

america 1871-1919

a view of chicago

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Among the twenty-seven million people who went through the turnstiles at the World's Columbian Exposition held at Chicago in the summer of 1893 was the historian Henry Adams. In fact, the Fair so intrigued Adams—he found it “a matter of study to fill a hundred years”—that he went back a second time especially to decide on Chicago's relationship to the rest of *fin de siècle* America. For Adams, “Chicago asked in 1893 for the first time the question whether the American people knew where they were driving.” Henry admitted that he did not know but when he sat down in the shadow of Richard Hunt's French Renaissance Administration Building he could not help but brood about America in the manner in which his idol Edward Gibbon had mused over the direction of Roman civilization. Were the American people “still . . . driving or drifting unconsciously to some point in thought, as their solar system was said to be drifting towards some point in space”? And, “if relations enough could be observed,” could “this point . . . be fixed”?¹

In attempting to understand the emergence of modern America in his own lifetime, Adams did eventually find “the point in thought” that his restless but monistic mind sought so desperately. As all readers of his unique autobiography know, Adams lingered among the Westinghouse and Edison dynamos at Chicago, concluding that they “gave history a new phase” and employing them as the symbols of the chaotic modern “multiverse” he saw replacing the medieval universe which had centered on the virgin of Chartres.

Had Henry Adams the historian not evolved into Henry Adams the philosopher of history, he might have looked at Chicago as a symbol of modern American history. That is, he might have appraised the city and

its development with the imaginative breadth he had once displayed in his classic single-chapter survey of American life in 1800 in the nine-volume *History of the United States During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison*. He could then have read Chicago's history from the 1870's to the 1920's as a striking microcosm of the political, economic, literary and artistic developments happening in the nation at large. In the essay that follows I attempt such a survey, merely to illustrate and summarize—not demonstrate and analyze—a thesis often hinted at by other scholars.² I will maintain that Chicago can be seen as archetypal of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century American cultural history; that it was a representative place wherein the “Age of Energy,” the sobriquet Howard Mumford Jones aptly uses to describe the “varieties of American experience, 1865-1915,” came to an apex.

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For example, I would argue that if Henry Adams had looked at Chicago's economic history from 1871 to 1919, he would have been struck by how, in three generations, the city changed from a predominantly agrarian to an emerging industrial center. In 1825, there were only an Indian agency and about fourteen houses around the river that the Indians called the *Checagou*; by the 1880's Chicago was already the nation's “Second City,” having surpassed Philadelphia, and when Adams came in 1893, the population exceeded the million mark. During the nineteenth century, no part of the republic underwent a more amazing transformation from a state of nature to a state of industry; for some early city residents the resulting industrialization and urbanization took place within their life spans.³

The inventions and techniques of a gigantic industrial order expanded and, in many cases, were expanded by Chicago: the endless freight and passenger trains (850 daily in 1893); the steel mills first along the north branch of the river then in Calumet and Gary; the Union stockyards; the mass-transit network of Charles Yerkes; the agriculture implements of the McCormicks; the dynamo, power plants and financial pyramids of Samuel Insull's Chicago Edison; and the volume merchandising techniques of the numerous dry-goods merchants—Leiter, Field, Ward and Sears. These “forces of the future,” as Adams would call them, drew thousands from the countryside, from the East and the South and from Europe; hordes of laborers, skilled and unskilled, who lived in areas like the 19th Ward slums (sometimes called “patches”) which the new millionaires of meat, steel, transportation, corn, electricity, wheat or banking never saw, or seeing, simply regarded as regrettable side-effects of an otherwise sound economic order.

A closer investigation, however, would indicate other forces also at work in Chicago and the America it so accurately represents. The industrial progress at the World's Fair that so impressed Adams—the high

tension currents of Nikola Tesla, the long-distance telephone to New York, and, of course, the dynamos, “those symbols of ultimate energy”—expressed one important facet of late nineteenth-century America. Yet Chicago in 1893 can represent other tendencies in late nineteenth-century history. There was the nation-wide financial panic that carried over into a depression which in turn begat Coxey’s Army, the militant workers who struck Pullman and the Populists who streamed into the Chicago Coliseum to thrill to William Jennings Bryan’s “Cross of Gold” speech at the Democratic National Convention of 1896.⁴ And it should be remembered that there was another historian at the Columbian Exposition who, like Henry Adams, pondered the direction of America. Appearing there at the meeting of the newly formed American Historical Association, Frederick Jackson Turner asserted that the chief influence on three centuries of American life had been the almost unlimited existence of unoccupied land beyond the western border of settlement. By examining the 1890 census Turner concluded that the frontier line had disappeared, the American frontier was closed and the country settled. *Checgou* had become Chicago.

Adams might have made use of Turner’s insight in his own interpretation, but no matter what aspect of the nation’s history he examined from the end of Reconstruction to the conclusion of World War I, he would have found highly representative illustrations in Chicago’s parallel history. The history of American labor could be traced from the turbulent “Bread or Blood” riots of 1873 when Chicago workers (in imitation of Paris Communards) carried flags of “the red and the black,” to their battles with the Pinkertons (a Chicago-based detective agency) in the Great Strikes of 1877, to the brutal Haymarket Affair, to the A.F. of L. National Congress under Samuel Gompers in 1893 and the bloody Pullman affair a year later.⁵ The “Wobblies,” the International Workers of the World, owe their birth in 1905 to Chicago and the organizing skill of Eugene Debs, Daniel DeLeon, Vincent St. John and Big Bill Haywood; the radical labor union also met its demise in the city when one hundred of its leaders were tried in 1919 before Federal Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis and found guilty of criminal syndicalism. (Paradoxically, in the same year that the IWW began in Chicago, the International Rotary Club was also founded in the city.)

An important chapter of the black man’s American history is also encapsulated in Chicago. With the outbreak of World War I in Europe, foreign immigration to the U.S. actually declined and black people, inspired by the promotional campaigns of newspapers such as *The Chicago Defender*, emigrated to Northern cities in search of job opportunities previously taken by white immigrants. As the terminus for the Illinois Central, Chicago was the most accessible northern city for blacks in Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas. In 1870 the Chicago black community numbered only 3,691; by 1910 that number had swelled to 44,103

and by 1915 doubled to over 109,458. The majority of this black population was employed in the city's stockyards, steel mills, foundries and domestic services. The American entry into the world war in 1917 took still another percentage of white workers out of industry and into military service, thus further accelerating an important demographic shift in American economic, social and political history.⁶

This long internal migration provided a major test case of race relations in the North. One test that the city unfortunately failed was the terrible fourteen-day race riot that broke out on the 25-29th Street beaches in the summer of 1919. Thirty-eight were killed including twenty-three black men and boys and at least 537 were injured, of whom 342 were black. The Chicago racial conflict was but one of the "Red Summer" riots that bloodied the streets of twenty-five American towns and cities in the six-month period from April to October 1919.⁷

Henry Adams might also have been expected to see in Chicago two additional trends characteristic of a rapidly urbanizing America: increasing protests for social reform and the rise of city bossism and ethnic politics. Adams, a characteristic genteel reformer, would have felt at home with certain Mugwump reform movements afoot in Chicago. He could have easily considered the city's Civic Foundation and the Municipal Voters League as Midwestern counterparts to organizations such as the National Civil Service Reform League. Likewise, given his sensitivity to the "Woman Question," Adams could have applauded the idealism of the social settlement and social service movement of the remarkable women at Hull-House on Halstead Street. Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr had founded Hull-House in 1889 and were soon joined by reformers such as Julia Lathrop, Mary Kenny O'Sullivan, Louise DeKoven Bowen and Mary McDowell. These women and the men who worked alongside them had an influence that spread beyond the west side of Chicago and represented the attempt of the liberal tradition to solve the human problems of the city. In addition to the amazing Hull-House history, the Chicago experience of numerous women is a multi-faceted, highly significant, yet still untold story in the history of women in America. For instance, that diverse narrative includes the literary criticism of Margaret Anderson and her *Little Review*, Florence Kelley's crusade to eradicate child labor abuses and Anna Morgan's success in developing the "little theatre" movement. Juxtaposed with the work of Chicago anarchists like Lucy Parsons and Emma Goldman is the social philosophy and involvement of society matrons such as Bertha Palmer and Harriet Pullman. Also vital to the history of Chicago and the nation is the scientific research into industrial disease by Dr. Alice Hamilton, the poetic achievement of Eunice Tietjens and Harriet Monroe and the Abbott sisters' (Edith and Grace) reform campaign for the welfare of women and immigrants in industry.

In opposition to these urban reformers Henry Adams could have

nicely arrayed the ward heelers, city councilmen and venal legislators who were on the take, or as the Chicagoans put it, "on the boodle." Chicago's "grey wolves" (Johnny "De Pow" Powers, John "The Bath" Coughlin, "Blind Billy" Kent and Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna) would compare favorably in exploits, extravagance and extortion with others of their stripe in any American city of the 1890's.⁸ As in other cities the boss system thrived, in part, because it exploited the polyglot nature of Chicago's inner city—the Irish, Germans and Scandinavians who came in droves in the 1840's and 1850's; the immigrants who traveled later from Austria-Hungary, the Balkans, Greece, Italy, Sicily; and the black Americans from the South. Chicago was not only a mosaic of foreign enclaves—Kilgubbin, the Nord Seite, Conley's Path, Bronzestown and Little Italy—it was also an urban matrix wherein all the issues and tensions associated with the role of the immigrant in American history were acutely dramatized at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁹

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H. L. Mencken's famous statements of the early twenties that Chicago was the literary capitol of America and that practically all American writers of consequence had been molded by the city were, of course, bits of bravado. Mencken loved barbing the Eastern literary establishment with claims that there were definite "Chicago habits of mind; and all of them (Fuller, Norris, Dreiser, Herrick, Patterson, Anderson and all other outstanding American writers) reek of Chicago in every line they write."¹⁰ Yet there is truth in Mencken's bombast and it must be granted that from Hamlin Garland's publication of *Crumbling Idols* in 1894 to Sherwood Anderson's departure for New York in 1920, the city had a significant share of the nation's literary inspiration, production and consumption. Henry Adams sensed the literary possibilities in the Midwest and William Dean Howells, Ohioan gone to Boston and self-transplanted to New York, also acknowledged the vitality of the literary tendencies variously labelled realism, regionalism and naturalism.¹¹

It was Garland, son of the middle border, who issued the call for a fresh, truly indigenous Midwestern literature in *Crumbling Idols*, a set of speculative essays elegantly published by the Chicago firm of Stone and Kimball. Garland felt that Chicago writers would draw their inspiration from "original contact with men and with nature." Hence a literature "not out of books, but of life," would be born. "It will have at first the rough-hewn quality of the first hard work." Moreover, unlike New York or Boston, "this [Chicago] school will be one where most notably the individuality of each writer will be respected, and this forbids strict uniformity to accepted models. When life is the model and truth the criterion and individualism the coloring element of a literature, the central academy has small power. There will be association as of equals, not slavish acceptance of dictation."¹²

Although Garland eventually became disillusioned with his prophecy for a Chicago literature, for a brilliant moment it was a reality. A group of writers native to the city plus a younger generation of men and women from Midwest towns like Clyde (Ohio), Terre Haute (Indiana), Garnett (Kansas), Galesburg (Illinois) and Davenport (Iowa) made it so. While it is often remarked that many of these writers owed their achievement to their revolt *from* the villages, it should not be forgotten that they came *to* a rich city, well endowed with nineteenth-century literary innovations. The city was as much a magnet to the aspirant writer as to the immigrant. Felix Fay, the hero of Floyd Dell's autobiographical novel, *Moon Calf*, was typical when he recalled a map, hung in the small-town railroad station, that symbolized his aspirations: "the map with a picture of iron roads from all of the middle West centered in a dark blotch in the corner . . . CHICAGO!"¹³ Dell, like his persona Fay, as well as an impressive list of American authors, made the exodus along those iron roads for many of the reasons that have always drawn creative young men and women to urban centers: anonymity, cultural institutions, bohemian slums and the conversation of like-minded peers. With its curious mixture of crudeness and culture, provincialism and cosmopolitanism, vulgarity and aggressiveness, Chicago consequently became, if but for a few decades, not only the hub of the country's rail system but also of its literary creativity.

The Chicago press was perhaps the liveliest in the nation between 1875 and 1925. Over a dozen dailies flourished and the newspaper offices and city rooms were one source of genuine literary talent: Eugene Field's column, "Sharps and Flats" in *The News*; George Ade's "Stories of the Streets and Town," illustrated by John T. McCutcheon's famous cartoons in *The Record*; and Francis Hackett and *The Post's* "Friday Literary Review." Of course Finley Peter Dunne's creation of "Mr. Dooley" of Archey Road (his original was a bartender in Dearborn Street) was the humorous, skeptical and very popular commentator on the nation's political scene, particularly its imperialist adventures. Heir to these Chicagoans was Ring Lardner, and then Ben Hecht who, along with Charles McArthur, captured much of the delight of the American newspaper world in the play, *The Front Page*.

Theodore Drieser, Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson and Floyd Dell were Chicago journalists before they were Chicago *litterateurs*. But before this cadre of writers came into their own, an older generation had begun to explore a variety of new literary topics even if they were uncertain in experimenting with new literary forms: Henry Blake Fuller, Hobart Chatfield-Taylor, Francis Fisher Browne, William Vaughan Moody, Edith Wyatt, Joseph Kirkland and Robert Herrick were all primarily concerned with the impact of the dominant business ethos upon cultural values and aspirations, especially those of the leisured and cultivated middle-class. Currently scholars are reevaluating these frequently

maligned and often neglected American authors and correcting many of the stereotypes foisted on them by progressive critics. Howard Mumford Jones has been the best known revisionist in this recent restatement of the cultural vitality of the late 19th century gentry but younger students have also been examining their creative work in literature and in specific cultural agencies such as Chicago's innovative *Chap-Book*, the first of the American "little magazines."¹⁴

The generation that followed these authors is even more familiar to the student of American literature. Here a sample catalog includes Drieser's *Sister Carrie* or his trilogy on the traction-magnate Yerkes (*The Financier*, *The Titan*, *The Stoic*), Floyd Dell's *Moon Calf* and *Briary Bush*, Sherwood Anderson's *Windy McPherson's Sons*, *Marching Men* or *Winesburg, Ohio*. It is no exaggeration, argues Bernard Duffey, historian of *The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters*, that "the group reality of twentieth-century American literature began in Chicago because in Chicago a chief strain which has formed our modern writing was first recognized." The Chicago writers defined a literary culture deliberately hostile to and liberated from the dominant forces of a modern business civilization. In Duffey's estimate, this was the legacy of the Chicago renaissance to the following decades of American literary thought and practice.¹⁵

Numerous Chicago writers were also poets; verse, like meat and grain, became a Chicago export and for a moment the city was America's poetic center. The movement's chief organ, *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*, originated in 1912 due to the tenacity of Harriet Monroe. Miss Monroe, a formidable entrepreneuse, convinced a hundred fellow city residents to subscribe fifty dollars a year for five years, and though a Philadelphia paper sneered at Chicago for using "the proceeds of pork for the promotion of poetry," the journal was a success from its origin. "*Poetry* is my mother," wrote Amy Lowell, exuberantly calling Chicago "her adopted city." "General William Booth Enters Heaven" gave Vachel Lindsay his first national audience via publication in the magazine and Lillian Steichen Sandburg credits the journal with bringing her husband back to creativity after years of discouragement. *Poetry* "discovered" Tagore, gave a banquet for Yeats, enlisted Pound as foreign editor and published Eliot.¹⁶

Chicago's literary achievements therefore not only paralleled currents in other parts of the country but in several instances prompted them. For many years the East had dismissed Chicago as only a smokey slaughterhouse, a Porkopolis, devoted to "cash, cussing, and cuspidors." Between 1871 and 1920, the city became self-conscious and self-corrective about its cultural life and had produced a first-rate set of cultural institutions. These decades saw the founding of the American Conservatory of Music, John Root's building for The Art Institute (1887) and its new structure (1893), the organization of the Chicago Civic Opera Company (1910) and

the founding of the Chicago Symphony (1891). In the same year that Harriet Monroe first published *Poetry*, Maurice Brown, along with Anna Morgan, created the Little Theater (1912) which significantly influenced both the Provincetown Players and the Washington Square Players, and two years later prompted the Drama League of America to make Chicago its headquarters.

During a dozen years or so, Chicago was also the center of a developing musical style that many cultural historians identify as the most indigenous of American musical genres. Jazz assuredly had its origins in New Orleans, but it was from Chicago that jazz first blossomed into an international craze, that “respectable white folks” first grasped the entertainment value of the new music, that white musicians first became interested in developing the genre and that jazz began its reciprocal influence on American popular music. One historian of American music rightly calls the period 1917-1929, “Chicago’s golden age of jazz” and identifies the evolution of a distinctive “Chicago style.” In George Bushnell’s estimate, “More than a revolt against New Orleans jazz itself, the Chicago music was a protest by some of the white jazzmen against their own middle-class backgrounds.”¹⁷ Thus Chicago jazzmen, not unlike some of the city’s literary experimenters, had a sense of inventiveness, a cockiness and a thirst for the new. Black talents such as Louis Armstrong, Joe “King” Oliver, pianists Tony Jackson and Lillian Hardin, “Jelly Roll” Morton and singer Bessie Smith made lasting contributions to the Chicago era of American jazz; these black artists, in turn, inspired young white musicians like Bix Beiderbecke, Eddie Condon, Muggsy Spanier and Gene Krupa.¹⁸

The city’s jazz was largely located on Chicago’s South Side and not far from this neighborhood arose another of the city’s cultural assets—the University of Chicago. The school, created practically overnight in 1892 with Standard Oil money, land from Marshall Field and the presidential entrepreneurship of Hebraist William Rainey Harper, nicely represents the important trends of late nineteenth-century American higher education: the rise of graduate and professional schools, the new emphasis of the social and behavioral sciences and the increased concern to involve the university in social issues. President Harper recruited a quality faculty with such vigor and largesse that some claimed the highest degree an educator could get was a C. T. C. (Called To Chicago). Harper successfully scoured academe for talent now famous in American intellectual history: A. A. Mickelson, Jacques Loeb, Thorstein Veblen, George Herbert Mead, Albion Small and, of course, John Dewey, who established the famous Chicago Laboratory School and the principles of Progressive education.¹⁹

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Despite his unusual receptivity to new ideas in education, science,

technology and history, Henry Adams could not appreciate Chicago's truly greatest contribution to American cultural history: the Chicago School of Architecture. Adams's own artistic sensibilities remained markedly traditional, a mixture of the classical and the Gothic. Hence he would hardly have been disposed to explain why Chicago, not St. Louis or Cincinnati (important river and rail centers before Chicago), was producing great art from its commerce; he could not have asked why Chicago not New York nor his native Boston (which also had disastrous fires and was, after all, the home base of Adams' good friend, the talented architect Henry H. Richardson) was the place where the new architecture developed.

Recently the U.S. Interior Department's Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation completed a study of Chicago's landmark buildings. That report confirmed what architectural historians have maintained for years: "The developments in Chicago in the late 19th century were as consequential in world cultural history as the developments in 12th century France that produced Gothic architecture and in 15th century Italy that produced Renaissance architecture. Of these three equally significant nodal points in the history of western man, only the consequences of the Chicago School were truly global in scope."²⁰

Despite the potential hyperbole of this estimate, there is little doubt that a radical shift in urban architecture occurred in Chicago following the 1871 fire through a convergence of changing economic and social circumstances, technological innovations and imaginative talent. The Great Fire destroyed over 17,500 buildings requiring the city to be created anew; moreover during the conflagration, tons of pig iron in the McCormick reaper supply yards melted, convincing builders that iron structures were not necessarily fireproof and that they should search for other building materials. In post-fire Chicago, land values in the Loop soared, inducing promoters to demand taller buildings for both the efficient use of available space and the commercial prestige that they felt accompanied grandiose offices. The city also offered a fertile field for implementing new technological advances. Chicagoan William S. Smith pioneered in the development of the caisson foundation and C. W. Baldwin and Elisha G. Otis perfected hydraulic passenger elevators, those vertical roads that made the skyscraper truly functional. These vital accessories to tall commercial buildings, along with other inventions (plate glass, the electric light and, of course, the Bessemer steel process) offered exciting architectural possibilities to imaginative thinkers.

Chicago architects accepted this challenge and in so doing developed a modern art form in which the United States is pre-eminent. They perfected their ideas along at least two lines which periodically merged into a single style. One tendency can be summarized in the work of Major William Le Baron Jenney; the other direction is nicely symbolized by Louis Henri Sullivan.

Jenney, an engineer in the Civil War, sought to devise an architectural style that would couple aesthetics with innovations in building technology. He, along with Chicago architects John Wellborn Root, William Holabird and occasionally Daniel H. Burnham, designed buildings that might be characterized as utilitarian, efficient, economical yet solidly constructed, aesthetically clean and striking in use of natural light. In 1883, the same year John Roebling's steel-cable suspension Brooklyn Bridge was opened, Jenney, in his ten-story Home Insurance Building, began experimenting with steel, a superstrong, flexible material that was just beginning to be mass-produced. Whether Jenney was forced to this steel-framing by his concern for as much window space as possible, by a bricklayer's strike, or whether, as Henry Ericsson suggests, Jenney got the idea from the accident of laying a heavy book on his wife's birdcage, the notion of using stone or brick, not to support loads, but to form curtain walls was established in modern architectural practice.²¹ Three years later in 1886, William Holabird employed a complete, riveted steel frame from the foundation up in the Tacoma Building, and in 1891, Burnham and Root put up the twenty-two story Masonic Temple, then the highest building in the world. Significantly in the same year, Maitland's *Dictionary of American Slang*, defined the term skyscraper as "a very tall building such as now being built in Chicago." The Reliance (1895), the Marquette (1895) and the Fisher Buildings (1896), with their famous "Chicago windows" were further perfections of this Chicago architectural innovation.

Nonetheless the unchallenged master of the skyscraper was Louis Henri Sullivan—a self-conscious romantic, idealist, Emersonian democrat whose Chicago practice (1873-1924) aptly spans the fifty years when the city can be seen as the nation in miniature. In his numerous and varied architectural landmarks—the Wainwright Building in St. Louis; the Guaranty Building in Buffalo; the Stock Exchange Building, the Ryerson and Getty Tombs, the World's Fair Transportation Building all in Chicago; and the nine business blocks and banks scattered throughout the Midwest—Sullivan sought not only the perfection of architectural form but also a way of expressing an organic, democratic social philosophy to which he felt America could and should aspire.²²

In contrast to the direct, utilitarian work of Jenney, the more plastic, imaginative expression of Sullivan can be seen in two of his creations: the Auditorium Building (1889) and the Schlesinger and Mayer department store (1899). "A building is an act," maintained Sullivan in his *Kinder-garten Chats* and his Auditorium, a combined hotel, office block, and handsome theatre perfectly illustrates this credo as well as his often quoted but frequently misunderstood apothegm "form follows function." Heavily influenced by H. H. Richardson's massive yet simple forms, Sullivan's Auditorium—like so many of the Chicago School's achievements—combined commercial and artistic ends; its exterior walls, while still tradi-

tionally load-bearing, reveal a powerful rhythm of limestone piers surmounting a rugged granite base; the theatre's sumptuous yet delicate interior ornamentation expressed a spirit of festivity that fills the entire building. When the theatre opened on December 9, 1889 a cultural rivalry was momentarily settled. It was reported that after reviewing Sullivan's accomplishment President Benjamin Harrison, a midwesterner, leaned over to Vice-President Levi P. Morton, an easterner, and mused, "New York surrenders, eh?"

The Schlesinger-Mayer store (now Carson, Pirie, Scott) on Chicago's busiest corner remains Sullivan's more familiar masterpiece. The facade of its first two floors, adorned with an envelope of decorative cast iron, suggests Sullivan's life-long use of breathtaking ornament drawn from nature and uniquely appropriate to each building's site and function. The broad, beautifully proportioned "Chicago windows" above are set horizontally rather than vertically yet they still graphically express the steel cage that supports the building.

In the decade between the national triumph of Sullivan's Auditorium and his design of the Schlesinger-Mayer store, Chicago seemingly had an unprecedented opportunity to show its architectural creativity to the world in the 1893 Columbian Exposition. In Sullivan's estimate, the city completely muffed its chance. Only his Transportation Building and the Fisheries Building by Chicagoan Henry Ives Cobb deviated from the imitative and derivative Beaux Arts classicism of "The White City." Nonetheless, Sullivan overemphasized the setback done by the Fair to the originality of the Chicago School when he predicted that it would take fifty years for the city to recover. The Fair did offer American clients a choice, and most of them we now think unwisely chose the classical revival. The Fair really only restated the traditional belief that insisted on cultural buildings being in the grand tradition of classical design. Sullivan and the Chicago School lost this battle but ultimately won the war as it was their architectural style that triumphed as modern urban design. Actually by 1893, the Chicago architects had barely shown what might be done; much of their outstanding work still lay in the future—the Marquette, the Reliance, the Fisher, the McClurg buildings and Sullivan's own Gage Building and the Schlesinger-Mayer Store. Also, as Christopher Tunnard reminds us, D. H. Burnham would never have dreamed of his famous "Chicago Plan" of 1909 if he had not first gazed on Frederick Law Olmstead's conversion of 686 acres of unsightly semi-wild dune and marshland into a fair ground of formal gardens, pavillions, terraces, avenues and lagoons set against the lake's open vista. Burnham's city-wide scheme, although never fully deployed, was a pioneering effort in city planning that prompted the dramatic development of Chicago's lake front.²³

Moreover the heritage of Sullivan himself underwent a brilliant exegesis in the work of his brash and self-assured protege, Frank Lloyd Wright. The sixty or so domestic and commercial buildings that Wright

created in and around Chicago are among the most dramatic uses of space and native materials ever achieved in modern art. His Prairie Style homes—the Robie, the Willitts, the Winslow residences—sought an indigenous and organic relationship to the Midwest landscape on which they were built; other superb examples of Wright’s development of the modern house abound in River Forest, Highland Park and in Oak Park where the architect made his home. One of his most interesting houses was designed for Avery Coonley in Riverside, a Chicago suburb laid out by Frederick Law Olmstead according to principles initiated by Andrew Jackson Dowling. Wright’s stated purpose in the Coonley home, as in all of his domestic architecture, was multiple: to free people from the prison of the rectilinear enclosure of traditional rooms; to encourage domesticity; to provide a center for cultural activities, and to be in accord with the personal needs of the occupants. The Coonley residence therefore also included a school since one of its owners was a teacher. John Dewey was among the educational advisors affiliated with the Coonley’s school and the building came to be Wright’s expression of Dewey’s principles of progressive education.²⁴

Anyone who reads their works (writings and buildings) realizes that the Chicago architects led by Sullivan and Wright sensed they were developing, both in theory and practice, art forms expressive of American realities, ambitions and cultural styles. Increasingly aware of their departures from the past, their differences from the East, the Chicagoans determined to emphasize their innovations in their founding of the Western Association of Architects. Their publication, *The Inland Architect and Builder*, spoke—much like Garland’s hopes for his region’s contribution to literature—of a West trying to assert its artistic modernity in steel and glass, those supremely modern industrial materials.²⁵ The reality of that modernity is more than evident in the inspiration the original “Chicago School” continues to provide for architectural practice both in Chicago and around the world. A third generation of the city’s architects, represented by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and many of his Chicago followers, openly acknowledges its indebtedness to the early masters of the period 1871-1919.

So when Henry Adams came to Chicago in 1893 he could have easily paraphrased Alexis de Tocqueville’s famous remark about seeing more in America than America. In seeing Chicago, Adams rightly saw more than Chicago; he had a genuine insight when he realized that the city’s history would be a case study sliced off for the microscope, showing all the characteristics, tensions and aspirations of the nation at large. None of the national struggles, problems and achievements, 1871-1919, was missing in the area that James Bryce once called “the most American part of America.” In Sam Bass Warner’s estimate, Chicago during this fifty year period emerged as a prototype of “the total urban industrial landscape”; another urban historian, Zane Miller, sees Chicago as “a luminous

illustration of how cities grew as a result of the simultaneous emergence of advocates of both the small and big community among builders of the twentieth-century city.”²⁶ Literary scholars have realized that in Chicago, 1871-1919, there arose a “New Poetry” and a “New American Literature” in which a daring younger generation would say new things in a new way. Finally, Louis Sullivan can be seen as the prophet of contemporary architecture and Frank Lloyd Wright as the first contemporary architect.

Therefore I think Henry Adams was right about Chicago in the 1890s when he said “one must start there” in order to understand “American thought as a unity.” Chicago was not just a middle America, but a little America, an America writ small—or as the residents of the City of Big Shoulders would have probably preferred it—an America writ large.

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footnotes

An abbreviated version of this essay was presented to the American Studies Association Regional (Ohio-Indiana) Meeting, 10 November 1973, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

1. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York, 1931), 342-43.
2. The only other scholar I know of who uses this interpretive scheme is Ray Ginger in his *Altgeld's America: The Lincoln Ideal Versus Changing Reality* (New York, 1958). For a bibliographical survey of the primary sources and monographic literature that further document my argument here, see my essay, “Regional Studies in America: The Chicago Model,” *American Studies, An International Newsletter* (Autumn, 1974), XIII:1, 20-34.
3. Mayor Carter Harrison I (1825-1893) and his son Carter Harrison II (1860-1953) both saw such a transformation during their lives in Chicago. See Lillis J. Abbot, *Carter Harrison, A Memoir* (New York, 1895) and Carter Harrison, *Growing Up With Chicago* (Chicago, 1944).
4. Sixteen years later the Republican National Convention, also held at the Coliseum, would be stunned by Theodore Roosevelt’s impetuous bolt from the party’s ranks to create his own “Bull Moose” Progressive movement.
5. Pullman provides a superb case study in which are interwoven important strands of economic, labor, social, business and political history. See, for example, the estimates of Almond Lindsey, *The Pullman Strike: The Story of a Unique Experiment and of a Great Labor Upheaval* (Chicago, 1942); Stanley Buder, *Pullman, An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning, 1880-1930* (New York & London, 1967); Colston E. Warre, *The Pullman Boycott of 1894: The Problem of Federal Intervention* (Boston, 1955) and two contemporary accounts: Richard T. Ely’s “Pullman, A Social Study,” *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (February, 1885) and William H. Carwardine, *The Pullman Strike* (Chicago, C. H. Kerr, 1894, reprinted 1971).
6. Harold F. Gosnell claims that while the popular image of big-city Negro life is Harlem, the academic image is Chicago’s South Side. His evidence for this is the claim that Chicago is the first Northern city in which blacks entered politics in significant numbers. See *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (Chicago, 1967), v. Also helpful is Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago, 1967).
7. Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago, A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago, 1922) and Carl Sandburg, *The Chicago Race Riots* (Chicago, 1919). See also Robert J. Goldstein, “The Anarchist Scare of 1908: A Sign of Tensions in the Progressive Era,” *American Studies* XV, 2 (1974), 55-78.
8. Charles E. Merriam’s autobiographical account, *Chicago: A More Intimate View of Urban Politics* (New York, 1929) is an excellent introduction to be supplemented by Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan’s colorful *Lords of the Levee* (Indianapolis, 1943) and Harold Gosnell’s analytical *Machine Politics: Chicago Model* (Chicago, 1937).
9. Practically every major ethnic group has been studied in the monographic literature but the most comprehensive survey is John M. Allswang’s *A House for All Peoples, Ethnic Politics in Chicago, 1890-1936* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1971).
10. *Chicago Tribune*, 28 October 1917; *The Nation* (London), 17 April 1920.

11. William Dean Howells, "Certain of the Chicago School of Fiction," *North American Review*, CLXXXVI (1903), 739-46. See similar estimates by Henry Blake Fuller, "The Upward Movement in Chicago," *Atlantic Monthly*, LXXX (1897), 534-47; Floyd Dell, "Chicago in Fiction," *Friday Literary Review* (Chicago *Evening Post* supplement), 8 March 1912; and Sherwood Anderson, "Chicago Culture," *Chicago Daily News*, 2 February 1918.

12. Hamlin Garland, *Crumbling Idols* (Chicago and Cambridge, 1894), 156-57.

13. Floyd Dell, *Moon Calf, A Novel* (New York, 1920), 2.

14. Howard Mumford Jones, *The Age of Energy, Varieties of American Experience, 1865-1915* (New York, 1971), 179-301. Also see Blake Nevius, *Robert Herrick; The Development of a Novelist* (Berkeley, 1962) and two helpful theses: Guy A. Szuberla, "Urban Vistas and the Pastoral Garden: Studies in the Literature and Architecture of Chicago, 1893-1909" (Minneapolis, 1972) and Wendy L. Clauson, "*The Chap-Book: A Case-Study in Genteel Innovation*" (Iowa City, 1972). For other recent re-evaluations of these authors see Kenny A. Jackson, "Robert Herrick's Use of Chicago," *American Studies* V, 1 (1964), 24-32, and Nicholas Joost, "The Dial, The Little Review and the New Movement," *American Studies* VIII, 1 (1967), 44-59.

15. Bernard Duffey, *The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1954), 261-62. Chicago's contributions to American literature have also been surveyed in H. Hugh Duncan, *Rise of Chicago As A Literary Center From 1885 to 1920; A Sociological Essay in American Culture* (Totowa, N.J., 1964); Dale Kramer, *Chicago Renaissance, The Literary Life in the Midwest, 1900-1930* (New York, 1966) and in Lennox Bouton Grey's dissertation, "Chicago and 'The Great American Novel'" (Chicago, 1947).

16. In addition to *Poetry*, the already mentioned *Chap-Book*, and *The Dial* (Francis Browne's sedate, Emersonian fortnightly review patterned after the old transcendentalist organ of the 1840's), Chicago was also the birthplace of Margaret Anderson's iconoclastic *Little Review*. Totally the brainchild of the volatile, brilliantly imaginative, impatient ingenue from Columbus, Indiana, the *Review* announced it would be "a magazine written for intelligent people who can feel; whose philosophy is applied Anarchism; whose policy is a Will to Splendor of Life." From March 1914 to 1929, when the market for "inspired conversation" fell off, *The Little Review* was one of the bellwethers of the *avant-garde* in American letters.

17. George D. Bushnell, Jr., "When Jazz Came To Chicago," *Chicago History*, I:3 (Spring, 1971), 139.

18. Chadwick Hansen has in turn traced a reverse influence of the dominant white culture upon jazz as a musical expression of the black subculture. In a most perceptive article, "Social Influences on Jazz Style: Chicago, 1920-1930," *American Quarterly*, XII:4 (Winter, 1960), 493-507, Chadwick demonstrates how the social environment of Chicago particularly the pressures of acculturation to the white middle-class tended to orient the musical genre toward the more socially sanctioned popular music of the white man.

19. Richard J. Storr, *Harper's University, The Beginnings, A History of the University of Chicago* (Chicago, 1966), 65-85; John Dewey, "A Story of The University Elementary School" in *The School and Society* (Chicago, 1899).

20. Hugh C. Miller, *The Chicago School of Architecture* (Washington, 1973), 1. Scholars who make similar claims are: Carl W. Condit, *The Rise of the Skyscraper* (Chicago, 1952) and his *The Chicago School of Architecture: A History of Commercial and Public Building in the Chicago Area, 1875-1925* (Chicago, 1964) and Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of A New Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954).

21. William Le Baron Jenney, *Architectural Reviewer* (February, 1897), 1-45; Montgomery Schuyler, "The Skyscraper Up To Date," *Architectural Record* (January-March, 1899), 231-257.

22. Louis Sullivan, "What is Architecture: A Study For the American People of Today" (1906) in Maurice English, ed., *The Testament of Stone: Themes of Idealism and Indignation from the Writings of Louis Sullivan* (Evanston, Ill., 1956), 43-63. Also see Sullivan's *Democracy* (Detroit, 1961), *Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings* (New York, 1947), and Sherman Paul's classic, *Louis Sullivan, An Architect in American Thought* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962).

23. Daniel H. Burnham and Edward A. Bennett, *Plan of Chicago, Prepared Under the Direction of the Commercial Club of Chicago* (Chicago, 1909) and Burnham's *Planning the Region of Chicago* (Chicago, 1956). The town of Pullman and the suburb of Riverside are also other, although different, excellent Chicago examples of American community planning.

24. Frank Lloyd Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture," *Architectural Record* (1908) as reprinted in Frederick Gutheim's anthology, *Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture* (New York, 1941), 31-45. Also see Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Natural House* (New York, 1954) and H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School, Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries* (Toronto, 1972).

25. Editorial Statement, *The Inland Architect and News Record, A Monthly Journal Devoted to Architecture, Construction, Decoration, and Furnishing in the West* (Chicago, February, 1883), I:2, 1.

26. See Sam Bass Warner, "The Segregated City; Chicago 1870-1920: Factories, Railroads, Skyscrapers," in his *The Urban Wilderness, A History of the American City* (New York, 1972), 100, and Zane L. Miller, "Builders of the Early-Twentieth-Century City: Chicago, 1900-1930," in his *The Urbanization of Modern America, a Brief History* (New York, 1973), 124.