



## Living History of Illinois and Chicago®

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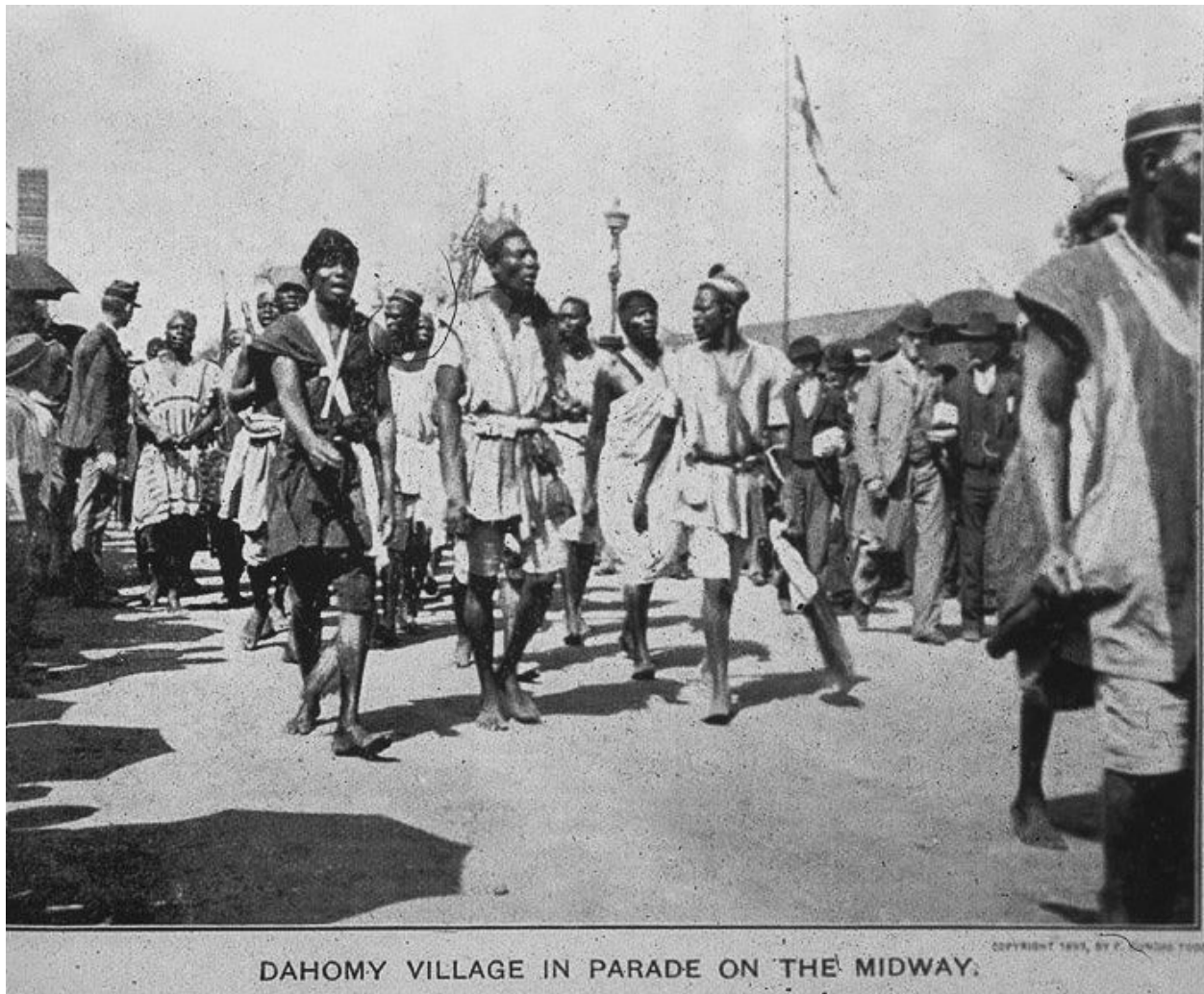
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### "Negro Day," August 25, 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, Illinois

Negros were welcomed as paying customers and workers at the World's Fair but were denied a voice in the fair's creation or construction. Most Black exhibits had to pass an all-white screening committee before they were allowed to be displayed to the public. Exhibits in the "African Villages" were generally found to portray Negros as repulsive savages.





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Ida B. Wells[1] came to Chicago in 1893 specifically to protest the exclusion of Negroes from the World's Fair exhibits. Blacks stood as a people without a nation until Haitian President Florvil Hyppolite[2] let Black leaders use the Haitian Pavilion as a platform for protest and quickly became the center for Americans of color.

Frederick Douglass[3], the noted Black abolitionist and advocate for equal rights, represented the Haitian government at the fair. Douglass gave a moving [speech](#) at the Haitian Pavilion Dedication Ceremonies at Chicago's World's Fair.

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.

For Wells, the final straw came when fair officials scheduled a "Negro Day." Well... it backfired; as the organizers, thoughtlessly, turned Negro Day into a racial insult by offering 2,000 free watermelons to Negro fairgoers.

### **NOTES:**

[1] Ida B. Wells was a Black American journalist and activist who led an anti-lynching crusade in the United States in the 1890s.

[2] Louis Mondestin Florvil Hyppolite (1828–1896) was the President of Haiti from October 17, 1889 to March 24, 1896. He was a career soldier, a general. He was installed as president by a constitutional council. Hyppolite died of a heart attack while in office, on a trip to address a civilian revolt in the city of Jacmel.

[3] Frederick Douglass (born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey (1818-1895) was a Black social reformer, abolitionist, orator, writer, and statesman.