the spreading of a pride and belief in the city’s potential as a great metropolis. Chicago had, in the years leading up to the event, experienced tremendous commercial and economic success, though this success was distributed to only a fraction of the population. For the vast majority, such as the immigrants laboring in the factories and stockyards, the city was a dangerous, discriminatory, and unhappy place. In declaring itself a city of the day, Chicago fittingly embodied the tensions and disparities of the Gilded Age. The wealthy built the fair, though the reality of the city truly defined what it meant to be a “Chicagoan” at the time. The ambiguity of the city, its good and bad elements, its institutions, and its people were magnified. The White City, the Midway, and Chicago were joined, and their contradictions were necessary for the fair’s effect and Chicago’s rebirth.

The fair closed its doors on 30 October 1893, and with it closed its fairyland-like exhibits. Shortly after it closed, the Panic of 1893 set in and, as the American economy spun out of control, the vision of the White City grew distant. The contrasts, hardships, and disparities of the modern city took the place of Burnham’s idealistic vision. By the summer of 1894, most of the fairgrounds had been burned or destroyed, yet the memory of the fair could not so easily be erased.
IV. After the Fair

The Shot Heard ‘Round the Fair

On Sunday, 28 October 1893, just three days before its scheduled end on the 31, Chicago eagerly prepared for the formal closing of a record-setting exposition. That morning, the city buzzed with excitement and Mayor Carter Harrison prepared to welcome five thousand mayors and city councilmen to American Cities Day. Later in the day, Harrison glowed as he confirmed the circulating rumors of his upcoming nuptials to Miss Annie Howard and that they planned to marry in November. Everything, it seemed to Harrison, was in perfect order. The fair was a monumental success and the upcoming closing ceremonies would decisively prove Chicago would, in the course of his own lifetime, “be the biggest city in America.”

That afternoon, Harrison addressed the Board of Lady Managers at the Woman’s Building to argue for the fair’s preservation. His audience included prominent female stalwarts such as Susan B. Anthony, Laura Gordon, Sarah Stevenson, and representatives from the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the National Suffrage Association, and the Daughter’s of the American Revolution. In his address, Harrison argued for the preservation of the fairgrounds, which he regarded as a great educational tool. Given the fair’s success, it was a tragedy for Harrison “to think that [the Exposition] will be allowed to crumble to dust.”

Around eight that evening, as Mayor Harrison rested at home, Patrick Eugene Pendergast, a disgruntled office seeker, knocked on his door at 231 Ashland Boulevard.

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295 Larson, *Devil in the White City*, 328.
296 Harrison’s death was said to be “an exact counterpart of that of President Garfield,” who was assassinated Charles J. Guiteau, a disgruntled office seeker, on 2 July 1881, not even four months after his inauguration. Guiteau believed he had been promised work in the wake of this political victories and became enraged when these promises were not fulfilled. Harrison’s death was reminiscent of the spirit of anarchy and political dissatisfaction underlying Garfield’s assassination, and aroused similar feelings of anger, sadness, and distrust of political radicals. Pendergast
Drawn out of his study to greet the man, Harrison, as reported by the *Independent*, had “barely passed out of the parlor into the hall when the man drew a revolver and fired three shots in rapid succession.”

Harrison’s sudden assassination shocked and disheartened Chicago. One day after the murder, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* eulogized the late mayor, the first in the city elected to the position five times, remembering he “was in his intentions a good citizen.” Harrison, they wrote, was “identified with the growth and the municipal history of Chicago in such a degree that it may be said the sudden death by violence of no man in the city would more immediately fix the public attention or excite more general regret or elicit the sympathy of so many of his fellow citizens.” This was certainly the case; within hours of the news spreading, the “home of the Mayor was quickly surrounded by almost a mob of persons…[and] all party lines [were] obliterated in their personal admiration for the man.”

Initially planned to be as elaborate and breathtaking as the dedication and opening ceremonies, the fair’s closing, marred by Harrison’s death, passed with far less fanfare. Thomas W. Palmer, president of the World’s Fair National Commission, and H.N. Higinbotham, president of the Chicago Committee, eulogized the late mayor, and none of the other planned speeches were delivered. A canon salute, coupled with the lowering of the flag, signaled the end. Austere and solemn feelings characterized the ceremonies, and, instead of closing in “a blaze of glory,” the fair ended quietly. The *Washington Post* reported:

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later justified his actions, claiming Harrison had promised him a corporate counselship and not kept his word. Quote from “The Death of Mayor Harrison,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (29 Oct 1893): 12.
Six months, with the exception of a day, have passed and the glory of the Exposition has been woven into the history of the world’s progress. At the word of command from artillery officers the guns of a battery facing the blue waters of Lake Michigan belched forth the signal telling the world that the World’s Fair was dying with the setting sun, dying while dirges were being sung and tears shed and heads were bowed in grief over the bier of Chicago’s murdered Mayor.  

The report epitomizes the dichotomy between the fair and city. Harrison’s assassination brought a somber end to the fair and an abrupt return to reality. Faced with the beginnings of a financial crisis, as well as labor strife, Chicago could no longer hide behind the White City’s dream-like reality. Characteristic of the time, class conflict, economic recession, inequality, violence, and political unrest stood poised to erase the White City’s memory. Chicago’s Dark City would quickly dominate and infiltrate the spaces once inhabited by Daniel Burnham’s perfect creation, proving the thinness of the divide between these two realities. In this way, Harrison’s death was, as stated by David F. Burg, “an unfortunate prophecy of the fate that awaited the closed exposition.”

The fair’s closing and Harrison’s assassination coincided with a moment of wrenching change in Chicago, particularly the impacts the depression brought to the city. Labor unrest increased throughout the winter of 1893-1894 and the homeless and unemployed came to reside in the White City’s remaining facades. While it had lasted, the fair offered steady jobs for the thousands of workers who came to build it. But when it finished, the Dark City took over and these workers’ jobs vanished suddenly. Chaos and turbulence dominated and, in July of 1894, arsonists set fire to the sparse remains of the White City. As these flames fizzled out, so too did Burnham’s elusive vision.

The coincidental overlap between the fair’s close and Harrison’s death begs a few questions: if, as has been argued, the fair’s and Chicago’s histories mirrored and contrasted one

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303 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 287.
another, what place does the fair have in the history that came after 1893? Given that the fair was largely dismantled and burned, what is the exposition’s legacy in regard to the city? Finally, what role, if any, did the fair play in shaping the way to modern America, or the vision of America supported by the wealthy and industrialists? This chapter seeks to answer these questions. The total impact of the exposition financially, culturally, and psychologically; the memories taken away from the space; and the effect of the fair’s deconstruction will be examined. To do this, we must return to the exposition’s final days, the last visitor accounts, and the records set.

A. The Final Impressions

To me the World’s Fair presented a spectacle that exceeded all my expectations of grandeur.304

—Mulji Devji Vedant, Fair Visitor, 1894

History will call it the Chicago World’s Fair. It is useless to expect otherwise.305

—James P. Holland, President of New York State Federation of Labor, 1893

While it lasted between May 1 and October 30, two visions of Chicago co-existed within the city’s perimeters. One vision was that of the fair, which sought to perfect the ills found on the city’s streets. Separated by only seven miles, the southern city—the fair—contained “a miracle of beauty…[and] a realization of the possibilities of the Celestial City.”306 When it ended, this image of “the possibilities of the Celestial City” also faded. The accounts, pictures, and reports no longer described any concrete place; they referred only to a memory of what was. Given this, it seems most fitting to view the fair in the history of Chicago as its elevating factor and tool; it articulated what could be. Current Literature magazine reported in 1894, “[The fair] was a sort

306 Clara Louise Burnham, Sweet Clover: A Romance of the White City (Boston, 1894), 181, quoted in Miller, American Apocalypse, 199.
of foretaste of the future city…it could not be preserved as a monument; it was a mere artistic ephemeris, teaching us of the existence of greater ideas than we may have suspected… and leaving us a mental fabric in the storehouse of the brain, the original of which was forever destroyed before we had time to pick a quarrel with it.”

With the fair gone, Chicago returned to reality and sought to construct the fair’s legacy as a fantasy, vision, and teacher.

“If a thing of beauty is a joy for ever, then that vision of the White City by night, silent and desolate, was well worth crossing the Atlantic for,” wrote the author William T. Stead in 1893. Stead, who spent the majority of his 1893 four-month visit to America in Chicago, was one of the last to see the fair. Visiting on October 31, a day in which the fair remained informally open despite its close the day before, Stead remarked that the buildings “were altogether unique.” As he strolled the grounds one last time, he recorded, “never before have I realized the effect which could be produced by architecture…Nothing that I have ever seen in Paris, in London, in St. Petersburg, or in Rome, could equal the effect produced by the illumination of these great white palaces that autumn night.”

Stead’s final impression of the fair speaks to its legacy: the planners created a scene of unprecedented grandeur.

As if attending the funeral of a dear friend, the final visitors both mourned the fair’s close and celebrated its achievements, as Stead did. One person reported seeing “an old man, as he left

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308 Stead, a British author, journalist, and founder of the British *Review of Reviews*, was the son of a Congregational minister. He visited America for the first time in the fall of 1893 for four months, the majority of which he spent in Chicago. Stead firmly believed that, in spending so much time in one location, he could learn more about the present and future of American institutions than if he were to travel extensively. While in Chicago, Stead attempted to “live and breathe” the city; he read only Chicago newspapers and learned the city like his own. Though he was greatly impressed with the fair, Stead is ultimately remembered for his book, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, in which he presented an inflammatory exposé of the political corruption, violence, and underground economy of Chicago. Stead and his book will be discussed later in this chapter. See Donald L. Miller, *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1996), 533; and William T. Stead, “My First Visit to America,” *Review of Reviews*, IX (Jan-June 1894), 414-417. Printed in Pierce, ed., *As Others See Chicago*, 355.
the Court of Honor, with tears in his eyes.” The fair seemed to infect its visitors with historical amnesia: those who saw it forget the truth of what lay beyond its gates. The British Journal of the Society of Arts wrote: “The Chicago Exposition was not merely the largest, but the most magnificent exhibition since the first of all Exhibitions in 1851.” Even before its final statistics were calculated, the fair had secured a legacy.

1. Calculating the Fair’s Impact

“Sell the cook stove if necessary and come. You must see this fair,” wrote Hamlin Garland, a native Dakotan and writer, to his father in 1893 of the growing urgency to go to Chicago. “Those who wish to visit that marvelous gathering of all the world’s productions at the great Columbian Exposition at Chicago have no time to lose…everybody should strain a point to go to Chicago,” stated the New York Times in October of 1893. Not only does this comment, coming from an Eastern newspaper, speak to the quality of the event, it highlights the fair’s wild success. So electric was the appeal that people were said to squander their life savings just to catch a glimpse of the Court of Honor.

In total, 27,529,400 visitors toured the fair, of which twenty-one million paid the fifty-cent admission fee. In total, attendance more than tripled that of Philadelphia in 1876, and only Paris in 1889 could brag of more paid and free admissions. As predicted, most of the fair’s visitors were Americans, and only roughly 25,000 Europeans made the trip. Most commonly, Europeans visited for their nation’s special day. For example, the May 17 Norway Day, which celebrated the adoption of their constitution, attracted ten thousand Norseman from Illinois and the surrounding area, as well as Norwegians; and the German Day celebration in honor of Kaiser

Wilhelm II’s coronation attracted thousands of Chicago Germans and festivities ran into the night. Infanta Eulalia, the aunt of the reigning king of Spain, was one of several European diplomats to accept President Harrison’s invitation to specially tour the fair and June 8—Princess Eulalia Day—was dedicated to her. Of the American visitors, a large number came from the Illinois hinterlands, though the East and West were also well represented. 3.4% of the population of Connecticut, for example, registered at its state building in the White City.313

Some of the highest paid attendance days were United States Day (July 4) and Illinois Day (August 24), which recorded 283,273 and 243,951 people, respectively.314 October in particular saw a vast increase in visitors, perhaps in response to the exposition’s waning life span, and each day averaged over 200,000 people.315 On each of October 9 (Chicago Day), 10, 11, and 19, paid admissions exceeded 300,000.316 Chicago Day in particular was the most extravagant and exciting of the planned days and was meant to celebrate not only the fair’s achievements, but also commemorated the twenty-second anniversary of the Great Fire.

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Of Chicago Day, the Chicago Tribune reported that never had “so many men and women been gathered in so limited space as were assembled in Jackson Park yesterday; never in the history of the world have so many persons paid for the privilege of entering an enclosure on a single day.” Chicago Day was a city-wide celebration. Businesses, schools, and factories closed, and men, women, and child alike crammed into cable cars and trains to get to the fair. It seemed as if every Chicagoan sought to prove their loyalty to the city and exposition. The Tribune reported that Chicago “rejoice[d] over the restoration of the city” and celebrated the “new Chicago, not the old Chicago that was destroyed.” Most importantly, at the forefront of this celebration was “the upbuilding of two cities—the great, restless, indomitable, vigorous City of Chicago, and the beautiful, artistic, matchless White city within its bounds.” For the almost 700,000 visitors—an unprecedented amount—the power of Chicago Day was about more than just the fair.

For the millions of fair visitors, transportation was critical and the machine inventions of the day played a large role. The newly constructed and elevated Illinois Central Railroad, carried, according to H.N. Higinbotham, president of the Chicago Committee, 4,352,409 people to the fair, with over 40,000 express trains and 36,600 suburban trains entering and exiting the Van Buren Street Station alone, and 19,342,684 people total using the service. More importantly, “in this service no accident occurred resulting in death, and very few accidents of even trifling importance occurred.” 3,518,721 more people arrived at the Exposition via the South Chicago Railroad Company, which improved its line terminal on Stony Island Avenue at the Thirty-Fourth Street Entrance. A further 22,371,499 visitors accessed the park from the Alley Elevated

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Additionally, 1,852,926 people arrived to Jackson Park via the World’s Fair Steamship Company. As it already dominated shipping and transportation in the Gilded Age, rail was also the most lucrative means of passage to the grounds. Not only this, within the fair, an electric railway, wheel chairs, electric and steam launches, Venetian gondolas, and the movable sidewalk transported visitors around in a futuristic fashion.

Finally, the fair achieved monetary success. Excluding private exhibits, the fair cost nearly twenty-eight million dollars to build, and when all the receipts were accounted for, it netted fourteen million dollars. The Midway’s revenues were key to this success, a necessity fair organizers hinged their initial plans upon. In his report to the Board of Directors, Higinbotham, wrote: “In the budget of February, 1891, the estimate of receipts from concessions was a million dollars. The actual receipts were more than $4,000,000…Except for the success of the concessions there would not only have been no 10 per cent dividend for stockholders, but there would have been a deficit at the close of the season which the subsequent collections would not have overcome.” The Midway’s wild financial success, though bemoaned by many for its commercial nature and exploitation of native peoples, eclipsed any prior earnings and rendered the fair profitable.

Besides attendance and revenues, the 1893 Columbian Exposition set records in other ways. Forty-seven American states and territories participated, as well as fifty-one foreign

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322 Higinbotham, Report of the President, 309.
323 A note on the moveable sidewalk is necessary for the sake of the richness of the fair’s details. The moveable sidewalk was located along the long pier east of the Peristyle and run by the Multiple Speed & Traction Company. The sidewalk did not open until July due to construction delays but when it did, it could carry 6,000 people and move as quickly as six miles per hour. The moveable sidewalk offered its 997,785 riders an experience of the future and views of the lake. See Higinbotham, Report of the President, 313-4.
325 Higinbotham, Report of the President, 299.
326 For more on the exploitative nature of the Midway, see Chapter Three.
nations and thirty-nine colonies of those nations. Burnham’s fair boasted fourteen great buildings, with a total floor space of sixty-three million square feet, and there were an additional two hundred buildings on the grounds. More than 18,000 tons of iron and steel were used in these buildings, and water plants pumped more than sixty-four million gallons of water daily through twenty miles of water mains. Over 120,000 incandescent lights and 7,000 arc lights—three times the electric lighting power in use in Chicago at the time and ten times more than used in Paris in 1889—illuminated the fairgrounds. By virtue of its sheer scope, Burnham’s fair wowed and awed, and its final vestige of amazement was how quickly it disappeared.

**B. Deconstructing the Fair**

It is desolation. You wish you had not come…It seems cruel, cruel, to give us such a vision; to let us dream and drift through heaven for six months, and then to take it out of our lives. —Teresa Dean, Columnist, January 1894

In the wake of Harrison’s sudden death and as the curtain fell upon the fair’s climatic six-month tenure, discussions on the fairgrounds’ fate began. While it was created to outshine and eclipse any previous exposition, it is interesting that Chicago’s fair was not designed to endure, a fact many visitors lamented. The structures lacked complete foundations and their facades were deceptively hollow. Symbolically, the deconstruction of the fair fits into Chicago’s history, and the first part of the fair’s legacy, as well as its impact on Chicago, arose by virtue of its sudden disappearance. As quickly as it appeared to solve the city’s problems, the fair vanished equally rapidly, leaving Chicago victim to its own dark city. On the other hand, its burning, like the fire of 1871, represented a chance for rebirth. This tension is the subject of this section.

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Initially, debates arose over what to do with the buildings, especially in the media.\textsuperscript{329} On one side, art lovers proposed preserving part or all the structures, “whose beauty had become familiar and dear to every Chicagoan.”\textsuperscript{330} Supreme emotional attachment made it difficult for many to imagine an empty Jackson Park. William Stead was particularly embittered by these discussions, “A fierce impatience seemed to have taken possession of the people of Chicago,” he stated, “They were tired of their toy and wished to be done with it…They declared that its buildings, as beautiful as a dream, were as perishable as the fancies of the night.”\textsuperscript{331} Stead’s comments characterize the feelings of those who found it deplorable to destroy the fair.

In contrast, many saw the fair’s destruction as inevitable. Higinbotham wrote:

Efforts were made to retain at least some portions of the edifices. The futility of these efforts was shown by those who understood the character of the buildings and their construction. They were designed only for temporary service, and their safety and durability was not expected to outlive the exposition. Their retention would have required constant outlays of considerable sums for repairs. Dilapidation began almost as soon as the Exposition season closed.\textsuperscript{332} While it may not have been clear to fairgoers, the planners understood the buildings lacked durability and that disassembly needed to occur immediately. The White City was a Dream City, one that failed the test of reality. Higinbotham noted, “when the landscape department ceased to care for the grounds their beauty was quickly marred by accumulations of waste…and within a week the ground had lost the freshness which had been maintained only by constant attention.”\textsuperscript{333} The depression revealed the true extent of the White City’s unrealistic vision; without constant and vigorous care, it would perish. This high cost of the buildings’ upkeep, as

\textsuperscript{329} It is worth noting that, up to this point, there had been no exposition after which all of its structures or exhibits were saved. Notably, though, many exhibits left behind a token of their memory, such as London’s 1851 Crystal Palace or Paris’ 1889 Eifel Tower.
\textsuperscript{332} Higinbotham, \textit{Report of the President}, 280.
\textsuperscript{333} Higinbotham, \textit{Report of the President}, 280.
Higinbotham noted, presented a second challenge to preserving them and, since the proper funds could not be allocated, most believed the fair should burn rather than rot. Among these were Daniel Burnham and the late Mayor Harrison, who said, “If we cannot preserve it for another year I would be in favor of putting a torch to it…and let it go up into the bright sky to eternal heaven.”334 The exposition’s beauty warranted perfect preservation or a grand exit and, with winter looming and weather ravaging the structures, the latter appeared appealing.

In February 1894, the Tribune reported the commissioners were “disinclined to spend the money necessary to protect [the buildings] from the incendiary and… adopted the wisest policy by deciding to advertise for bids for the removal of these structures…[because it] was better that these buildings should vanish from the public gaze before they had faded from the freshness of their bloom and begun to look dingy and decayed.”335 Though Higinbotham foresaw this outcome, popular opinion continued to scoff at the seeming disinterest of planners in their buildings. The planners understood, though, given the maintenance costs and prospect of watching the White City fade completely to black, the best decision was to preserve the pureness of its memory.

Also, though guards were stationed around the fair’s perimeter to keep thieves and vandals out, they still crept in. The small army of workers responsible for building and running the fair, now unemployed, were, as author Will Payne wrote in his novel, Mr. Salt, “thrown back into the trades,” into the throngs of the depression, and in need of shelter, which the White City provided.336 Author Robert Herrick characterized this movement: “Tens of thousands of human beings, lured to the festive city by abnormal wages, had been left stranded, without food or a

334 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 287.
336 Miller, City of the Century, 534.
right to shelter in its tenantless buildings.”\textsuperscript{337} Ray Stannard Baker further wrote in November 1893, “What a spectacle!...What a human downfall after the magnificence and prodigality of the World’s Fair...Heights of splendor, pride, exaltation, in one month: depths of wretchedness, suffering, hunger, cold, in the next.”\textsuperscript{338} The brutality of the depression marred the White City’s golden vision, and labor conflict, along with increased resentment of Chicago’s merchant princes, further threatened the longevity of the grounds. In May of 1894, 2,000 Pullman workers began a strike supported by Eugene Debs’s American Railway Union.\textsuperscript{339}

Given these events, the disassembly of the White City reveals the power of contrasts at work in the Gilded Age. The 1893-94 Depression was the worst in the country’s history to that point. Unemployment peaked at three million people, twenty percent of Chicago’s workforce became unemployed, and ten percent of the population lived in starvation.\textsuperscript{340} Despite its creation of an exceptional object of beauty, Chicago and its White City could not escape reality.

![Figure 9. A view of the Grand Basin after the January fire, looking East to West from behind the Statue of the Republic from the remains of the burned Peristyle.\textsuperscript{341}](image)

\textsuperscript{337} Quoted in Miller, \textit{City of the Century}, 535.
\textsuperscript{338} Quoted in Miller, \textit{City of the Century}, 534.
\textsuperscript{340} Miller, \textit{City of the Century}, 535.
\textsuperscript{341} See Larson, \textit{Devil in the White City}, 371.
Thus, formal and informal arrangements were made to take down the buildings, with limited plans for preservation. On 8 January 1894, fire destroyed the Casino, Music Hall, Peristyle, and movable sidewalk. In July of the same year and as a result of continued labor unrest, flames, said to have originated from arsonists and strikers, took hold of the buildings around the Court of Honor, including the terminal station, the Administration, Mines and Mining, Electricity, Machinery, Agricultural, and Manufactures buildings. The blaze illuminated the night sky with a sea of multi-colored flames that rose as high as the skyscrapers from which viewers watched, as if watching a fireworks show.\textsuperscript{342} With this fury of flames, the fair exited as spectacularly as it began months earlier. Of the few buildings that escaped the fire, bits and pieces found their way around the world. Some of the State, Foreign, and Auxiliary buildings were sold and relocated to other sites as homes, galleries, or offices; other remains were ravaged for scrap parts and souvenirs; and formal plans were made only for the Palace of Fine Arts, as will be discussed in the next section.\textsuperscript{343}

The burning of the majority of the fairgrounds, as the Great Fire of 1871 had, offered a chance for rebirth in the creation of the fair’s legacy. Ross Miller wrote that ruins, “poeticized by the distance of time like a walk in Ostia, Herculaneum, or Pompeii…hold a mystery for any of the living willing to consider them deeply.”\textsuperscript{344} Though the darkness of the depression engulfed the space the fair once occupied, the exposition lived on as a memory of mythic proportions. While observing the final fire in July, 1894, the \textit{Tribune reported} “there was no regret; rather a feeling of pleasure that the elements and not the wrecker should wipe out the spectacle of the Columbian season.” The burning was a glorious end to the most “splendid [and] beautiful thing

\textsuperscript{343} Bolotin and Laing, \textit{The World’s Columbian Exposition}, 154.
\textsuperscript{344} Miller, \textit{American Apocalypse}, 97-8.
Chicago had ever created.” Despite the fact that chaos and labor strife brought the end of the White City, many believed this end was somehow fitting. In this view, the fair was perhaps too much of a “beautiful thing” to live on in anything but memory.

In combining these competing views of the fair’s disassembly, that it was symbolic of the overpowering nature of the Dark City and that it represented a rebirth, it seems best to consider it both. While representative of the trends of the era and closely mirroring those of Chicago, the legacy of the fair also arose because of what it created. The fairgrounds briefly allowed visitors, while wandering its spaces, to forget the harsh reality of city life.

C. Constructing a Legacy

Marshall Field, of Chicago, has given a million dollars to the Columbian Memorial Museum on the condition that $500,000 in each be subscribed to the endowment fund and that two million dollars of Exposition stock be transferred to the trustees of the projected museum. An informal understanding has been reached between the directors and the South Park Commissioners for the retention of the Fine Arts Palace as the Museum building, and the chiefs of departments have secured the promise of valuable exhibits from foreign and American exhibitors, including all the exhibits in the Forestry Building and in the Mining Department.  

—The Independent, November 1893

One legacy of the fair stemmed from its few remains, left as mementos of what had been and as tools to educate. Marshall Field and other prominent Chicagoans saved the Palace of Fine Arts, which now exists as Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry, and is one of only four surviving exposition buildings. Unlike most of the other structures and because it housed and showcased expensive works of art, the Palace of the Fine Arts was fireproof and durable, making its preservation much simpler. The other three original structures to survive were the Maine Building, moved across the country on a sixteen-car train to become a Maine resort; the Dutch House, now a popular tourist attraction in Brookline, Massachusetts; and the Norway Building,

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345 Chicago Tribune (July 1894):6-7, Quoted in Miller, City of the Century, 550.
moved by William Wrigley to Lake Geneva, and then to Blue Mounds, Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{347} The University of Chicago, perhaps the city’s most prestigious institution, inhabits the once-bustling and rowdy Midway Plaisance. Apart from the Museum of Science and Industry, the fair truly vanished from the grounds of Chicago. While Jackson Park remains as one of Chicago’s largest parks and a tribute to the City Beautiful movement that followed the exposition, which sought to elevate American cities in the image of European ones, little evidence of the fair stands today. In discussing the fair’s legacy, it is perhaps most interesting that, of the two hundred buildings on the grounds, only four survived, only one of which is in Chicago, perhaps suggesting that the fair was meant to linger only in memory.

In many other ways, though, the fair has endured to the present. The fair left its most lasting physical legacy in the movements it inspired, particularly city planning. The gleaming facades of Burnham’s alabaster White City aroused public interest, made Americans reassess their own environments in light of what they saw, and provided a model every city could strive to emulate. This was Burnham’s goal. The harmony of his buildings prompted the City Beautiful movement and the introduction of conscious beautification and spatial grandeur into American cities.\textsuperscript{348} For Burnham, the burning of the White City signified a moment of rebirth, as the Great Fire of 1871 had, and he hoped this rebirth could occur nationwide. Burnham, whose White City exemplified the first realization of the City Beautiful goals, naturally rose as the figurehead of the movement. Burnham proved the city did not have to be dark and dirty; rather, it could prevent crime and boast architectural beauty.\textsuperscript{349} “Among the various instrumentalities designed

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\textsuperscript{347} Bolotin and Laing, \textit{The World’s Columbian Exposition}, 155.  
\textsuperscript{348} Burg, \textit{Chicago’s White City of 1893}, 308.  
\textsuperscript{349} Burnham believed that America, as Burg stated, “was on the threshold of constructing buildings of unprecedented magnitude.” These new buildings would be of an entirely different type, scale, and boldness than previous constructions, and would manifest themselves in the building of new public libraries, state capitols, skyscrapers, and railroad stations. These structures would elevate the modern city and its culture. Interestingly enough, despite being the leader of the movement, Burnham was not recognized as a “great architect,” though he was a “great organizer.”
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to accomplish this result,” Burnham wrote “a plan for a well-ordered and convenient city is seen to be indispensable.”\(^{350}\) In an era where the city was the crossroads of people, commerce, and trade, Burnham’s vision of a more dynamic and organized space appealed to urban planners.

In the summer of 1894, Burnham began plans for a series of civic improvement projects, including one for Jackson Park. The subsequent Chicago Plan of 1909 was arguably the greatest civic project resulting from the fair. The project preserved and transformed the land in Jackson Park and along Chicago’s lakefront, and aimed to simplify and integrate the city’s traffic through a central rail union freight yard terminus and harbors for water commerce; preserve the lakefront for recreation; revitalize Michigan Avenue as the city’s core; improve conditions in slums; and better enforce sanitation regulations. In sum, Burnham hoped to create a White City in Chicago and make it a leader in social betterment.\(^{351}\) Though not all of the goals of Burnham’s plan were met, and the goals benefitting the marginalized fell by the wayside, Chicago’s “Magnificent Mile,” the stretch of lakefront parks and homes along Michigan Avenue; string of parks, some of which now house Soldier Field and the Museum Campus; and rechanneling of major railroads are all attributed to Burnham’s work. Chicago’s lakefront and skyline thus serve as constant reminders of the exposition’s impact and solidify a permanent connection between the fair and city.\(^{352}\)

As he had in Chicago, Burnham also completed City Beautiful improvement plans in Cleveland, San Francisco, St. Louis, Manila, Atlantic City, and Washington, D.C. Today, Burnham’s influence is found in green spaces across the country, from the steps of the U.S. Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial; the redesign of Washington D.C.’s L’Enfant plaza; the iconic

\(^{350}\) Quoted in Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893*, 310.

\(^{351}\) Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893*, 310-11.

\(^{352}\) Larson, *Devil in the White City*, 374.
lakefront paths in Chicago; and the harbor areas of San Francisco. Not only this, the exposition provided a model of large-scale and effective administrative management and cooperation. With this sort of system, city planning efforts could flourish, as Burnham argued, “in making the city convenient and healthful for...its citizens; that civic beauty satisfies a craving of human nature...that the orderly arrangement of fine buildings and monuments brings fame and wealth to the city; and that the cities which truly exercise dominion rule by reason of their appeal to the higher emotions of the human mind.” Chicago’s exposition served as proof of Burnham’s vision. Visitor’s praised the fair’s “beauty,” and the city obtained both “fame and wealth” as a result. In pioneering a way forward in architecture, Burnham used the fair and Chicago as his tools for experimentation. The former offered a vision Burnham sought to recreate in the latter.

Though appeal was great, it proved difficult to emulate and recreate the White City’s reality across the United States (a task, as detailed above, that would have be expensive anyway), which was noted in the great outpouring of writing and literature that stemmed from the fair. The exposition drew writers and reporters of a global scope and perspective, thereby affording the city the chance to reimagine its literary means of expression. Between 1890 and 1900, seventy periodicals were born, and eighty-eight more were founded by 1906. The foreign language press also grew and writers (many of whom commented on the fair) such as Eugene Field, Henry B. Fuller, Finley Peter Dunne, William Vaughn Moody, Robert Herrick, and Sherwood Anderson, enriched America’s field of letters.

Literature highlighting the problems of the Gilded Age and Chicago’s Dark City also flowered in the exposition’s wake. For many authors, the blatant contrasts observed between vice

354 Quoted in Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893*, 311.  
and reform, rich and poor, high and low culture, and White and Dark Cities inspired a reaction. Authors such as Theodore Dreiser, Hamlin Garland, Jane Addams, George Ade, Ida B. Wells, William Rainey Harper, Upton Sinclair, and Ray Stannard Baker found a muse in the industrial metropolis and the fair’s beauty and ruins. The exposition acted as a major character in thirteen novels after 1893, with a predominant theme being the contrast between the two Chicagos, as well as the tension between rural and urban. Some of these novels included Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Two Little Pilgrims’ Progress*, and Robert Herrick’s *Memoirs of an American Citizen*, both of which memorialized the fair and the darker realities of Chicago. In Burnett’s book, two small orphan children living on a farm in rural Illinois become enticed by the lure of the exposition. For months, the children work hard to save their money to visit the exposition, during which they stay with a poor family in Chicago’s slums. While the children are able to visit the fair, Burnett’s novel made a stark commentary on the contrast between city and country and the condition of cities. Edward Can Harrington, the protagonist in Robert Herrick’s novel, commented on the vast beauty of the fair, which he saw illuminated one night: “In that lovely hour…the toil and trouble of men, the fear that was gripping men’s hearts in the market, fell away from me, and in its place came Faith.” Harrington’s character is ultimately destroyed in the novel by the ruthless and conniving actions of Jane Dround, the wife of the Harrington’s company’s president. These novels both clearly pitted the fair’s dream-like nature against reality.

William Stead also found inspiration from the fair, and his book, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, was particularly shocking and embarrassing to the city’s elites and their pride. Though he admired the accomplishments of the fair (as noted earlier in this chapter), Stead also detested

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356 Miller, *City of the Century*, 551.
359 Quoted in Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893*, 295.
its contrast to the Black City. In the tradition of Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* and Jane Addams’s *Hull House*, Stead sought to expose the violent nature of city life. To do so, he immersed himself for two weeks in the city’s underworld of tramps, unemployed, prostitutes, gamblers, criminals, and drunkards.\(^{360}\) What he found he then reported to every possible media outlet, women’s clubs, clergymen, and newspaper he could in hopes of spurring reform.

“Chicago,” Stead began in one chapter, “is possessed by a host of unclean spirits.”\(^ {361}\) As a minister, and viewing the city’s problems as a sign of the devil, Stead ridiculed its contrasts. Though the wealthy wanted to highlight the city’s merits, Stead’s experiences and works revealed a laundry list of items less boast-worthy. Of the justice system, Stead reported that “there is hardly a court in Chicago where a prisoner who has political pull is not tolerably sure of escaping punishment, unless, of course, his crime has been too flagrant or too sensational for it to be safe for him to be liberated after the usual fashion.” Not only was the court system corrupt, Stead found that law and justice in Chicago were neither “impartial nor just.” More importantly, he observed, “at present it is almost impossible for the policeman to resist the temptation to supplement his salary by bribes.”\(^ {362}\) While Stead observed many of the same ills visitors had seen, his book in particular sparked a reaction: it propelled the city improvement movements the White City had inspired, served as a catalyst to clean up Chicago’s streets, and made clear how corruption, both political and personal, stemmed from social forces that *could* be reformed. The fact that Stead’s report created so much excitement highlights the lasting relationship between the fair and Chicago.

### 1. The Fair and Chicago

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\(^{360}\) Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 333.  
\(^{361}\) William T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago: A Plea for the Union of All who Love in the Service of All who Suffer* (Chicago: Laird & Lee, 1894), 361.  
\(^{362}\) Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, 355, 354, 357.
Whether or not Chicago will ever become the ideal city of the world is for the future to say; certainly she, more than any other city, has the opportunity at her feet. She is not laden down by any...of the blunders of the crimes of the past; her citizens are full of boundless élan, and full of faith in the destiny of their city. They have a position of unique prominence in the heart of the New World. They have the incentive of the aspiration of the World’s Fair.  
—William T. Stead, Author, 1894

In an unfinished article, Stead gave the above prophecy and expressed the spirit radiating from Chicago following the fair: for the first time, the city’s elites had proven themselves as culturally equal and economically on par with any other American city. Not only this, riding on the fair’s success, they appeared to possess the latest word on what modernity truly was. By its end, the *New York Times, Tribune, and Sun*, though they spurned Chicago’s claims to host as “full of wind,” praised the exposition and Chicago’s handling of it. The New York *Sun* applauded, “Hats off to Chicago!... This Western town conceived and carried her enterprise through to splendid success.” Chicago, it seemed, was capable of anything.

The fair and Chicago were cities of contrasts. As noted, the event that took over Jackson and Washington Parks between May and October 1893 became linked to its host. Created to commemorate Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America, the fair truly existed as a splendid tribute to Chicago. When the fair was destroyed, though, the city’s dark contrasts took over the memory of its space, revealing the continual interaction between the fair and Chicago.

If, as Henry Adams stated, “Chicago was the first expression of American thought as a unity,” one must wonder where exactly America was “driving itself” with the fair. The fair sought to educate, celebrate, and entertain, and, by most accounts, succeeded wildly in these regards. Visitors left with a better knowledge of technological and machine advances, could

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celebrate America’s role in these developments, and felt awed by the sites they encountered on the Midway and in Chicago. Not only this, stockholders, investors, and the city made profits. Chicago’s businesses and hotels received a massive stimulus, and the giant influx of people into the city increased the amount of money in circulation, both factors that lessened the sting of the Depression. Yet, the achievement of these basic goals does not seem like enough to warrant Adams’s claim that the fair showed where America was “driving itself.” The fair revealed the realities of the Gilded Age: it was a time of growth, industry, capitalism, and inequality, and also a time of great cultural and literary flowering. Chicago, the image of the destiny of Westward expansion, represented the possibility of the future, and also its challenges.

“I would say that Chicago gave me the idea of a classicality less formal than our ancient and so much larger of how much the earth has increased from Rome, after all,” wrote the Italian author and playwright Guiseppe Giacose. By the 1890s, it was clear that America’s future was urban, not rural. Chicago, through hosting the fair, became the real and imagined vision of what this future looked like. The lessons of the White City—the perfect city—and the Dark City could be learned from. In 1895, the Harper’s Magazine writer Julian Ralph reported on the results of the new drive of civic-mindedness and pursuit of the fair’s ideals: “Since the closing of the fair, they have gone on, putting up scores of superb residences and office buildings, a majestic depot, pushing a stupendous drainage work...bringing university life into prominence, and satisfying, in a half a dozen directions, the demands of the cultivated element of the population.” Perhaps most notable in this observation is the fact that only the “cultivated element of the population” benefitted. Yet, the White City’s immediate impacts in Chicago were the first sign of the reform-

368 Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 338.
minded spirit that would take hold in the next century, albeit if this spirit first impacted the wealthy. In the early twentieth century, the progressive movement, in response to the exact ills Stead described, embarked on a political crusade for change, seeking to put foundations beneath the structures and visions the White City constructed.

Chicago, and particularly the events that followed during the depression, also made clear that the country was still wrought with inequality. Yet, in publicizing these observations and creating a dialogue, change was on the horizon. The fair gave visitors a taste of what equality and prosperity felt like, a feeling not easily forgotten. As John Coleman Adams, a Tufts College Divinity school graduate, noted, the fairgoer “was treated to the extraordinary experience of feeling that all this beauty, order, protection and display were for his sake, to minister to his enjoyment and to his ease.”

The exposition imparted a lesson on all its visitors: each could be sovereign and respected among its streets, a fact they starkly recognized as in contrast to Chicago. This idea drove political change. “It is by politics,” Stead proclaimed, “that the work of redemption must be wrought.” For Stead, the elite classes would drive political change, despite the fact that their “right ideas” and current “indifference” plagued reform to that point. Even a pessimist like Stead, though, believed that change would come because of the ideas planted at the exposition, albeit if the politics behind this change would be slow.

All things considered, it appears clear that Chicago and its fair were certainly “driving’ America somewhere and, for many contemporary visitors and modern-day historians, this “somewhere” was the future. Manufacturing, machine invention, and commerce, particularly foreign trade, all received an impetus as a result. American craftsmen and exhibitors spread their

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370 Stead, If Christ Came to Chicago, 344-353.
371 Quoted in Miller, City of the Century, 538.
trade relations globally. For example, both German exports and imports increased in a pronounced fashion leading up to and following the exposition, and trade with the Netherlands, Japan, and Italy also increased, revealing part of the impact of the exposition on global trade.\textsuperscript{372} While the fair was only a part of the impetus to expand to global markets, it is clear it boosted this process.

As Frederick Jackson Turner announced in his thesis, the frontier of American expansion was closed, and Chicago, to him, had been a product of this expansion. Yet, the White City, in unity with Chicago, offered a different picture. A group of largely Eastern architects designed and constructed the fair, revealing the growing spread of culture westward. Chicago represented the new home and outpost of this growth and, coupled with the expansion of the railroad and telegraph, placed the city as a leader toward modernity. The fair taught everyone who visited of the power of perfect architectural harmony. By believing in the confidence of its builders, the fair offered a vision of the seemingly limitless possibilities of urban life, realized the Chicago’s dreamers’ prophecy to “rise from the ashes,” offered an authentic interpretation of what the “modern” world had in store, and also showed the difficulty of overcoming the problems of labor strife, poverty, and urbanization. The fair and the city existed in a dual relationship; each magnified and exemplified the contrasts and glories of the other from inception to deconstruction. In this light, they exist in historical harmony.

Conclusion

Memories

While a schoolboy in Boston, Edmund A. Walsh learned about the Columbian Exposition through pictures he saw at school. Just a young boy, Walsh, the future founder of Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service, never forgot the impression these images made on him, even from afar. “In 1892 the great World’s Fair at Chicago and its attendant publicity made us primary school boys conscious of Christopher Columbus,” he remarked later in life. “We began to understand that America was discovered by an Italian navigator in the employ of Spain, whereas we previously had imagined that the new world had been created by Puritans from down Cape Cod way.” Walsh’s comment speaks to the power the fair exercised over individual memory. Throughout his life as a preacher, academic, and teacher, Walsh stressed the importance of education and understanding one’s place among the nations of the world, lessons he in part could have learned from the fair.

Walsh was not the only person to carry the memories of the fair. Elias Disney, a young carpenter at the time of construction, helped build the fair and later relayed his stories to his son, Walt. Walt took careful notes. Though he had not witnessed it, when Walt Disney constructed his famous Disneyworld, echoes of the White City were everywhere, from the layout of the grounds, to its commitment to cleanliness, to the Disney castle. The writer L. Frank Baum and his artist-partner William Wallace Denslow also visited the fair during the summer of 1893. Through their work, The Wizard of Oz, their names have been immortalized, and the grandeur of their Emerald City drew inspiration from the White City. These lasting impacts

375 Larson, Devil in the White City, 373.
show the extent of the exposition’s never-ending legacy and its immortalization through memory.

In 1894, the London Spectacle wrote, “The ideal city is the blossom, and Chicago is the root or bulb, which, seven miles away, holds in its grimy fibres as many human activities as the mind of man can well conceive. The 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago was truly a creation of every “fibre” of the human mind—both the “grimy” and brilliant ones. It was a fair for the people of the world complete with a seemingly endless display of culture and vision for society. When the fair closed, it seemed as if the transformation of Jackson Park had, indeed, been a miracle, and one similar to Chicago’s “rise from the ashes” after the Great Fire. The Manufactures and Liberal Arts building had enough interior volume to house the U.S. Capitol, the Great Pyramid, Winchester Cathedral, Madison Square Garden, and St. Paul’s Cathedral all at once; a 22,000-pound cheese in the Wisconsin Pavilion did not mold; a map of the United States was constructed of pickles; and the transformation of the swampy grounds to a landscaping beauty were each feats worthy of praise.

The fair’s legacy also extended far beyond its constructions because it presented a vision for the future. Cracker Jacks, Shredded Wheat, Wrigley Gum, Aunt Jemima Pancake mix, the zipper, and spicy Texas chili—households products today—made their debuts between May and October of 1893. The fair’s moving sidewalk provided a prototype for the moving walkways commonly found in airports and theme parks, and the exposition’s Music Hall, directed by Theodore Thomas, treated visitors to classical concerts of grand quality. The most advanced sewing machines, which would soon transform the garment industry, were also on display, and

Thomas Alva Edison unveiled his genius Kinetoscope, the forerunner to motion pictures, in the Electricity building.\textsuperscript{379} Today, the remnants of the fair can be found across the country; one can stroll through Jackson Park and imagine where the Court of Honor once stood, and the City Beautiful movement owes its impetus to Burnham’s work.

Yet, the fair was also a study of contrasts and exhibited a dichotomy between the pleasant White City and the unpleasant Chicago. This relationship was realized in the fair’s dark side, which, like the city’s, could not be hidden. Like in the city, elitist authority dominated the White City—the symbol of high culture—whose image sought to promote upper-class prosperity while shunning laborers and those deemed uncivilized. Popular entertainments and the exhibits of foreign nations were intentionally segregated from the Court of Honor and placed on the distant Midway, viewed as the home of low civilization.

While the fair brought the problems of industrialization to light and sparked reform movements, many problems still persist today. The exposition clearly drew class lines and accentuated the differences in culture, ethnicity, and race. The Haymarket and Pullman strikes that preceded and followed the fair, respectively, as well as Harrison’s assassination, revealed the large prevalence of labor and civil unrest. These events also found echoes in the riots that occurred citywide during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968, and continue to echo in the race-based protests and Chicago Public School system strikes of today. In 1893, Chicago was recognized as one of the most dangerous cities in the country and this infamous legacy still stands, proving how, in some regards, the city has not progressed. Not only in crime has the city seen little improvement; Chicago’s neighborhoods are still segregated largely by race, which fuels racial and ethnic disputes and feeds the nation’s growing race crisis.

\textsuperscript{379} Robert Muccigrosso, \textit{Celebrating the New World}, 87-8.
Given the high praise and inflated rhetoric the fair inspired, how many of its products are used today, and the attention it brought to the modern city’s problems, it is necessary to consider what the fair’s legacy really is. If not for Erik Larson’s *Devil in the White City*, it is likely many Chicagoans—or Americans—would never know a fair once stood on Jackson Park. This fact, though, does not necessarily diminish its legacy. Of the fair’s impact, H.N. Higinbotham wrote:

> Our Exposition stamped itself indelibly upon the closing years of the nineteenth century, and has left a mark upon our times, particularly in matters of taste and refinement, that seems to grow deeper as the Exposition vanishes into the past. Its effect upon the industries has probably been very great, but so diffused that it can not be closely estimated or justly appreciated. The effect upon our beloved city has been to emphasize its position as a great metropolis and an abiding place of energy, business enterprise, and high ambitions.\(^{380}\)

In this view, one could argue it is not necessary that every Chicagoan know the details of the fair’s existence, and today this fact seems to be the case. The fair does not play a prominent role in the city’s history and there exist no grand monuments to it in Jackson or Washington Parks. Perhaps, though, this is the point. Perhaps the lasting magic of the fair is the fact that it fundamentally changed the face of Chicago and, without realizing it, introduced the country to products many still use today. The fair was certainly a “dreamland,” and one that expressed both what Chicago and the country could and wanted to achieve. Because of this, the Chicago’s world’s fair became the Great World’s Fair, realized the prophecies of Chicago’s earliest “dreamers,” and also revealed the true nature of the Gilded Age city. As the city continues penning its own story, the lasting impact of this temporary construction should not be ignored—and cannot be. The fair still echoes through Chicago and the country; they are linked. In this way, the greatest legacy of the fair and Chicago is their continued interaction.

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Appendix of Images

This collection of images is meant to supplement information I have provided in the text and to allow the reader a glimpse of the fair. By no means have I have attempted to provide a comprehensive volume of images, and I am indebted to Stanley Applebaum’s collection for many of these images.

1. “A group of Exposition Planners”
Chicago Historical Society. Photograph from the “World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893.”
Applebaum, 4.

Left to right: Daniel H. Burnham, Director of Works; George B. Post, architect of Manufactures; M.B. Pickett, Secretary of Works; Henry Van Brunt, co-architect of Electricity; Francis D. Millet, Director of Decoration; Maitland Armstrong; Col. Edmund Rice, Commandant of the Columbian Guard; Augustus Saint-Gaudens, adviser on sculpture; Henry Sargent Codman, landscape architect; George W. Maynard, muralist for Agriculture; Charles F. McKim, architect of Agriculture; Ernest R. Graham, Assistant Director of Works; and Dion Geraldine, general supervisor of construction.
The White City in the right half of the map borders the lake. The largest yellow rectangle within the White City is the Manufactures and Liberal Arts building, which sits on the northern corner of the Grand Basin. The Midway Plaisance is the long rectangular expanse growing out of the White City’s northern section.
3. Layout of the White City
Google Images.
4. Map of the Midway Plaisance


Of note, the Indian Village corresponds with number three; the Dahomey Village with five; the Ferris Wheel with fifteen; the Street in Cairo with eighteen; the German village with twenty-one; and the Japanese Bazar with twenty-five. The main entrances were at the number one, and the information depot at the one in the left corner of the Midway. Thirty-two was the circular railway tower.
5. The Administration Building from the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building
“Revisiting the White City,” 35.
6. The Court of Honor, Looking West past Daniel Chester French’s colossal statue Republic
“Revisiting the White City,” 36-37.
7. *Birdseye View of Tracks Leading to the Terminal Station*


At right, the tracks leading to the Terminal Station, with the Administration dome looming above the Station. At the left, the Cold Storage Building in the foreground, with the Transportation annex and building behind it.
8. A Corner of the Agricultural Building
Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University in the City of New York. Photographs by Charles Dudley Arnold.
Applebaum, 8.
9. Atwood’s Palace of Fine Arts
10. General view of the South Canal

Left to Right: Agricultural building, Colonnade with Obelisk in front of it, Machinery Hall, Columbian Fountain.
11. View of Manufactures Building
12. Agriculture Building

Seen across the Basin from the southeast corner of the Electricity Building. The Casino is at the far left, the Colonnade at the right.
13. Agriculture Building, seen from behind a Grand Plaza bandstand surrounded by Chicago Day crowds
Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University in the City of New York. Photographs by Charles Dudley Arnold.
Applebaum, 30.

Agriculture seen from behind a Grand Plaza bandstand surrounded by Chicago Day crowds. Left to right: Peristyle, Casino, Agriculture, a bit of the windmill display to the south, Colonnade, Machinery.
14. Machinery Hall
15. Inside Machinery Hall
16. East Façade of the Women’s Building
“Revisiting the White City,” 53.
17. Electricity Hall. Southeast corner in the center of the photo
18. Inside Electricity Hall, with the Tower of Light in the center
Chicago Historical Society. Photograph from the “World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893.” Applebaum, 44.
19. Bird’s Eye View of World’s Columbian Exposition
Engraving after watercolor by Charles Graham. Court of Honor surrounded by Official Exposition Buildings (lower left to right), Midway Plaisance with Ferris Wheel (Upper Left), and Fine Arts Building surrounded by state and foreign buildings (far right).
“Revisiting the White City,” 40-41.
20. The National Building of Brazil
21. Turkish Building
22. Swedish Building

To the left of it and behind, Guatemala. To the right of it, India and Germany.
23. Victoria House, the national building of Great Britain
24. “Cairo-Street on the Midway Plaisance”
25. “Ship of the Desert.” A View from the Street of Cairo
Chromolithograph from original watercolor by Thur de Thulstrup. Hubert Howe Bancroft, the Book of the Fair, author’s ed. (Chicago and San Francisco: The Bancroft Company, 1893). “Revisiting the White City,” 46.
26. The east half of the Midway as seen from the Ferris Wheel
Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University in the City of New York. Photographs by Charles Dudley Arnold.
Applebaum, 96.

The Woodlawn viaduct crosses the thoroughfare. Closing the prospect is the Women’s Building. Down the left side, from near to far, A Street in Cairo, the German Village, the Javanese Village. Down the right side, from near to far: The Moorish Palace, the Turkish Village, the Panorama of the Bernese Alps, the Natatorium and, farther down, Hagenbeck’s Animal Show. Along the far right side is the elevated railroad that ran on a film of water. Exposition landmarks in the distance, left to right, Fine Arts, Illinois, Fisheries, U.S. Manufactures, Horticulture, Electricity, Transportation, Administration.
27. *World’s Columbian Exposition Programme*
“Revisiting the White City,” 47.
28. Enlarged Nationalities Map

1. Left half of nationalities map.

2. Right half of nationalities map.
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