

A People without a Nation

BARBARA J. BALLARD

African Americans at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition stood as a people without a nation until Florvil Hyppolite let African American leaders use the Haitian Pavilion as a platform for protest.



The United States Congress established the World's Columbian Exposition, popularly known as the world's fair, to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's discovery of the New World. On one level the fair was an economic venture with political overtones, calculated to open new domestic and international markets. It netted millions of dollars for the city of Chicago and exposition financiers. On another level the fair was a grand amusement park designed to swell patriotic pride and capture the imagination of a fairgoer with the achievement of his or her particular nation and the exotica of the unfamiliar. On a deeper and, perhaps, more profound level, the exposition was a grand display of extraordinary commercial, technological, industrial, and cultural Western achievement in the New World.

Congress invited several states and nations to participate in the exposition. Even Euro-American women, although still without the right to vote, won their fight to erect a building dedicated to female achievement and potential. Yet, black Americans—despite their high hopes—did not have a space or site in which to represent themselves as a separate American racial and ethnic entity. At the World's Columbian Exposition, African Americans stood as a people without a nation at a gathering of nations.

For African American leaders such as the renowned Frederick Douglass and civil rights advocate Ida B. Wells, the World's Columbian Exposition was a place to celebrate the contributions, progress, and promise of African-Americans; a space in which to lay claim to the fruits of "civilization." Outraged by the exclusion of African Americans from the fair, Douglass, Wells, Chicago lawyer and newspaper publisher Ferdinand Barnett, and educator, author, and publisher I. Garland



The legendary Frederick Douglass (above right) said of the fair, "All classes and conditions were there save the educated American Negro." Above: Certificate from the Board of Lady Managers, Woman's Building at the World's Columbian Exposition.



*Ida B. Wells and Ferdinand L. Barnett, co-authors of *The Reason Why the Colored American...*, married in June 1895. This 1917 family photo shows the Barnetts with their children and grandchildren.*

Penn wrote a protest pamphlet entitled *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* that they distributed at the fair. Douglass, Wells, and other black protesters had hoped to use the world's fair to demonstrate how far their race had progressed merely three decades after emancipation. The pamphlet explained:

Prominent colored men suggested the establishment of a Department of Colored Exhibits in the Exposition. It was argued by them that nothing would so well evidence the progress of colored people as an exhibit made entirely of the products of skill and industry of the race since emancipation. . . . [T]he National Directors . . . decided that no separate exhibit for colored people would be permitted.

In addition to denying African Americans an exhibition hall, fair organizers also excluded blacks from the

planning, administration, and national ceremonies of the event. Their failure to invite even one African American leader—not even the aged and internationally venerated Frederick Douglass, who was seventy-six in 1893—to appear at the opening ceremony among the hundreds of white notables illustrated the fair's deliberate exclusion of blacks. Douglass maintained that even one black person on the dais “would speak more for the civilization of the American republic than all the domes, towers, and turrets of the magnificent buildings that adorn the Exposition grounds.”

The few exhibits by black Americans at some of the state's pavilions provided no single, unified statement about African Americans. Influenced by Social Darwinism, political leaders in the 1890s used theories of biological evolution and species-survival to justify Jim Crow laws and virulent racism at home and imperialism abroad. According to this fairly prevalent perspective, the



CHAPTER V.
THE PROGRESS OF THE AFRO-AMERICAN SINCE
EMANCIPATION.
BY I. GARLAND PENN.

That the Afro-American has made some progress in education, in the professions, in the accumulation of wealth and literature, and how much, this chapter will show. To determine the progress of the race in education it is necessary to know the relative progress in the increase of population since Emancipation, the number who could read and write, and the number who were in school. According to the census report there were in this country in

1850,	3,038,808 Afro-Americans
1860,	4,441,830 "
1870,	4,880,000 "
1880,	6,480,000 "
1890,	7,470,000 "

The census of 1860 shows an increase of 703,022 in ten years, that of 1870 shows an increase of 438,170 in ten years, that of 1880 shows an increase of 1,700,784 in ten years; that of 1890 shows an increase of 889,247 in ten years. From 1850 to 1890 the race increased 3,331,192 persons.

It was hardly considered probable that any considerable number of the freedmen would at once seize the opportunity for immediate education as they did when the first ray of hope and light beamed upon them from the philanthropic north. Yet the Afro-American, as upon a moment's thought availed himself of the opportunities which were offered under the Freedmen's Bureau, the first argu-

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THEIR WEALTH AND BUSINESS INTERESTS.

The wealth of the Afro-American has been fixed by statisticians at the following figures:

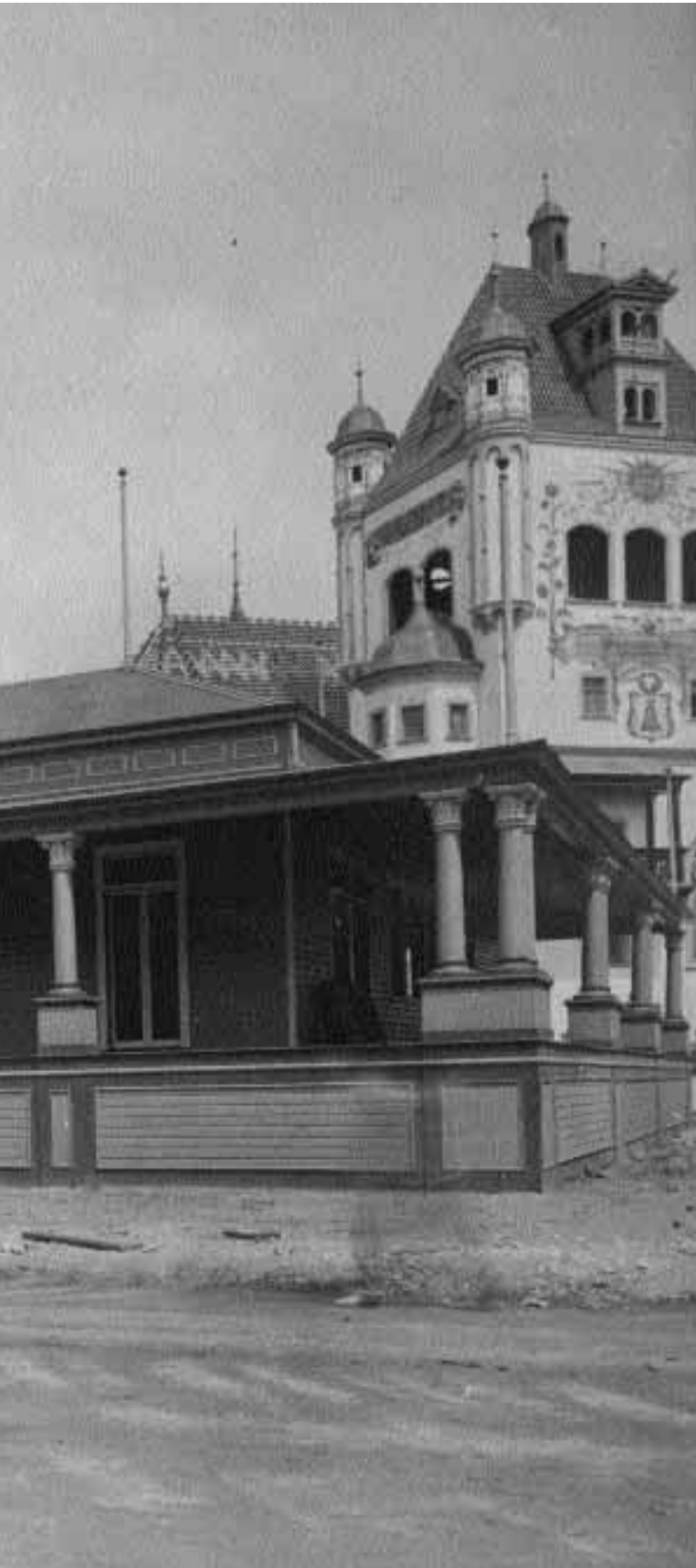
Alabama	\$3,700,175	North Carolina	\$1,000,057
Oregon	85,000	Nevada	250,000
Connecticut	500,155	Arkansas	8,100,315
Delaware	1,000,170	California	4,000,000
North Dakota	76,490	Colorado	3,100,074
Florida	7,000,000	Dist. Columbia	5,300,000
Utah	75,000	South Dakota	475,275
Iowa	2,500,071	Georgia	10,415,330
Chicago alone	2,500,000	Illinois	8,300,511
Indiana	4,004,113	Indian Territory	600,000
Kentucky	5,000,000	Kansas	3,000,000
Maine	175,011	Louisiana	18,100,578
Massachusetts	6,000,000	Mississippi	1,300,215
Minnesota	1,100,000	Maryland	9,000,735
Montana	120,000	Michigan	4,800,000
New York	17,000,750	New Jersey	3,300,185
New Mexico	700,000	New Hampshire	300,175
Nebraska	2,500,000	Virginia	4,000,000
Massachusetts	6,000,171	Ohio	7,800,325
Rhode Island	3,400,000	Pennsylvania	15,300,048
South Carolina	12,500,000	Texas	18,000,545
Tennessee	10,000,211	Vermont	1,100,571
West Virginia	5,600,721	Washington	573,000
		Wyoming	231,115

The total amount of property owned by the race is \$263,000,000.

This report, which is an under estimate, has been going the rounds and accepted as a most remarkable showing. It is an underestimate by at least ten millions. For instance in the state of Virginia, according to the report of the Auditor of Public Accounts, the Afro-American property in the state was valued at \$34,455,578. This is over four million and a half more than the above table. In Texas the property interests of the Afro-American are estimated

In *The Reason Why*, Douglass, Wells, Barnett, and I. Garland Penn protested African American exclusion from the world's fair, arguing that the fair would have been an ideal place to show African American progress merely three decades after emancipation. Consequently, *The Reason Why* contains many examples of African American success, including: Top: Porter Hall, one of the main buildings of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Bottom left: Penn's chapter on "The Progress of the Afro-American since Emancipation" discusses the advances of former slaves since the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Bottom right: This chart shows the total wealth of African Americans in 1893, broken down by state; the total amount of property owned by African Americans was estimated at \$263 million.





strongest nations and races would survive, while those unable to compete in the emerging technological, industrial, and cultural world order would be overrun and disappear. The protestors wrote in *The Reason Why*:

The [f]our hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America is acknowledged to be our greatest national enterprise of the century. . . . The Negro wanted to show by his years of freedom, that his industry did not need the incentive of a master's whip, and that his intelligence was capable of successful self direction. It had been said that he was improvident and devoid of ambition, and that he would gradually lapse into barbarism. He wanted to show that in a quarter of a century, he had accumulated property to the value of two hundred million dollars, that his ambition had led him into every field of industry, and that capable men [of] his race had served his nation well in the legislatures . . . and as national Representatives abroad.

The pavilion of the Republic of Haiti stood as the only structure erected by a black nation and the only autonomous representation of people of African descent in the White City. The fairgrounds consisted of two distinct parts: a main area called the "White City," due to the color of its buildings and its pristine environment, and the Midway Plaisance, a narrower strip of land adjacent to the White City that contained amusement attractions, restaurants, and ethnological exhibits. The White City's grand Neoclassical structures, dedicated to commerce, manufacturing, technology, and the arts, sat on wide boulevards unified by bodies of water, bridges, and walkways. Various exhibitions, state and foreign buildings (including Haiti's), and the woman's pavilion resided in the White City.

The disorderly Midway, with its makeshift structures that characterized the villages of "lesser" European nations and so-called primitive peoples, contrasted sharply with the White City. It displayed a variety of amusements such as the world's first Ferris Wheel, restaurants, and shops selling souvenirs and demonstrating a variety of crafts. Exhibits representing, and indeed stereotyping, the lifestyles of Dahomeans, Algerians, Tunisians, Bedouins, Egyptians, Samoan Islanders, and Eskimos, among others, also lined the Midway.

According to cultural historian Burton Benedict, living exhibitions of peoples such as the Dahomeans of West Africa and their artifacts emphasized the "ethnic and cultural differences" between these peoples and the fairgoers. These "colonial exhibits," as Benedict calls them,

The splendid pavilion of the Republic of Haiti was the only structure erected by a black nation and the only autonomous representation of people of African descent in the White City.



The White City (above) contrasted sharply with the Midway Plaisance (left). While the White City featured pristine grand structures on wide boulevards, the Midway featured sideshow attractions and a variety of amusements.

served several purposes. Along with their entertainment and instructive value, he contends, they were meant to signify the “trophy” or prizes of the colonizing powers of the West and to justify imperialism.

Although Liberia sent a small fair exhibition shown in the Agricultural Building, the Dahomean village was the largest exhibit representing West Africa, the ancestral home of most black Americans (Dahomey is now Benin). Dahomeans were depicted as barbarians and cannibals, the most savage of all the conquered peoples at the exposition. A large poster advertising the Dahomean exhibition featured a scantily clothed “native” brandishing a machete in one hand and holding what appears to be the head of a European in the other. A fair guidebook disparagingly described Dahomean women as masculine Amazon warriors and Dahomean men as small and effeminate.

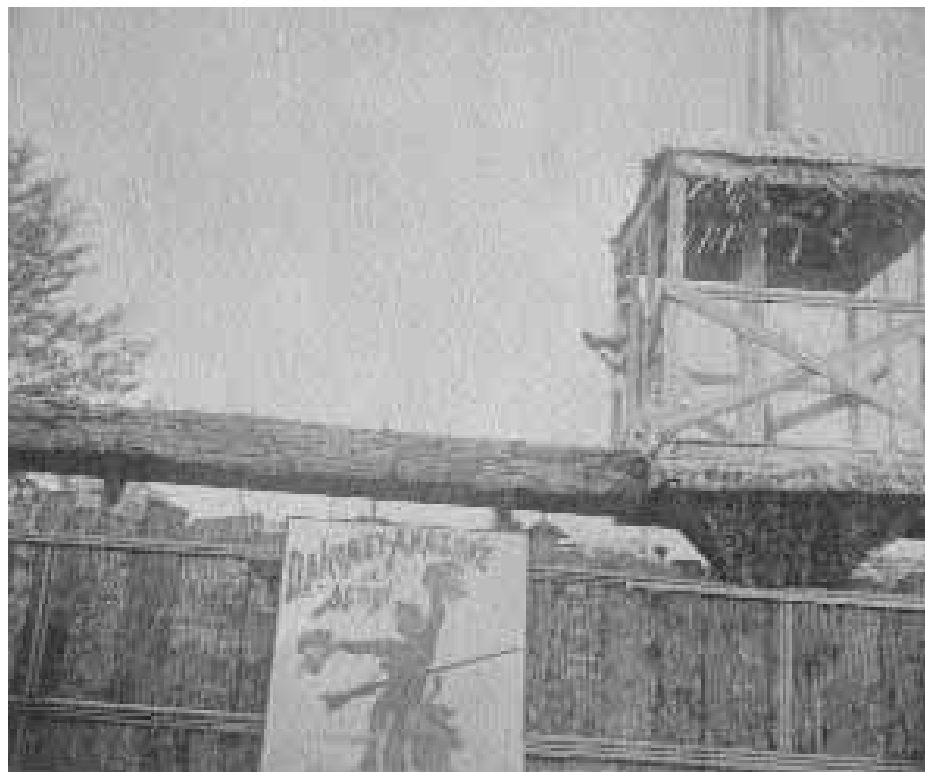
Right: Official Catalogue of Exhibits on the Midway Plaisance, World’s Columbian Exposition. This ten-cent catalog boasted that the “Dahomey Village of thirty native houses has a population of sixty-nine people, twenty-one of them being Amazon warriors.” Below: The catalog also advertised performances at the South Sea Islands Village; performers line up before they show “the songs and dances of Samoa, Fiji, Romutah and Wallis Islands” at the South Sea Island theatre.



As historian Robert Rydell observed, “Visitors [to] the Fair were asked to note the Dahomeans’ ‘regretful absence of tailor made clothes.’” And the mocking tone in some of the popular media, as Rydell illustrates, gives us an indication of how these so-called primitive peoples might have been perceived by the wider public. A vicious cartoon depicted an obese Eskimo female wearing heavy fur clothing and suffering from the heat, while a barely clothed, spear-bearing Dahomean male, with exaggeratedly broad features, shivered from the cold. The Eskimo gives her clothing to the African and romance results. The satirical magazine *World’s Fair Puck* outlined a relationship between black Americans and the “savage” Dahomeans, combining long-standing racist and dehumanizing stereotypes, and referring to blacks as “chicken thieves,” intellectually stupid, and akin to the orangutan.

Douglass and other black activists emphatically protested the Dahomean exhibition. Douglass explained in the introduction to *The Reason Why*: “America has brought to her shores and given welcome to a greater variety of mankind than were ever assembled in one place since the day of Pentecost . . . , and as if to shame the Negro, the Dahomians [sic] are also here to exhibit the Negro as a repulsive savage.” In numerous speeches, during and after the fair, Douglass continued to comment on the racist representation of the Dahomeans. In a lecture entitled “The Lessons of the Hour,” he stated: “All classes and conditions were there [at the fair] save the educated American Negro.”

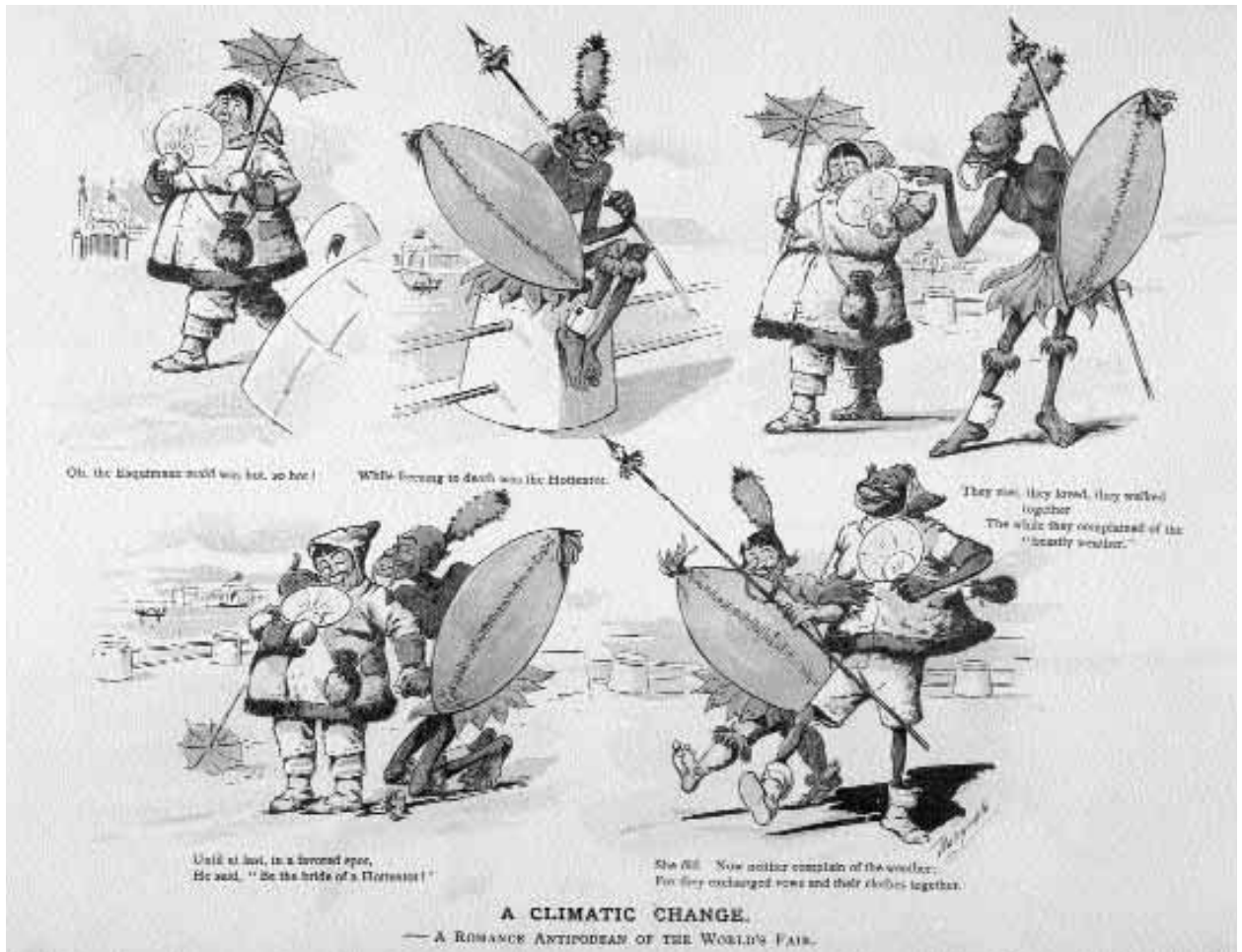
Black Americans appeared in some numbers at the World’s Congress Auxiliary of the Chicago World’s Fair. The auxiliary, “a parliament of nations,” consisted of a series of meetings designed to “surpass all previous efforts to bring about real fraternity of nations, and unite the enlightened people of the whole earth.” Twenty departments comprised the congresses; each department—such as Woman’s Progress, Temperance, Religion, and Africa—sponsored open forums for the discussion of issues and problems relative to that topic. Many black spokespersons viewed the congresses as a forum for protest rather than celebration. Participants discussed many contentious issues, including women’s rights, European colonization of Africa, and black emigration.



Black leaders protested the Dahomey Village because it portrayed the West Africans as barbarians. Top: Dahomey natives inside the village. Bottom: On the side wall of the building, a sign boasted “Dahomey Amazone in Action.”



The Chicago Times publication Midway Types said of the Dahomey Village: “[I]ts inhabitants were just the sort of people the managers of the Exposition did not banquet or surfeit with receptions.”



“A Climatic Change,” a simplistic cartoon from the publication *World’s Fair Puck*, features an African falling for an Eskimo and makes fun of both cultures.



Here's a tale, old and brief,
 of a Dahomey Chief
 who, with thoughts all intent
 upon pillage,
 Suppressed a wild whomp
 at the sight of a coop

That he saw in the Juaneville.



He made no delay,
 but hastened away
 While his mind ran
 on Juaneville chickens;
 But the occupant sage

Of the strongly barred cage
 Marked him well
 and the plot of his thieving



And that very night, as the moon shone out bright,
 The Chief at the head of his gang
 At one fell swoop Come down on the coop
 That held Mr. Orang Outang



The Chief enters in, and a horrible din,
 That is neither a crowing
 nor cackling,
 Tells his now frightened troupe
 that inside the coop
 Some strange kind of bird he is tackling



Then forth from the cage, in a chatter of rage,
 The Victorious Simian springs
 While fast in his place is the point of his race
 Who ran fool of a red 'Nang Outang.

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This World's Fair Puck cartoon displays stereotypes of African cultures.



In this lithograph by Rodolfo Morgari, Columbia, a mythical figure representing the New World, displays the fair to various “exotic” cultures as Columbus, Washington, Lincoln, and other figures from American history watch from overhead.



African American women felt out of place in the Woman's Building, as the white women who erected and managed the building denied African American women a voice in the planning and leadership of this project.

Black women were unwelcome even in the building dedicated to their own gender. The white women who erected and managed the Woman's Building and the Congress of Women denied African American women a voice in the planning and leadership of these projects. Prominent black women such as Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie Barrier Williams, and Fannie Jackson Coppin—who addressed the World's Congress of Representative Women of the World's Congress Auxiliary—praised the progress and promise of black women as they denounced the lower status of black Americans in society and at the fair.

A variety of individuals concerned with uplifting what one speaker dubbed the “pariah of continents” attended the Chicago Congress on Africa, one of the many meetings under the auspices of the auxiliary. The contemporary magazine *Our Day* gave an account of the several days of meetings. Attendees discussed African colonization by Europeans, but the meetings focused on the need to end the slave trade and civilize, Christianize, and commercialize Africa. An array of prominent blacks debated the age-old question of black emigration. Participants also expressed concern for American blacks' constitutional rights; black-white relations in the South; and the status and future of Liberia. However, the congress was



The Haitian Pavilion contained many of the country's treasures, such as the sword of Touissant Louverture, leader of the Haitian Rebellion, and paintings of leaders such as President Florvil Hyppolite.

hardly a comfortable space, as black speakers heard the negative and racist pronouncements of former Confederates and imperialists, some of whom supported the colonization of Africa by Europeans and praised slavery for civilizing blacks in the New World.

Douglass voiced his opposition to emigration at the Congress on Africa. Throughout his career the preeminent black leader and activist stood in steadfast opposition to mass black emigration. In an 1883 address he stated:

I will say that I do not look for colonization either in or out of the United States. Africa is too far off, even if we desired to go there. . . . There is but one destiny . . . and that is to make ourselves and be made by others a part of the American people in every sense of the word.

Douglass expressed similar sentiments in 1893 at the Haitian Pavilion:

I hold that the American Negro owes no more to the Negroes of Africa than he owes to the Negroes in America. . . . We have a fight on our hand[s] right here . . . and a blow struck for the Negro in America is a blow struck for the Negro in Africa. The native land of the American Negro is America . . . and millions of his posterity have inherited Caucasian blood.

In Douglass's view, imperialists had overrun much of the African continent. Moreover, American blacks needed their best and brightest at home in the United States. Furthermore, some blacks of both Euro-American and African American parentage, such as Douglass, found racial and cultural identification with Africa difficult. Although Douglass consistently opposed mass black emigration, when he temporarily retreated from his position just before the Civil War, he considered Haiti—not Canada, Liberia, or Sierra Leone—the nation for black emigration.

For many blacks, the Haitian Pavilion represented their racial and cultural identity at the fair. Due to the generosity of the Haitian government, the building became the space from which Douglass, Wells, and others protested and staked a claim for blacks in the White City.

When Douglass served as United States minister to Haiti from 1889 to 1891, his duties included presenting the United States' invitation to the fair to Haiti's secretary of foreign affairs. In a message to Douglass dated June 27, 1891, Haitian President Florvil Hyppolite accepted the invitation and underscored his government's hope to maintain amicable relations with the United States. Hyppolite's reply reflected his awareness



Above: Famed Haitian artist Hector Hyppolite painted President Florvil Hyppolite in this 1947 work. Right: This 1975 painting by Michel Obin depicts the Battle of Vertieres; in the center of the painting, Toussaint Louverture, on horseback, raises his famous sword. Below: An eighteenth-century engraving of Haitian hero Toussaint Louverture.



of the symbolic meaning of the fair as a world arena in which evidence of national and racial progress was to be displayed:

It will be for us a happy occasion to show to the civilized world our rich natural products and the first efforts which [Haiti] has been able to realize in industrial endeavor and in the liberal arts. Our disastrous civil wars have without doubt greatly paralyzed our march toward progress; nevertheless one will be able to see that we are not lacking in elevated aspirations and that we are endeavoring to figure worthily in the grand concert of American nations.

Hyppolite's letter also emphasized the progress and potential of Haiti that Douglass and others had hoped to demonstrate to the world on behalf of blacks in the United States. Haiti was black and independent; in 1804



it fought for and won its independence from France, one of the world's strongest countries. In spite of its persistent bloody internal strife, Haiti received diplomatic recognition from the United States and other powerful nations. It maintained its sovereignty in the face of U.S. demands to secure a coaling station and naval base on the island; and, despite continuing underdevelopment, had manufactures that suggested future progress. For African Americans denied their own space at the fair, the Haitian Pavilion was an acceptable substitute.

In one of his many public speeches, Douglass established a link between Haiti's successful revolution against France and the freedom of people of African descent:

Civilized or savage, whatever the future may have in store for her, Haiti is a black man's country. . . . We should not forget that the freedom you and I enjoy today; that of . . . colored people in the British West Indies; the freedom that has come to the colored

people the world over is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons of Haiti ninety years ago. . . . It was her one brave example that first startled the Christian world into a sense of the Negro's manhood.

When the Haitian government appointed Douglass its co-commissioner to the fair—along with Haitian native Charles A. Preston, a former member of the Haitian diplomatic corps in Washington, D.C.—Douglass and his colleagues seized the opportunity to use the pavilion. The Haitian building provided black visitors a place where they could not only feel at home, but could protest black Americans' exclusion from the exposition and identify with the march of "civilization" in the Western world.

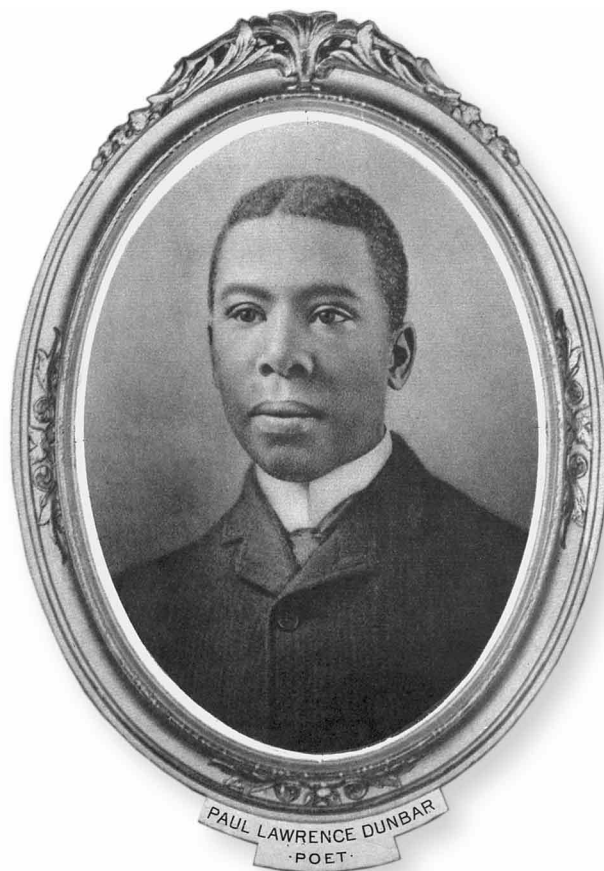
In her autobiography, Ida B. Wells wrote that "had it not been for [the generosity of Haiti], Negroes of the United States would have [had] no part . . . in any official way in the World's Fair. . . . Haiti's building was one of the gems of the World's Fair, and in it Mr. Douglass held high court. . . . Needless to say, the Haitian building was the chosen spot; for representative Negroes of the [United States] who visited the fair were to be found along with the Haitians and citizens of other foreign countries."

The opportunity to place black America at the fair in the framework of Euro-American cultural achievement held special importance for Douglass. Like most of his peers in the late nineteenth century, Douglass identified Euro-American culture with civilization and progress. The Haitian Pavilion was in the White City, situated near the buildings of Germany, Spain, and New South Wales (now Australia); these nations were not England or France but were still respectable European or settler areas.

An official guide to the fair described Haiti's building as follows:

It was in the Greco-Colonial style, surmounted by a gilded dome, which is copied after the State capitol of Massachusetts. The structure has a frontage of 126 feet, including piazzas 12 feet wide which surround three sides of the building. In the center of the facade is the coat-of-arms of the Republic of Haiti in a medallion surrounded by a scroll bearing the following inscription: "Republique Haitienne," and the dates 1492 (the discovery), 1804 (date of [Haitian] national independence) and 1893 (the present anniversary).

The guide also summarized Haiti's exhibits and artifacts, which included "some pre-Columbian relics and the authentic anchor of the caravel Santa Maria" from one of the three ships Columbus used on his 1492 voyage, and the sword of Toussaint Louverture, the hero of the Haitian revolution. Another account described the Haitian flag, a marble statue by a native sculptor,



Gravure of poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, 1914. At age 21, Dunbar worked at the Haitian Pavilion as a clerk and distributed his poems there. Dunbar was one of the first African Americans to gain national prominence as a poet; he wrote several volumes of poetry before he died at thirty-three.

and paintings of President Hyppolite, Douglass, and other prominent black men. One writer noted that "a choice collection of wood was displayed, including a huge block of mahogany. Among the many articles of manufactures were fine specimens of saddlery, laces, and embroidery; and fibers and minerals were exhibited" to represent the natural resources of the island and industry of the Haitian people. "Native hands" prepared and sold Haitian coffee, along with various by-products such as liqueurs, in a restaurant at the southern end of the building.

At the Haitian Pavilion, Wells "spent [her] days putting [copies of *The Reason Why*] in the hands of foreigners," eventually distributing ten thousand copies. Blacks also expressed themselves culturally at the pavilion. According to Wells, Douglass hired the rising African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, "with his first little volume of poems, called 'Oak and Ivy,'" as a clerk at the pavilion. Wells also recalled that Dunbar's poems

CHAPTER IV.
LYNCH LAW.

BY IDA B. WELLS.

"Lynch Law," says the *Virginia Lancet*, "as known by that appellation, had its origin in 1780 in a combination of citizens of Pittsylvania County, Virginia, entered into for the purpose of suppressing a trained band of horse-thieves and counterfeiters whose well concocted schemes had bidden defiance to the ordinary laws of the land, and whose success encouraged and emboldened them in their outrages upon the community. Col. Wm. Lynch drafted the constitution for this combination of citizens, and hence "Lynch Law" has ever since been the name given to the summary infliction of punishment by private and unauthorized citizens."

This law continues in force to-day in some of the oldest states of the Union, where courts of justice have long been established, whose laws are executed by white Americans. It flourishes most largely in the states which foster the convict lease system, and is brought to bear mainly, against the Negro. The first fifteen years of his freedom he was murdered by masked mobs for trying to vote. Public opinion having made lynching for that cause unpopular, a new reason is given to justify the murders of the past 15 years. The Negro was first charged with attempting to rule white people, and hundreds were murdered on that pretended supposition. He is now charged with assaulting or attempting to assault white women. This charge, as false as it is foul, robs us of the sympathy of the world and is blasting the race's good name.

as to the guilt or innocence of the accused is never made. Under these conditions, white men have only to blacken their faces, commit crimes against the peace of the community, accuse some Negro, nor rest till he is killed by a mob. Will Lewis, an 18 year old Negro youth was lynched at Tullahoma, Tennessee, August, 1891, for being "drunk and saucy to white folks."

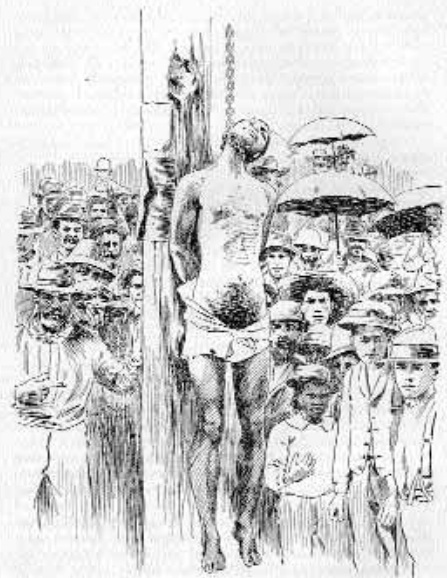
The women of the race have not escaped the fury of the mob. In Jackson, Tennessee, in the summer of 1886, a white woman died of poisoning. Her black cook was suspected, and as a box of rat poison was found in her room, she was hurried away to jail. When the mob had worked itself to the lynching pitch, she was dragged out of jail, every stitch of clothing torn from her body, and she was hung in the public court-house square in sight of everybody. Jackson is one of the oldest towns in the State, and the State Supreme Court holds its sittings there; but no one was arrested for the deed—not even a protest was uttered. The husband of the poisoned woman has since died a raving maniac, and his ravings showed that he, and not the poor black cook, was the poisoner of his wife. A fifteen year old Negro girl was hanged in Rayville, Louisiana, in the spring of 1892, on the same charge of poisoning white persons. There was no more proof or investigation of this case than the one in Jackson. A Negro woman, Lou Stevens, was hanged from a railway bridge in Hollendale, Mississippi, in 1892. She was charged with being accessory to the murder of her white paramour, who had shamefully abused her.

In 1892 there were 241 persons lynched. The entire number is divided among the following states.

Alabama	22	Montana	4
Arkansas	25	New York	1
California	3	North Carolina	5
Florida	11	North Dakota	1
Georgia	17	Ohio	3
Idaho	8	South Carolina	5
Illinois	1	Tennessee	28



FAC-SIMILE OF BACK OF PHOTOGRAPH.



Hanging of C. J. Miller, at Bardwell, Kentucky, July 7th, 1891.

As a correspondent for several black newspapers, Wells used her news contacts to research lynchings. These accounts helped her to write the "Lynching Law" chapter of *The Reason Why* (top left), which featured charts showing how many men were lynched each year (top right), and a graphic illustration of a lynching (bottom right). Bottom left: The note on the back of a photograph of a lynching reads: "This S-O-B was hung at Clanton Ala. Friday Aug. 21, '91, for murdering a little boy in cold blood for 35 in cash. He is a good specimen of your 'Black Christian' hung by 'White Heathens.'" The statement is signed "The Committee."



Above: Unfamiliar cultures shocked many fair visitors; a line of marching Samoans surprise Midway passersby in this photograph. Below: C. D. Arnold photograph of the Midway Plaisance, 1893.



were distributed at the pavilion and came to the attention of the American literary critic William Dean Howells: “Mr. Howells reviewed that little volume a few months later in the columns of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and Paul Dunbar’s fame as a poet was established in America.” In addition to American and foreign fairgoers, Wells indicates, an array of prominent white and black people visited the Haitian Pavilion, including: Euro-American abolitionist and woman’s rights advocate Angelina Grimké; Hallie Brown and Mary Church Terrell, educators and black woman’s rights’ advocates; Reverend Alexander Crummell, the former emigrationist and advocate of black racial solidarity and economic self-help; and other black poets.

When fair managers designated a “Negro Day” (August 25, 1893), Wells concluded that “Observing the popularity of the Haitian building and the widespread interest of World’s Fair visitors in everything colored, and perhaps deciding to appease the discontent of colored people over their government’s attitude of segregation, the authorities came to Mr. Douglass and asked him to arrange a Negro Day on the program.” She suggested that the fair managers were, in essence, shamed into recognizing the presence of black Americans with a special day of speeches and festivities. Wells maintained that initially she and Douglass differed on whether blacks should participate in what was, after all, an afterthought on the part of exposition directors. Yet, Wells attests, Douglass’s speeches, Dunbar’s poetry, and the music of the Fiske Jubilee Singers changed the tone of the day from one that was apparently intended to merely appease blacks to one of high honor for African Americans.

The existence of a Haitian exhibition in the White City filled a void for many black Americans that other African and third-world exhibitions could not. In a period in which nationhood was viewed as synonymous with civilization and Europeans colonized people of color, black and independent Haiti was a symbol of what African descendants could accomplish.

The decision of Wells, Douglass, Barnett, and others to make their stand at the Haitian Pavilion illuminates racism and the exclusion of black Americans in late-nineteenth century American society. Blacks were of African descent, yet cut off from Africa by time and circumstance, in a nation that clearly viewed itself as a white man’s country, despite its increasing ethnic diversity. For the purposes of economic and political exploitation, whites saw blacks as a distinct ethnic and cultural entity; yet whites viewed blacks as part of the American collective in order to render them invisible.

In the Haitian Pavilion, Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, and other black leaders found a place where they could both contest their “invisibility” and affirm their racial and cultural distinctiveness as people of African

and American descent in the world that Columbus “discovered.” Against strong opposition, they refused to be banished from the world’s fair and found a way to make their voices heard—voices that are still being heard today.

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FOR FURTHER READING | For an overview of the World’s Columbian Exposition, the CHS publication *Grand Illusions* (1993) is a comprehensive resource. *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition* is available in some libraries. *Black Women in United States History* series by Carlson Press (1990) includes a volume on Ida B. Wells and reprints a selection of her essays, including her chapter on lynching from *The Reason Why*. Yale University Press published a full set of *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, featuring the great leader’s writings and speeches, in 1979. Several volumes of Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poems are available, including *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (University Press of Virginia, 1993). For more about Haitian history, try Robert Debs Jr., Heintz, et al.’s *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People 1492–1995* (University Press of America, 1996). For more images of Haitian art, read Selden Rodman’s *Where Art Is Joy: Haitian Art: The First Forty Years* (Ruggles de Latour, 1988).

ILLUSTRATIONS | 26, CHS, ICHI-25143; 27 left, CHS, ICHI-25159; 27 top right, CHS, ICHI-10139; 28, courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library; 29 all, from *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition* (1893), CHS; 30–31, CHS, ICHI-25136; 32 top, CHS, ICHI-25057; 32 bottom, CHS, ICHI-25236; 33 top, from *Official Catalogue of Exhibits on the Midway Plaisance, World’s Columbian Exposition* (1893), CHS; 33 bottom, CHS, ICHI-25747; 34 top, CHS, ICHI-26924; 34 bottom, CHS, ICHI-26906; 35 top, from *Midway Types* (1893), CHS; 35 bottom, CHS, ICHI-27381; 36, CHS, ICHI-25175; 37 top, CHS, ICHI-25233; 37 bottom, CHS, ICHI-16265; 38, CHS, ICHI-26928; 39 top, courtesy of the collection of the Davenport Museum of Art, Iowa; 39 middle, courtesy of L. Clayton Willis; 39 bottom, from *Where Art Is Joy*, by Selden Rodman (Ruggles de Latour, 1988); 40, CHS, ICHI-10160; 41 all, from *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*, CHS; 42 top, CHS, ICHI-25237; 42 bottom, CHS, ICHI-13855.