“A Dream of the Future”: Race, Empire, and Modernity at the Atlanta and Nashville International Expositions, 1895-1897

by

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History
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Abstract

For a region often viewed as outside the processes of modernization, the United States South’s international expositions were symbolic opportunities to demonstrate its embrace of a narrative of industrial, cultural, and racial progress. Taking the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition and the 1897 Nashville Tennessee Centennial Exposition as an analytical basis, this dissertation investigates how southerners transformed modernity by making it “Jim Crow.” It explores the ways white and African American southerners performed a variety of racialized and classed identities that embraced and critiqued modern progress. Responding to the dissolution of old certainties, southerners turned to science and technology as a stable site of truth and meaning. At the same time, their response to modernity was rooted in the South and its developing “New South” cities. In these cities southerners formulated a distinctive modernity that was compatible with the region’s racial dynamics and was adopted by the North as the nation expanded and encountered non-white colonial subjects. This dissertation makes clear the ways in which southerners, often considered on the periphery of change, responded to dislocating events by rooting their responses in the local. The specific economic, social, racial, and political realities of the South all shaped southerners reactions to and articulations of
modernity and empire. By narrowing the question of southern modernity to a specific time and space this dissertation redefines a key moment in southern and American history, showing how responses to the dislocating effects of modernity were grounded in the specific temporal and spatial contexts of the South and were exported as American empire.
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Introduction

Go into the country, almost within sight of the spires and lofty housetops of bustling, progressive Atlanta, and you will find yourself among a primitive people, who know little or nothing of the great world which lies beyond their ken of vision…To such as these the Exposition comes as a revelation. They gaze at its wonders without comprehending them, but what they see and hear cannot fail to loosen the bonds of lethargy which have compressed their faculties, and awaken new ideas and ambition in their dormant brains.” – New York at the Cotton States

In the 1880s and 1890s the United States South had a problem on its hands. Despite the best efforts of a solidifying middle class, northerners viewed the former states of the Confederacy as backwards and outside modernity. In the day’s popular culture and literature, southerners, white and African American, were lambasted for their uncouth behavior, social problems, and stunted economic growth. In the last decades of the nineteenth century an answer to this problem was found in the industrial exposition movement sweeping the Western world. Beginning in 1881 with Atlanta’s International Cotton Exposition, southern cities hosted international expositions, also known as world’s fairs, to attract investment, advertise the region’s resources, and promote a distinctly southern identity and culture. The South’s expositions were representative of an ideology that called for a “New South” based not on the region’s agrarian past but one defined by urban industrial manufacturing. The expositions presented a southern future of a scientific and diversified economy based on a racially
hierarchical society. They were advertisements for and articulations of a unique southern modernity, a Jim Crow modernity.¹

With the exception of the New Orleans World Cotton Centennial in 1884, the South’s world’s fairs remained small and lacked federal appropriations. This changed with the World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. The Chicago exposition transformed the scale and scope of world’s fairs in the United States. With just under 30 million visitors, the Columbian Exposition was the cultural and social event of the decade. The southern expositions that followed, while not attempting the scale of Chicago, attempted to duplicate its scope and impact. Expositions in Atlanta, Georgia (1895), Nashville, Tennessee (1897), Charleston, South Carolina (1901-02), and Norfolk, Virginia (1907) were deeply influenced by the Columbian in form and content. At these fairs, urban middle class and elite southerners created idealized worlds they hoped would draw investment and demonstrate to southerners the need for progress and industrial development. In their celebration of modernity and industrial capitalism, the

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South’s expositions represented an important effort to break free from the stereotypical images of the region as backward and agrarian.  

Although southern expositions attempted to replicate the World’s Columbian, they remained rooted in the South’s social, economic, and political realities. A key difference to Chicago, which effectively barred black involvement, was that southern fairs opened their doors to the participation of African Americans. Management of the races was a central tenet of New South ideology. New South spokesmen believed that northern investment would only flow south if southerners demonstrated a restrained approach to the so-called “Negro Question.” With the participation of African Americans at the expositions, New South boosters launched a public relations campaign to demonstrate that southerners alone had the answer to the question.

For the members of the black elite and middle class who supported and organized the fairs’ Negro Exhibits, the buildings were important sites to demonstrate the “progress of the race” and educate and uplift working class African Americans. Booker T. Washington’s “Atlanta Compromise” speech at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition succinctly summarized the motivations of the black exhibition committees. According to Washington, blacks should forgo political and social rights in favor of economic development. At times controversial, the Atlanta and Nashville expositions had widespread support amongst African Americans. However, as the realities of Jim Crow sank in, the Charleston and Norfolk expositions became targets of derision and protest by many prominent blacks, including leading...

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activists such as W. E. B. Du Bois. In the end, the Negro Exhibits were a compromise in the pursuit of civil and economic rights, much like Washington’s speech.  

In their size and scope the South’s international expositions transcended the old ties of the local. Exploding the traditional boundaries that defined “the South,” they looked to the Caribbean and Latin America as imperial extensions of the region. They put forth an argument for the South as not only important to the nation but also central to extending U.S. empire across the hemisphere. Southern international expositions were also part of a larger push to persuade a peripheral rural South to acquiesce to the powers of centralization. The New South would be based on cities’ abilities to draw resources from the countryside and transform them into manufactured products. The expositions were a celebration of a new urban power rooted in middle class men not tied to old plantation families. It is not surprising, then, that the South’s two largest expositions, Atlanta’s 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition and Nashville’s 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition, were hosted by inland cities that emerged as major players in the postbellum period and whose growth was largely dependent on the railroad.

This dissertation began as a response to C. Vann Woodward’s observation that the South’s late nineteenth century expositions were places for the worship of the “alien gods of Mass and Speed.” What, I wondered, made mass and speed so alien to turn-of-the-century southerners? While I was aware of the rural nature of the South, it was odd that these hallmarks of industrial modernity would be foreign to southerners. Was not Woodward’s book about mass

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and speed in the South? Did he not start with the transformations of the railroad—that quintessential technology of modernity? Why then were mass and speed so alien?⁴

A persistent notion exists that the South lagged behind the nation’s embrace of modernity in the late nineteenth century. Dating to the national debates over slavery in the antebellum period the South and its culture has been viewed by scholars, northerners, and even some southerners as the antithesis of modernity and industry.⁵ Following the Civil War, the South of popular culture became a salve to the modern experience. The “moonlight and magnolias” of a mythic Old South was more tenacious than the New South image of a modern and industrial region. Even today, the South is more likely to be represented in the popular imagination by the History Channel’s Swamp People or TLC’s Here Comes Honey Boo Boo than the modern and diverse cities of Atlanta, Georgia or Charlotte, North Carolina. These reality television series depict rural and uneducated southerners who are out of touch of with the modern world and are not far removed from the “country rube” and dialect stories of the late nineteenth century. At the

⁴ Woodward, Origins, 124.

same time, the South did and continues to lack in key indicators of industrial and commercial modernity.\textsuperscript{6}

The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to make sense of the contradiction between a modern South with imperial intentions and a region lagging behind. By narrowing the question of modernity to a specific time and space, I place the South at the centre of the conversation over late nineteenth century industrial capitalism and U. S. Empire. Using the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition and the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition as lenses, I argue that southerners transformed modernity by making it Jim Crow. I contend that southern elites and ideologues confronted the problems—both real and imagined—of a benighted South far earlier than the 1920s and 1930s as Natalie Ring and Leigh Ann Duck have recently proposed. Through the expositions, New South boosters presented an argument for an industrial and modern South on the region’s own terms.\textsuperscript{7}

The Atlanta and Nashville expositions suggest the ways in which southerners were open to the liberal ideas of capitalist modernity at the same time as they presented a solution to the supposed problems of multiracial industrial democracy. Unlike the much-analyzed Columbian Exposition, African Americans presented their own vision of modernity within the fairs’ “Negro Buildings.” While northerners excluded African Americans from their vision of an industrializing U.S., white southerners included blacks in a Jim Crowed version of modern progress. To the white organizers of the fairs the Negro Building and its exhibits were testimony of their paternalistic goodwill. They were representative of New South ideologues’ ability to imagine a multi-racial, if hierarchically organized, modern society. Although the rhetoric

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{6}] Cox, \textit{Dreaming of Dixie}, 4, 57; Kolchin, \textit{Sphinx on the American Land}, 8-11. See also Cox’s ongoing online project \textit{Pop South: Reflections of the South in Popular Culture}, southinpopculture.com, accessed April 8, 2013.
\item[\textsuperscript{7}] Ring, \textit{Problem South}; Duck, \textit{Nation’s Region}.
\end{itemize}
surrounding the exhibits had a tinge of equality, the reality was that the fairs’ organizers viewed the buildings as way to demonstrate their guidance of a childlike race. At the same time, the Negro Buildings and the black organized Negro Exhibits opened the door for African Americans to present their own vision of modern progress. The expositions, then, presented a New South vision that combined late nineteenth century modernity with the region’s racial dynamics.

Beyond the unique participation of African Americans, the inclusion of “Woman’s Buildings,” open displays of Civil War memory, and anthropological villages were essential to the South’s presentation of a modern region. The expositions created a forum through which southern white women reconciled the tension between modernity and tradition without upsetting the gender hierarchy of the late nineteenth century. Southern white women offered themselves as exemplars of modern womanhood opposed to the supposedly corrupted factory girls of northern industrial cities. The fairs were also sites for Civil War memorialization and reconciliation. Civil War reunions created a cognitive disjuncture in which the region was moving forward while claiming its days of glory were in the past. This disjuncture was assuaged through a language of manliness that transcended time and space to link Americans in the common experience of war, uniting Americans for future imperial adventures. Lastly, the expositions mobilized ideas of industrial progress and race hierarchy to formulate a blueprint for a distinctly southern imperial expansion. In the end, this dissertation makes clear the ways in which southerners, often considered on the periphery of change, responded to dislocating events by rooting their responses in the local. The specific economic, social, and political realities of the South shaped southerners reactions to and articulations of modernity and empire.

The Atlanta and Nashville expositions were the embodiment of a “New South” vision for the region. The New South model of economic modernization was the result of an interconnected
group of urban elites evangelical in their desire to bring material and industrial progress to the region. Despite having an economic growth rate that was equal to most other parts of the country in the late nineteenth century, the South still supported less real industry and commerce than the North. With limited capital and a reticent planter class in the rural hinterland, southern urban elites developed a program of modernization known as the “New South Creed.” This creed, always loosely defined, attempted to convince southerners to adopt a more northern plan of modernization. New South boosters believed that there could only be reconciliation between the North and South, racial peace, and a new economic and social order if the southern economy turned to scientific and diversified agriculture and continued to grow its manufacturing industry along the lines of the North. The New South creed amassed a large following in both the North and South and became the modus operandi for the South’s business, railroad, and industrial interests in the 1890s.

New South ideologues understood that many southerners remained suspicious of what they viewed as plans to welcome Yankee economic domination so soon after the South had rid itself of Federal oversight. Recognizing that their program of agricultural diversification, industrialization, and urbanization disturbed many white southerners’ belief that racial harmony was dependent on a hierarchical agricultural society, New South boosters went to great lengths to emphasize the southerness of their vision. Slavery in the New South vision became not a moral wrong but an economic wrong. The Old South was not a contradistinction to the new but a part

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8 Dewey W. Grantham, *The South in Modern America: A Region at Odds* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 6. Although the South was largely rural at the time of the fairs, its agricultural economy had been in decline since the 1880s. From 1880 onwards growth in value-added manufacturing had outpaced that of the nation. David Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982), 7.


8
of the New South’s linear history. By romanticizing and idealizing the southern past, New South boosters hoped to make their vision palatable to the majority of southerners.¹⁰

The second part of the New South program was focused on winning over the nation. New South spokesmen in the 1880s launched promotional campaigns to encourage economic growth and investment. They inundated regional and national newspapers with articles and stories advertising the South’s natural resources and its suitability for northern investment and immigration. Alongside newspapers, magazines, and lectures, the South’s expositions were key components in showcasing the region to the nation and world. Lastly, management of the races was a central tenet of New South ideology. Jim Crow laws and disfranchisement were signifiers of the New South leadership’s ability to manage the races in a supposedly peaceful manner and provide would be investors with a cheap tractable labor force.¹¹

The New South model of modernization was never as effective as its proponents believed, and by the late nineteenth century the South was divided over what path the future should take. A rising urban elite and middle class, consisting of whites and African Americans, adopted a northern viewpoint that industry and capital were required to drag the South out of its economic doldrums and usher in a period of liberal democracy. This was the vision presented by the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions. On the other hand, the planter elite in the rural areas of the South pushed for industrial development on their own terms. Their vision was far more hierarchical than the proponents of liberal capitalism in Atlanta and Nashville favored. For rural farmers pinched by declining economic power and new consumer desires the answer emerged in a radical political movement known as Populism that was noticeable for its


absence of mention at the expositions. For African American sharecroppers and rural black southerners, the only option was to vote with their feet and leave the rural South, heading first to the region’s growing cities and then onwards to the North. In the end, the 1893 depression, the most severe economic downturn the United States had faced, restricted the real choices open to all four groups. In 1895 at the start of the Cotton States exposition the region had made strides but as the expositions demonstrated the New South remained for many a dream of the future.¹²

The cities of Atlanta and Nashville were simultaneously by-products and drivers of the New South. While both cities had antebellum origins, they grew exponentially in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Their central position as nodes in an expanding southern rail network explains much of this growth. Railroads drove the nineteenth century economy. Following the Civil War, the South quickly caught up with northern railroad expansion. By 1890 ninety percent of southerners lived in a railroad county. Railroads transformed the region: new cities sprung up where multiple lines met, new goods and products flooded the marketplace, plantation owners pushed into the interiors of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama confident they could move

cotton and other staples to market quickly. Railroads changed southerners’ orientation from
country to city.\textsuperscript{13}

Atlanta’s growth in the postwar period was nothing short of miraculous. Destroyed by the
Union Army, its spectacular rise from the ashes lent it the moniker of the “Phoenix City.” By the
turn-of-the-twentieth-century, Atlanta was the South’s most dynamic city. In 1860 Atlanta’s
population was just under ten thousand. A decade later it doubled and, by 1890, Atlanta’s
population had risen to sixty-five thousand people, a six hundred and eighty five percent increase
in three decades.\textsuperscript{14} The quick recovery of the rail network was the main reason for this growth.
Already a terminus for four railroads, Atlanta became the centre for fast freight associations
seeking to transport inland cotton and foodstuffs to the Atlantic seaboard. Its merchants
rebounded after the war putting together aggressive programs to entice wholesale and retail
grocers to the city. A Board of Trade was formed in 1866 and, by the 1870s, delegates and city
council members traveled as far a field as Chicago and Indianapolis to attract trade. Lastly, the
construction of Kimball House in 1871, a six-story hotel with 317 rooms, made the city a
principal destination for southern travellers.\textsuperscript{15}

Having established itself as a trading city in the 1860s and 1870s, Atlanta grew its
industry in the 1880s and 1890s. Local boosters and railroad lines joined to spearhead a variety
of projects to increase the city’s commerce and industry. One of these projects was Atlanta’s first
industrial exposition, the International Cotton Exposition held in 1881. According to historian
James Russell, “[m]ore than any other event during the 1880s, the International Cotton

\textsuperscript{13} Ayers, Promise, 9-33.

\textsuperscript{14} James Michael Russell, “Appendix A: Table 1,” Atlanta, 1847-1890: City Building in the Old

\textsuperscript{15} Russell, Atlanta, 120-122.
Exposition put Atlanta on the national map as the headquarters of the New South movement.”

Its organizers, which included the New South movement’s *de facto* leader, Henry W. Grady, intended the exposition to be an advertisement for the city’s embrace of the North’s industrial gospel. Later the 1885 National Commerce Convention and 1887 Piedmont Exposition continued the work of the Cotton Exposition. Promotional events such as industrial fairs joined with major investments by railroads, wholesalers, and local merchants to triple Atlanta’s commerce in the 1880s. The city also added four new railroad lines in that decade. Significantly, the Georgia Pacific arrived in 1883, connecting the city to the growing coal and iron fields of Alabama. One other railroad was built after the Georgia Pacific: the Seaboard Air Line, owned by Cotton States exposition president Charles Collier, was completed in 1892.

Like any boom city Atlanta experienced an influx of people, transforming not only the city’s character but its leadership. Only twelve percent of Atlanta’s 1890 population had been in the city in 1870 and its growth as a commercial and industrial city meant that Atlanta had stable persistence rates through the 1880s. When people arrived in Atlanta they stayed. A similar transformation occurred amongst the city’s economic and political elite. The majority were between the ages of thirty and fifty, and only twenty members of the elite lived in the city prior to the Civil War. Many of the new elite began their climb up the political and economic ladder prior to arriving in the city. These were New South men not tied to the traditional planter-elite of the region. At the same time, they gave an air of continuity. They lived in the same

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17 Russell, *Atlanta*, 233-248. By 1890 eight railroads terminated in Atlanta: the East Tennessee, Virginia, & Georgia; the Western & Atlantic; the Marietta & North Georgia; the Richmond & Danville; the Central of Georgia; the Atlanta & Florida; the Atlanta & West Point; and the Georgia Pacific.
neighborhoods, attended the same churches, and took part in the same clubs as the city’s antebellum elite.\textsuperscript{18}

Low labor costs and relative labor peace contributed to Atlanta’s railroad, commerce, and industrial growth. Despite these advantages Atlanta remained a city of trade and commerce rather than industry well into the twentieth century. The lack of urban markets in the region combined with high freight rates to ensure that Atlanta did not become the frequently promised “Chicago of the South.” Despite these limitations and a relatively small industrial sector, Atlanta experienced industrial growth throughout the 1880s. By the time of the Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895, Atlanta rightfully claimed to be the quintessential New South city.\textsuperscript{19}

Although their histories diverged in the twentieth century, Nashville and Atlanta competed for title of greatest New South city. Like Atlanta, Nashville owed much of its postbellum wealth and growth to its location as a central terminus in the expansion of the southern railroad network, especially the Louisville & Nashville road that connected the city to New Orleans. Like Atlanta, the city became a center for wholesalers who expanded their markets by enlarging their territory through price-cutting measures. The city also expanded its manufacturing, particularly in cotton, while growing its meat processing, timber, coal and iron industries. Unlike Atlanta, however, Nashville was home to the South’s largest educational sector. Vanderbilt University, Peabody Normal, Meharry Medical College, and Fisk University diversified the city’s economy and lent, in the words of historian Don Doyle, a “certain tone of refinement and cultural amenities that boosters of the ‘Athens of the South’ never failed to

\textsuperscript{18} Russell, \textit{Atlanta}, 250-258.

\textsuperscript{19} Russell, \textit{Atlanta}, 249-250.
Lastly, while Atlanta had a strong banking centre, it was surpassed in this regard by Nashville. With a population of eighty-one thousand people in 1890, nine thousand fewer than Atlanta, Nashville was the third largest city in the South in 1900.

Throughout its period of growth, Nashville’s commercial and political elite joined with railroad firms to advertise the city’s industry and promote northern investment. In the 1870s and 1880s, Nashville’s business leaders, bankers, and manufacturers formed a variety of clubs to sponsor city building. In 1888 the Commercial Club was founded to “promote more intimate social relations among the businessmen of Nashville, to encourage and promote the commercial and manufacturing interests of the city, to advertise its diverse advantages…to foster and encourage a public spirit which will benefit the city.” And like Atlanta, Nashville turned to expositions to draw in outside money and support. The Nashville Centennial Exposition of 1880 was a small but significant affair in the city’s history. Like the much larger Tennessee Centennial Exposition seventeen years later, the Nashville Centennial combined a reverence for the past with a belief in progress. Like other southern expositions, Doyle notes that the Nashville Centennial proclaimed “the New South creed of industrial progress, racial harmony, and national reconciliation.”

With the unveiling of an Andrew Jackson statue alongside the exposition’s main building, the Nashville Centennial celebrated the old with the new.

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22 Russell, *Atlanta*, 262; Doyle, *Nashville*. New Orleans was the largest.

23 Quoted in Doyle, *Nashville*, 59.

24 Doyle, 10.

25 Doyle, 5.
Nashville, like Atlanta, formed the vanguard of the New South. Although lacking the same degree of boosterism and self-promotion as the Phoenix City, Nashville prided itself on its antebellum heritage, educational institutions, and contributions to the nation’s presidential history. At the same time, behind the exterior of its erudite public image lay the cold calculation of nineteenth century industrial capitalism. The northern owned Louisville & Nashville Railroad was a driving force behind the city’s economic development. The merchant, banking, and industrial class all put their efforts behind building the city into one of the South’s great urban centres.  

As growing New South cities, Atlanta and Nashville were centres for the region’s increasingly urban African American population. Like much of Atlanta’s postbellum white citizens, its African American inhabitants were new arrivals. By 1900 African Americans numbered thirty-five thousand, making up forty percent of the city’s population. In the three decades after the war, black Atlantans built a small but strong economic base. In addition, the wealthy and poor were brought together through fraternal organizations that provided avenues for economic mobility and cemented the wealth of a small middle class. By the 1890s, however, Atlanta’s black community was showing signs of social and economic stratification. An aspiring middle class of clerics, small businessmen, porters, and professionals defined themselves as a separate group through what historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has called the “politics of respectability.” In their dress, behavior, and participation in status-building institutions they separated themselves from Atlanta’s working class. At Atlanta University, in the sizable and nationally prominent Bethel AME, Friendship Baptist, and First Congregational churches, or in the founding of the Atlanta Loan and Trust Company, Atlanta’s black elite took on notable leadership roles. By the time of the Cotton States exposition, Atlanta was home to nationally

26 Doyle, 20-32.
prominent black clerics, Wesley J. Gaines and Henry McNeal Turner, both of whom played key roles in the exposition’s Negro Building. In the 1890s Atlanta was a key site in the formation of nationally prominent black elite who took it upon themselves to make clear a hierarchy within the African American community, while simultaneously seeking to uplift working class and rural blacks.\textsuperscript{27}

Postwar Nashville was also home to a growing black elite and middle class and was a destination for rural African Americans looking for wage work. Nashville’s black population increased by eighty percent in the 1880s and reached almost forty percent of the city’s population in 1890. Although African Americans could be found in all areas of the city, the poor and working class were confined to the “Black Bottom” of south Nashville. The middle class and elite settled around the black educational institutions of Walden University and Meharry College in the south and Fisk University in the north. Geographic mobility within Nashville led to a greater stratification within the black community than in cities like Atlanta where residential segregation was strictly enforced. In Nashville elite blacks and clergymen often sided with white reformers to address intemperance and crime in working class black neighborhoods. At the same time, they raised their voices in protest over white discrimination and segregation. Like aspiring middle class and elite African Americans across the South, Nashville’s black leadership embraced the mantra of progressivism and supported the expansion of a black business culture and economy. Nashville’s middle and elite classes continued the work of uplift in a discriminatory environment, while the city’s working class was forced to live in unsanitary conditions.

conditions and scrape out an existence on the margins of the city’s economy.\textsuperscript{28} Although the 1890s were witness to a solidification of Jim Crow, it remained a transitory period for segregation laws. For instance, Atlanta and Nashville did not have streetcar segregation on the books until the twentieth century, well after the fairs.\textsuperscript{29}

Nashville and Atlanta were quintessential New South cities. Their economies relied on the railway’s ability to transport agricultural goods through the city before heading north to be manufactured or consumed. Located at the centre of rail networks Atlanta and Nashville developed strong banking and business elites that sought to bring manufacturing to the South. A growing middle class of lawyers, doctors, teachers, and entrepreneurs serviced the expanding communities, while believing firmly that the New South Creed was the path to prosperity. However, despite the pretenses to an industrializing economy, Nashville and Atlanta remained intimately connected to the production of cotton and foodstuffs, lending both places an agricultural air. From an outsider’s point of view the cities were contradictory. They were modern and yet traditional. In the 1890s, with the United States in economic depression, both cities turned to international expositions to present a modern vision of their city and the South. According to this vision, northern capital would remake the South into an industrial and imperial hub and in doing so transform the nation. Atlanta and Nashville’s dream of the future placed the cities alongside New York and Chicago as drivers of a new American nation.


\textsuperscript{29} Dorsey, \textit{To Build}, 75; Doyle, \textit{Nashville}, 117. Atlanta’s segregated streetcar laws were passed in 1903. Nashville’s streetcar law did not go on the books until 1905 and was met by a citywide boycott led by members of the city’s African American elite.
Beginning with London’s Great Exhibition in 1851, international expositions became the premier spectacles of the nineteenth century. Crammed within their borders were contradictory and complementary cultures, epistemologies, sciences, and economies. Despite the cornucopia of images, spectacles, tastes, and sounds, the official rhetoric of the fairs was couched in a language of order and control. They were to be experienced as perfect worlds, where society’s elites harnessed the powers of industry and modernity and made them safe for all people. Expositions functioned as shrines to a belief in material and cultural progress, offering proof to its participants of a historical trajectory that led to the realization of a capitalist utopia. They were conceived of and perceived as spaces of representation, spaces in which the dominant order demonstrated, in a spectacular and grand fashion, its manufacturing, cultural, and racial superiority.  

Within much of the scholarly writing on international expositions the representative nature of the fairs has been widely accepted. In the expositions’ carefully planned and curated “White City,” society’s business and political elites expressed and maintained their hegemony.  

[Figure 1: Chicago’s White City]. Recent work on other cultural practices, however, suggests  

the performative possibilities located within the representational spaces of such cultural institutions. Fairs were spaces in which visitors, entertainers, and educators performed imperialism, consumerism, and modernity. Cultural institutions, such as expositions, functioned on a variety of levels, some which have been thoroughly explored and others only now opened to further analysis.\footnote{I have been particularly influenced by Judith Butler’s notion that gender is a performance dependent on place and social circumstance. Extrapolating from this we can see how all identity is a form of performance dependent on space and time. Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," \textit{Theatre Journal} 40:4 (1988): 519-533. For more on the performance of identity see Bennett, \textit{Birth of the Museum}, 69; David Guss, \textit{The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism as Cultural Performance} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 9-12; John Kasson, \textit{Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America} (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Jayna Brown, \textit{Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 3, 60, 129; Susan Brownell, “Introduction: Bodies Before Boas, Sport Before the Laughter Left,” \textit{The 1904 Anthropology Days and Olympic Games: Sport, Race, and American Imperialism}, ed. Brownell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1, 10.}  \footnote{Robert Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 2.}

In what is the best synthesis of the exposition movement in the United States, Robert Rydell’s \textit{All the World’s a Fair} argues that nineteenth century expositions were the foremost space of representation for America’s elite. To Rydell the fairs offered a “cohesive blueprint of social experience,” making the larger world comprehensible to the expositions’ provincial visitors.\footnote{Robert Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 2.} In a world in which modernity and capitalism fragmented everyday life, fairs presented a perfect world to white Americans. They functioned as a part of the late nineteenth century’s “search for order.”\footnote{Robert Wiebe, \textit{The Search for Order} (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).} The fairs were not passive spaces but embodied an active didacticism. They did not reflect American culture but shaped it. Beginning with Philadelphia’s 1876 Centennial Exhibition and ending with the 1916 San Diego Exposition, U.S. fairs employed a variety of cultural practices from scientific and technological displays to entertainment and
amusement to convince white Americans of their participation in the nation’s progress. According to Rydell, this not only had the effect of creating a sense of nationalism and belonging but also muted the fractious class divisions of modern industrial society. International expositions were key sites in which America’s elites expanded their cultural, social, racial, and political hegemony over U.S. citizens.34

The international exposition movement ordered an increasingly connected world, expanded the United States’ place in that world, and confirmed white Americans’ duty to uplift and civilize the globe’s “colored races.”35 The fairs’ anthropological exhibits confirmed an evolutionary hierarchy of humanity that placed Anglo-Saxons at the top and descended, largely according skin color, to the “lowest” races, namely Africans, Asians, and Aboriginal peoples. In addition to the scientific and staid exhibits of the nascent field of anthropology, international expositions’ Midways were full of ethnological “living villages” where fairgoers witnessed “primitive” and “uncivilized” behavior firsthand. “Dahommey Villages,” “Philippine Reservations,” “Chinese Villages,” and “Streets of Cairo” presented non-Europeans as backwards and primitive. In the safe environment of the expositions, white fairgoers traveled the world and confirmed their superiority. These entertainments were understood in direct contradistinction to the fairs’ White City. “Anthropological attractions charted a course of racial progress,” notes Rydell, “toward an image of utopia that was reflected in the main exposition buildings.”36 International expositions were important parts in the construction of a culture of empire, in which white Americans were given the task of subduing and civilizing the world.

34 Rydell, *All the World’s A Fair*, 236.
35 Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 5-8.
36 Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 235.
In Rydell’s analysis, the visitor to the exposition was a passive agent internalizing the lessons of America’s economic and racial elite. For Rydell the fair’s hegemony was static, incorporating the visitor in a preplanned order. His work ignores the ways in which hegemony resolves conflict relationally, creating an unstable balance. Hegemony is not the will of a ruling class but a temporary, multi-dimensional historical bloc that is composed of various class sections, subalterns, and dominated classes. It is, as Stuart Hall notes, a “system of alliances.” It is essential, therefore, that historians analyze the ways in which participants and visitors to the fairs performed their own modernities, sometimes in alliance with the fair’s prescribed order but just as often in contradiction or juxtaposition to the expositions’ hierarchical arrangement.37

In his study of the museum and related institutions, cultural critic Tony Bennett demonstrates the ways in which cultural institutions are arenas in which performances are both dictated and witnessed. As Bennett notes, “[by] summarizing the course of mankind’s advance and plotting its future path, expositions allow – invite and incite – us to practice what we must become if progress is to progress, and if we are able to keep up with it.”38 The exposition becomes a space that “constructs man in relation of both subject and object to the knowledge it organizes.”39 Fairs and museums were places where visitors performed their own modernity. Through their behavior and demonstration of “cognitive horizons” fairgoers participated in what it meant to be modern. At the same time, this performance was conducted before the gaze of one’s peers. New technologies of vision, such as the Eiffel Tower built for the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle, rendered the masses visible to their own inspection. The crowd became

38 Bennett, Birth of the Museum, 214.
39 Bennett, 7.
the ultimate spectacle and the means by which behavior was controlled. At the expositions society became self-watching, self-regulating, “a society watching over itself.”

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the state’s power of surveillance shifted from the state to its citizenry, forming what Bennett calls an “exhibitionary complex.” The state created new spectacles of power that did not seek to terrorize people by placing them on the outside of power but rather placed the masses on the side of power as its beneficiaries. At the expositions’ anthropological exhibits and displays of manufacturing superiority, white (male) fairgoers were witness to the Anglo-Saxon progress of which they themselves were the embodiment. Fairgoers became both the subjects and objects of knowledge. As Bennett explains, exposition visitors came to know power and “what power knows, and knowing themselves as (ideally) known by power, interiorizing its gaze as a principle of self-surveillance and, hence, self-regulation.”

Tony Bennett’s work makes clear that far from “blueprints of social experience,” expositions, museums, zoos, and other cultural institutions were places where modernity was performed. Exposition visitors demonstrated and practiced their gendered, racial, and modern identities. In their ethnographic and anthropological displays, girded by an ideology of progress, expositions provided a space where one encountered one’s ideal modern self both corporeally and cognitively. Just as new forms of discipline and surveillance made the population objects of knowledge/power, the exhibition/museum enabled people to become subjects of knowledge. Expositions were not only spaces of didactic representation but were the organization of performances that influenced visitors’ behavior and “cognitive horizons,” while allowing for multiple and alternative performances of modernity.

40 Bennett, 10, 69.

41 Bennett, 3.
World’s fairs present an opportunity to examine what happens when fairgoers break free from the act and perform their own understanding of modernity. Historian Paul Kramer notes that rather than a single blueprint of experience, “each fair was in itself a mosaic of widely varied cultural forms, each often uneasy with its neighbors.”42 For the visitor to the Philippine display at the 1904 St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the modern and the primitive, the self and the Other, became overlapping experiences. Rather than viewing imperialism as an expression of power and domination, the imperial discourse of the fair was marked by ambivalence. The colonizer and colonized were not diametrically opposed but linked in a complex relationship. The indigenous populations of the Philippines were viewed by fairgoers as both modern colonial subjects and anthropological objects, symbols of science and symbols of entertainment. Performances of the racial “other” denied Filipinos their coevality, while the place of their performance, the modern exposition, confirmed it. In their performance as both primitives and moderns, Filipinos disrupted the fair’s colonial order, obfuscating the ideological distance between spectator and object, citizen and foreigner.43

World’s Fairs created order out of the disorder of industrializing society. As products of industrialization, however, they often embodied the same disorder they sought to correct. Exposition halls, stuffed to the rafters with objects, were open to what historian Steven Conn


43 Here I am borrowing from the work of Johannes Fabian, who argues that late nineteenth century anthropology recognized the “primitive” as a contemporary ancestor, while denying their coevality by making the primitive an artifact of prehistory, rejecting their contemporaneousness. In her application of Fabian, Loren Kruger notes that the ethnographic showcase reinforced a false “ideological distance between primitive and modern.” Kruger, “‘White Cities,’” 21; Johhanes Fabian, Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
calls “accidental or unintentional” narratives.\textsuperscript{44} The sheer amount of exhibits meant that an adoption of a uniform narrative was tenuous at best. Gazing at the displays of industry and progress fairgoers conceived of their own dreams of the future that did not necessarily align with the expositions’ organizers. Likewise, the hodgepodge of the Midway offered a distinct alternative to the discipline of the fairs’ White City. It aligned the fairs with the future of mass consumption far better than the ordered displays of industrial progress, which spoke more to nineteenth century notions of the modern. Lastly, ethnological villages presented an image of empire at the same time as the actors and people put on display disrupted the image.

International Expositions, despite the pretenses of order, were open spaces. They were not prisons, asylums, or hospitals controlling and ordering behavior in a fixed environment. Expositions were records of a city, state, or country’s dream of the future, at the same time as they opened spaces for alternative dreams and hopes that contested, confirmed, and unsettled the expositions’ vision of progress and modernity.\textsuperscript{45}

At its core, modernity seeks the Enlightenment goal of ceaseless material and moral progress through an embrace of individualism and scientific rationality.\textsuperscript{46} In the late nineteenth century societal modernization permeated everyday life through the technological and scientific changes of the second Industrial Revolution. The growth in scientific consciousness, secularism,

\textsuperscript{44} Steven Conn, \textit{Do Museums Still Need Objects?} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 23.

\textsuperscript{45} Steven Conn notes that in much of the literature on museums and by extension expositions, museums “resemble penitentiaries, but with better interior decorating.” Foucauldian analysis can only go so far. The expositions were diverse spaces open to alternative possibilities, hopes, and dreams. Conn, \textit{Do Museums Still Need Objects?}, 3.

urbanity, wage-labour, mass consumption and markets, and the decline of traditional social orders, contributed to a cognitive transformation that idealized a new type of subject “set free from the constraints imposed by tradition to pursue [hers or his] own private ends.” Combined with a belief in a guiding telos that led to a material and moral utopia, modernity disrupted notions of permanency, producing a feeling of perpetual progress that sped up, dissolved, displaced, transformed, and reshaped the present, destroyed the past, and transformed the future.47

Modernity, however, was not an “acultural” process. Science, technology, industrialization, secularization, and bureaucratization are not culturally neutral forms or processes but are the result of what philosopher Charles Taylor calls a “constellation of values.”48 This does not deny a causal relationship between the modern subject and modernization but instead places modernization within a cultural framework. Modernity develops along various temporal lines within specific cultural, social, and “civilizational” contexts, producing not a single modernity by a wide variety of “alternative” modernities. A cultural framework opens up the examination of modernity outside of a single Euro-American modernity and allows for the possibility of studying multiple modernities. The notion of an alternative modernity, then, encapsulates, in the words of cultural critic Dilip Gaonkar, the ways in which “people ‘make’ themselves modern, as opposed to being ‘made’ modern by alien and impersonal forces, and where they give themselves an identity and a destiny.”49 For white southerners, their version of modernity would have to be Jim Crowed.


48 Charles Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity,” in Alternative Modernities, 175.

Jim Crow modernity contained the liberating impulses of late nineteenth century capitalism within the South’s racial and social hierarchy. Not backward looking, it saw a future in which modernity and capitalism dissolved the longstanding divide between black and white. Recognizing this, Jim Crow modernity at the fairs created, in the words of historian Walter Weare, a “utopian apartheid” in which whites and African Americans consented to a separate existence but agreed to work together for the general progress of the region and nation.\textsuperscript{50}

Southern whites and blacks recognized that late nineteenth century modernity was a force that could not be resisted at the same time as they identified the “Negro question” as central to the formation of a southern modernity. For southern blacks, the question came down to how they would be included in the modern world and, in the late nineteenth century at least, many approved of Booker T. Washington’s plan for industrial and technical education. By reconstructing black agricultural workers into a modern workforce, southern middle class blacks believed that they would be accepted into American modernity and their rights as American citizens and human beings at least partially recognized. For whites, however, the response to the question was maintenance of social and racial order through the implementation of both \textit{de facto} and \textit{de jure} controls on the participation of blacks in modern society. This debate over the answer to the “Negro question” shaped American modernity by making it Jim Crow.

In advertising Jim Crow modernity, the South’s expositions gave the United States a system of governance and control that extended to America’s nascent imperial adventures. In the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, natives were incorporated into an imperial modernity that was Jim Crow in nature. Imperial subjects denied formal citizenship and American rights were

expected to participate in the nation’s industrial and material progress while remaining a separate people.\footnote{As David Theo Goldberg notes in what summarizes both the colonial and the African American experience: “The colonized are inserted into global markets perpetually as laboring means, promised equality as economic players but perennially shortchanged as political and social equals.” Goldberg, \textit{The Racial State} (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 96.} Likewise, with the migration of blacks to the urban North, Jim Crow modernity became the \textit{de facto} policy of the nation. In the early twentieth century, politicians, sociologists, economists, and capitalists looked south for the answers to the day’s modern problems. “The Negro” as both an ideological construct and a lived experience became a central ingredient in the making of American modernity.\footnote{This is not to deny that “the Negro,” as concept, did not mean anything in the North until the arrival of southern blacks, instead the Great Migration re-ignited northerners’ attention to the Negro question. Jeremy Wells notes that the South’s plantations at the turn-of-the-century were viewed as solutions to the problems of a modern and multiracial industrial society. Race and its categorization, then, were essential to modernity’s construction of power. Wells, \textit{Romances of the White Man’s Burden: Race, Empire, and the Plantation in American Literature, 1880-1936} (Nashville: Vanderbilt Press, 2011), 5-7, 116. See also Goldberg, \textit{Racial State}, 108-116.}

Jim Crow was not a premodern or backwards looking system but a rational response by a racist society to the disorder of industrial capitalism. When placed in a racial hierarchy in which black inferiority was taken as fact, white paternalism in support of black progress created an image of a benevolent white South. While the reality was starkly different, the image of a progressive white and black South was essential to demonstrate the region’s modernity. Although blacks may have lagged behind white southerners, the fact that they were progressing was viewed as solid evidence for the South’s progress as a whole. In the spaces of the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions, southerners constructed their own interpretations of the New South. Jim Crow was a fluid and permeable reality that was reshaped by the very
people it sought to control. In doing so, southerners of both races performed and constructed their own Jim Crow modernity.\(^{53}\)

This dissertation is divided into two parts. The first looks at the built-environment of the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions and how two buildings—the Negro Building and Woman’s Building—defined the South to the nation. The second part is not focused on a particular building but rather demonstrates how the expositions were important sites of memory, patriotism, and empire. Chapter One traces the rise of the exposition movement in Atlanta and Nashville in the 1890s. For the cities’ economic and political elite a World’s Fair was a solution to the depression of 1893. It explores the machinations behind the expositions and the ways in which the fairs were representative of a New South vision of modernity and future of the region. Central to this vision was the place of African Americans in a modernizing southern society. Chapter Two examines the ways in which fair organizers presented a region of racial peace, while the African American elite used the Negro Buildings as a way to challenge the perception that they were unfit for modernity and industry. At the same time, working class African Americans and black commercial performers challenged both the fairs and black elites’ vision of the future.

Chapter Three moves the discussion to the ways in which New South women contributed to the cultural stability of a modernizing region. Presenting themselves as both New Women and keepers of the South’s best traditions, New South women suggested that the region could become new while maintaining the best of the old. In addition, southern white women, through

domestic exhibits, confirmed and accepted their roles as civilizing agents in a U.S. imperial future. On the other hand, African American women, denied a presence in the Woman’s Building, turned to the Negro Building as a way to present their middle class comportments and embrace the “politics of respectability.” Southern women, white and black, played key roles in the expositions’ narrative of a modern imperial South connected to its past.

Chapter Four compares the Atlanta and Nashville expositions to a growing literature that reconceives the South not only as a vassal to northern industrialists, as C. Vann Woodward had it, but as a launching point for empire. Expositions were central components in the late nineteenth century’s culture of empire. The Atlanta and Nashville fairs were products of a regional elite who viewed the South’s place in the nation and world through the lens of imperialism. The expositions suggested the ways in which the South could escape northern vassalage and become the launching point for a United States empire in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Pacific.

Central to a nascent U.S. empire was the need for a martial culture rooted in the South’s history of military action and defeat. Chapter Five suggests the ways in which Civil War reunions and military memory at the expositions reunited the regions through a language of remembrance and manhood. At the fairs, Civil War memory collided with New South hopes and formulated both a remembrance of the past and a hope for a southern future that restored the region’s military glory. Men from both sides of the conflict descended on Atlanta and Nashville to reunite in a spirit of reconciliation that allowed the nation to heal prior to the Spanish-American War of 1898.

The dissertation concludes by briefly examining the 1907 Jamestown Exposition held on Hampton Roads just outside Norfolk, Virginia. A decade after the Tennessee Centennial it presented a much-tempered dream of the future. Despite the best-laid plans of the region’s
ideologues, the South remained mired in an agricultural economy and culture that placed it at odds with the rest of the nation. Jamestown was the last of the South’s nineteenth century expositions. It linked a belief in providential progress with a dream of a capitalist and industrial utopia. For many southerners, the reality of the region’s economy, politics, and culture in 1907 made this dream uncertain. For African Americans the Jamestown Exposition’s Negro Building was representative of the ways in which their dreams had turned to nightmares. As segregation became entrenched the accommodationist vision favored in Atlanta and Nashville faded. The Jamestown Negro Building was met universally with scorn and faced a serious boycott. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the dream of the New South represented by the Nashville and Atlanta expositions looked less likely of coming true for the expositions’ organizers and proponents.

_Journalist Roger Riordan used the phrase “a dream of the future” to describe World’s Fairs after Buffalo’s 1901 Pan-American Exposition. The expression also accurately captures the sentiment behind the South’s expositions at the turn-of-the-century. Here in the spaces of Atlanta and Nashville was a waking dream of the future. For the region’s elite and middle class the fairs were representative of a dream for a New South restored to its economic and military importance within the nation. For southern women the fairs were an opportunity to dream of a region that managed the gendered transformations of urbanization and industrialization. African Americans, on the other hand, dreamt of a region and nation in which they would be included on the basis of their history and economic contributions to the United States. At the same time, the expositions were dreams: the economic, political, social, and racial realities of the South often differed, sometimes substantially, from the visions of the exposition organizers and building committees. The South’s international expositions, then, are important_
spaces to re-examine the formation of United States modernity. Rather than an outlier, the South adapted modernity to fit a racially hierarchical society that denied large sections of its population the rights of citizenship while encouraging them to participate in the industrial progress of the region. This dissertation moves the South and its racial system to the center of the modern American experience.\textsuperscript{54}

Chapter 1. “A Prophecy of our Glory and Power in the Future”: The New South Vision of the Atlanta and Nashville Expositions

“And looking at all this, at what the Parthenon signifies as well as what it embodies, captivated by the matchless serenity of its charm, realizing its contrast to the nineteenth century, one asks again: ‘To what result is all this pageant of American material progress going forward?’ And one turns hastily away lest one look too long upon the unattainable and lose heart and despair of his generation. And yet, at least, it has set before its eyes a model without compare.” – Nathaniel Stephenson, The Tennessee Centennial Exposition

On the day the Tennessee Centennial Exposition welcomed the President of the United States, the Governor of Tennessee, Robert Taylor, stood before six thousand men and women crammed into the Exposition Auditorium to hear a rousing speech in support of southern progress. Taylor began by attacking those who claimed that the South was full of “lazy and thriftless people” due to its “warm Southern climate that evaporates energy.” Taking target at those who resided in the “Northern suburbs,” he offered the Centennial as proof of southern development and the region’s place as a new industrial centre for the nation. The governor called on the nation to view “the triumphs of our brain and brawn and the tangible evidences of our activity.” For those men and women who still thought of the South as a land laid destitute by the internecine war of thirty years ago, Taylor suggested they would “appreciate the fact that we have wrought miracles” from the destruction. “This splendid Industrial Exposition,” he concluded, “is a prophecy of our glory and power in the future, [it] blossoms like a beautiful flower in the track of war, and is a token of eternal peace and brotherhood between the two sections….I believe in these industrial expositions. They are the flowers of progress; they are the
bouquets of civilization; they are the garlands of peace gathered from the gardens of human brains and human hearts, and they bloom only in the most enlightened centers of the world.” For the men and women behind Atlanta’s Cotton States and International Exposition and Nashville’s Tennessee Centennial Exposition, the fairs were a defining moment for the South. They demonstrated the region as one of the “most enlightened centers of the world.”

This chapter begins by exploring the motives behind the expositions, namely the belief in a providential progress that would restore the South to its proper place within the Union. It then moves on to examine the origins of the international expositions in Atlanta and Nashville before making clear some of the key architectural features of the expositions. It concludes by focusing in on a key phrase of the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions: the fairs were to be understood as “object lessons,” educating southerners in the ideology of progress, modernity, and industrial-capitalism. In the late nineteenth century objects were as important as texts to convey meaning and the expositions were understood in toto as presenting an argument for distinct southern modernity.

The Cotton States and International Exposition and the Tennessee Centennial Exposition were southern forays into the exposition movement. At the same time, they were infused with the South’s social, economic, and political realities. As much as they were a celebration of southern progress, at their heart was a desire to line the pockets of the region’s business and railroad elite. They aimed to cement the power of this elite by presenting a world of order and stability. Despite

Nathaniel Stephenson, *The Tennessee Centennial Exposition: First Published in the Cincinnati Commercial-Tribune, April 9, 1897* (Nashville, 1897), 32.

1 Herman Justi, *The Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition* (Knoxville, 1898), 237.

the rhetoric of “progress” and “perfection,” internationalism and “patriotism,” the expositions exposed the many fissures that defined southern life. At the fairs, the New South elite, consisting mostly of railroad executives, bankers, and local businessmen, attempted to create a perfect southern world that would attract northern investment, demonstrate to southerners the need for progress and industrial development, and situate the South as an important partner in the nation’s imperial future. Both educational and promotional, the expositions challenged the image of the South as backwards and rural. They were the region’s coming out party after which an era of glorious material and moral progress would restore the South’s prominence in the Union.

Given their centrality in the South’s economic growth, it is unsurprising that the railways were the major sponsors of the expositions. Phrased in the language of southern patriotism, the railroads maneuvered the expositions to their own economic advantage. Railroads advertised, gave financial aid, exhibited, and transported people and displays at reduced rates to and from the expositions. For the railroads the importance of the expositions was to advertise the South’s natural resources. ³ Railroads built impressive exhibits at the fairs to convince northern investors and potential immigrants to come south. Without the support of the railroads Atlanta and Nashville’s expositions would have failed to materialize or would have been greatly reduced in size and importance. ⁴

For the business and banking elite, whose fortunes were tied to the railways, the expositions were a way to combat the depression of 1893. Prominent Atlanta journalist Clark

³ Read What the South Offers to Industrious People in the Country Traversed by the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway (Nashville, 1896), 11. Southern Pamphlets, Rare Book Collection at the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. (Hereinafter RBC UNC).

Howell believed that the Cotton States exposition would be a “break-water against the tide of business depression.” Like the railroads, the southern business elite needed to attract northern capital to finance the exploitation of the region’s natural resources as well as fund their manufacturing interests. New South boosters hoped that the “exhibits of industrial and technical schools” would advance the South to a “higher type of industry.” The goal of the expositions for Atlanta and Nashville’s businessmen was to encourage manufacturing of all types, from “cradles” to “coffins.” The Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions were couched in a language of municipal and regional pride that intended to sell the South as a place of good investment and immigration.

The expositions were also intended to train and educate southerners in the advantages of industrial and commercial capitalism. At the South’s world’s fairs modernity became a learned repetition of acts. Within the space of the fair, visitors were asked to perform a modernity that was conducive to organizers’ New South vision. The degree to which visitors embodied the lessons of the expositions was, however, uneven. Rural and working class southerners, white and black, distorted the image of a harmonious and homogeneous New South. If education in modern life was a step forward for the southerner, what literary critic Dana Seitler has called a

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“progressive overcoming of self,” it was also shown to be incomplete. The sights, smells, and sounds of working class African Americans and whites undermined the New South vision of society. Although fairgoers were encouraged to both observe cultural displays and each other, the necessity to perform their own self-regulating modernity opened spaces for alternative performances. The heterogeneity of the fairs meant that individuals interpreted and internalized each cultural display in a myriad of ways. It also made clear that many southerners were uneasy with the proposed New South future. Unwilling to accept a new centralized authority rooted in the South’s cities these southerners questioned the message of the expositions. The reality of the fairs became not one of order but of contradictory cultural performances that contested southern elites’ “dream of the future.” The expositions presented a disjointed vision in which the region was emblematic of progress at the same time as they conceded the South lacked when compared to the North. At the expositions the New South ideal of an ordered society came “unhinged,” revealing the amorphous nature of southern society in the late nineteenth century.

Late nineteenth century Americans were obsessed with “progress.” The term was the watchword of the day. It summed up Americans’ belief in a divine path for the nation and invested meaning in the present. It was the word that most encapsulated the nineteenth century understanding of modernity and it was the expression most used in relation to the South’s

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expositions. Long viewed by northerners as a region without progress or at the least a slow one, the Atlanta and Nashville expositions’ celebration of southern progress was a clear rejoinder to the conception of a bifurcated nation.\(^{11}\) “It is in every sense a remarkable object-lesson of Southern progress,” reported *Leslie’s Weekly* of the Cotton States exposition. “It shows conclusively that the cotton States have accepted modern ideas and are determined to make the most of their opportunities and resources.”\(^{12}\) Connected closely to the nineteenth century conception of “civilization,” progress was an assertion of the South’s civilized status, its place on the forefront of “History,” and its racial advancement.\(^{13}\)

Exposition historian Paul Greenhalgh notes that the word ‘progress’ “appeared in more exhibition mottos and subtitles than any other in the century following the [1851] Great Exhibition.” Expositions were the main vehicle through which the idea of progress was demonstrated; that the world was moving forward, or as Greenhalgh astutely notes “appear to be moving, away from the grim actuality of contemporary life.”\(^{14}\) In crafting a universal History, Western Europeans and Americans placed themselves on the vanguard of time and classified others according to their “temporal and geographic positioning in history.”\(^{15}\) This rhetoric, as


\(^{12}\) John Y. Foster, “The Meaning of the Atlanta Exposition” *Leslie’s Weekly Illustrated* (December 5, 1895), 363.

\(^{13}\) Robert Nisbett in his study of the idea of progress comments that “[b]y the second half of the nineteenth century, the concept of progress had become almost as sacred to Americas of all classes as any formal religious precept.” Nisbett, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 204.


historians Gail Bederman and Daniel Bender have demonstrated, was interwoven with prevailing assumptions of race, class, and gender. With one in four Americans visiting expositions in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, world’s fairs were the premier spectacles of the period. Expositions were spaces in which the dominant order demonstrated in a spectacular fashion its cultural and social authority over an increasingly fragmented and interconnected world.

As much as nineteenth century Americans believed in the power of progress there was also a lurking fear of degeneration. Looking out upon large swaths of human history it was apparent that nations and empires declined as easily as they developed. Americans’ obsessive belief in the power of progress and civilization suggested a deep-rooted fear of the possibility of degeneration. According to their own logic, degenerates, in the form of racialized minorities, criminals, homosexuals and sexual deviants, the chronically poor, and the physically and mentally disabled, lurked among them. The depression of 1893, widespread poverty, and the violent class conflicts of the 1890s gave credence to the notion that perhaps degeneration was closer to the reality of life than endless progress. While degeneration was taken to be a part of natural and divine law, condemning degenerates by their own biology, many middle class and elite Americans also feared degeneration lurked inside them. They feared that an atavistic animal self existed beneath the surface of civilization and appeared sporadically leading to deviant and abnormal behavior among society’s better classes. Only by maintaining strict Victorian


behavioral codes, and providing space, especially for men, to release lurking atavistic behavior did the middle class believe that degeneration could be held at bay. Progress and degeneration were central to the way in which nineteenth century Americans understood themselves. Part destiny, part self-improvement, the discipline of progress operated as a bulwark against the degenerate tendencies of capitalism and industrialism.18

Atlanta and Nashville’s expositions’ celebration of progress was twofold. The first was to make clear that the South was a progressive and not degenerate space. The South’s rural economy and few cities confirmed northerners’ sense that the South lagged behind politically, socially, and economically.19 This also partially accounts for the inclusion of African Americans at the fairs. If, according to the day’s racial science, blacks were viewed as degenerate and lived mostly in the South, it was necessary to demonstrate that, at the very least, the black middle class was progressive, confirming the progressive character of the region as a whole. The second was centered on power. Those who were progressive, in this case the urban elite and middle class, were given an authority based in the laws of nature. By celebrating and presenting their progress, New South boosters claimed an authority rooted in natural and historical law and formulated a messianic vision in which all southerners joined the ranks of modern civilization. As the New Orleans Times-Picayune reported, the Cotton States exposition was “considered a white stone erected along the line of the south’s march of progress” and that the expositions marked the

18 Seitler, Atavistic Tendencies, 7.

“beginning of a period of industrial activity, building, advancement, investment and prosperity.”

The Atlanta and Nashville expositions were foreshadows of the Progressive movement that swept the South in the early twentieth century. Rooted in the South’s elite classes, the expositions promoted the region and its economy while seeking to model the lives of all southerners on bourgeois class values. In the words of historian Dewey Grantham, they wanted to “modernize the South and to humanize its institutions without abandoning its more desirable values and traditions….impose a greater measure of social order, to foster economic opportunity an development, and to protect the weak and unfortunate in deserving cases.” The expositions were trial runs in the social engineering campaigns of the opening decades of the twentieth century. As the first advertisements of southern progress, the fairs were the initial salvos of a new power rooted in the urban South that sought to reform the region in the twentieth century.

The Cotton States and International Exposition ran from the 18th of September to the 31st of December 1895 and grew out of an embarrassment over the representation of the South at the World’s Columbian Exposition. Thirty million people visited Chicago that summer and were witness to the greatest display of technological and commercial prowess the nation had ever seen. The paltry or non-existent exhibits from southern states were a major embarrassment to those southerners who made the trip to Chicago and served as an impetus for Atlanta’s business


21 Dewey Grantham, Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983), xvi. In many ways, the expositions were acts of class formation similar to that of the New York elite as described by Sven Beckert. See Beckert, The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
and political leaders to bring an exposition to the Phoenix City only two years after the close of the Columbian Exposition.\textsuperscript{22}

The idea for a great exhibition was conceived by William A. Hemphill, the founder and business manager of the Atlanta Constitution and was quickly taken up by other newspapers during the Christmas season of 1893. In short order the idea was brought to the attention of the city’s Chamber of Commerce. A committee of twenty-five leading citizens presided over by Samuel M. Inman, a local businessmen and prominent investor in railroads and banks, formed to investigate the feasibility of the enterprise. The idea was approved by the Chamber and the committee established a Guarantee Fund of seventy-five thousand dollars from the city with citizens contributing $134,000 for a total of $209,000. In the end, the exposition cost two million dollars. The idea behind the name of the fair was to make clear the South’s resources, while attracting trade from Latin America. A number of names were considered that explicitly connected the Atlanta fair to South America such as “The Cotton States and Sub-Tropical” and “The Pan-American” before “The Cotton States and International” was settled upon.\textsuperscript{23}

The lead committee, which eventually formed the exposition’s Executive Committee, was made up of men who came of age before and after the Civil War. It was the older men, however, that dominated the executive. Like their younger counterparts they imbibed the spirit of the New South and with “heart and soul” worked together “with oneness of purpose.” The exposition’s official history made clear the connection between the old and new: “Here was personified a greater truth which the outside world seems to have but dimly apprehended—that the new South and the old are one, in person and in spirit.” In the eyes of its organizers time


\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Cotton States and International Exposition and South}, 5, 13.
collapsed at the exposition where buildings could be built upon “old ruins” and the “superstructure of a new era” cemented “wherein the new light of the present is savored with the best ideas of the past.” For New South boosters this was an important point as many northerners interpreted the exposition to be the product of a younger generation. “We are dazzled by the near with its gauds,” claimed the Cotton States’ history, “while the pure light of the past streams over us to wake some future renaissance.”\(^{24}\) To New South spokesmen modernity did not destroy the past but collapsed it into the present, shaping the trajectory of the future.

Atlanta’s business elite readily contributed to the exposition viewing it as the best way to promote their commercial interests both nationally and internationally. It was also this international element that convinced Congress to give an appropriation to the fair. The executive committee, working with the State Department, made certain that most Latin American governments had at least heard of the exposition even if they had never heard of Atlanta. Hemphill was elected President but retired for “business reasons,” giving way to Charles A. Collier, a prominent banker in the city, who took on the role of President and Director General.\(^{25}\)

With a Guarantee Fund and an international component, the executive committee approached Congress for an appropriation for a Government exhibit. The participation of the federal government was essential if the exposition was to attract foreign exhibits. A committee of leading men along with representatives of commercial bodies from other southern cities, most notably the President of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, went before Congress. The most

\(^{24}\) *Cotton States and International Exposition*, 6-7.

\(^{25}\) *The Atlanta Exposition and South Illustrated* (Chicago, 1896): 7. Charles Collier was born in Atlanta on 19 July 1848. He graduated from the University of Georgia and was admitted to the bar in 1871. At the time of the exposition he was the Vice-President and Director of the Capitol City Bank, Chairman of County Commissioners, and Vice-President of the Georgia Loan and Investment Company. Collier had also served, alongside Henry Grady, as President of the Piedmont Exposition held in Atlanta in 1887.
significant feature of the committee, however, was the presence of three prominent African Americans: Booker T. Washington and African Methodist Episcopal Church bishops Wesley J. Gaines of Georgia and Abram L. Grant of Texas. On March 22, 1894 a group of prominent black Atlantans led by Gaines had gone before the Exposition Committee on behalf of the city’s black population and pledged their aid and support for the enterprise. Taking into account black Atlantans’ favor for the exposition, Samuel Inman suggested opening the exposition to African Americans as way to “stimulate the race by an exhibition of its progress, at the same time giving substantial evidence of the good will of the white people.” This fell in line with the white South’s campaign to determine that it alone had the answer to the “Negro question.” And, according to the official history, it was successful: “The good feeling extended to the Northern friends of the Negro, who accepted this action on the part of the Exposition Managers as an earnest act of good faith in the contention that the Southern people were the real friends of the black man.”

Washington, Gaines, and Grant each addressed the Committee on Appropriations on behalf of the exposition company. Their speeches were well received and led exposition chronicler W. G. Cooper to claim that the “presence and the assurance of a Negro exhibit did much to secure the appropriation.” Ultimately, Congress provided two hundred thousand dollars for the construction of a Government Exhibit in Atlanta on the condition that the Negro Exhibit be removed from the Government Building and given its own building. With the appropriation, which came in August 1894, the executive committee had just over a year to build and complete the exposition.

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26 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 7-8, 18.

27 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 8, 28. Cooper’s claim that the Negro exhibit did much to help the exposition cause is well founded. Both the official report of the congressional hearing on an appropriation for the exposition and the Treasury Department were certain that the inclusion of a Negro exhibit would be beneficial to region and nation and, perhaps mostly importantly, ticket sales. See 53d Congress, 2d Session: House of
After some delay it was decided that Atlanta’s Piedmont Park was the most suitable location for the exposition. In April 1894 the city leased the park from the Piedmont Company. The exposition’s construction progressed rapidly not least because the exposition was given the use of a chain gang for a year by the County Commissioners to construct and grade the exposition grounds. The decision to use a chain gang made many in the black press wonder how “friendly” the organizers were to “the Negro.” The Parsons Weekly Blade wondered how the exposition could demonstrate southern progress if convicts’ labor was used not only on the grounds but throughout the state. “The Atlantic [sic] exposition is to show the development and progress of the south,” wrote the Weekly Blade. “But no material development can excuse Georgia for continuing such a system as this in handling her convicts. It is a system which belongs to the dark ages.” Of the three hundred convicts employed by the exposition, the Savannah Tribune estimated that only fifty were white and that most were African American boys aged ten to seventeen. While the use of the chain gang suggested to the black press the South’s continued backwardness, historian Alex Lichtenstein has demonstrated the ways in which unfree labor was compatible to the region’s drive toward industrial modernity. The use of convict labor, then, raised questions over how free black labor would be in the New South vision presented by the expositions.  

Representatives: Report No. 1023; Treasury Department, May 21, 1894. House Committee on Appropriations, p. 20. Cotton States Expo 1895 – Souvenirs: Cotton States Subject File, Box 2; Folder 3. Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA. Hereinafter KRC.

The chain gang amounted to a one hundred thousand dollar contribution to the exposition by Fulton County. Despite the convicts and Atlanta’s best efforts the fair remained incomplete on opening day; buildings were half constructed, debris littered the grounds, and some exhibitors were late in setting up their displays. Added to this was a major break in the main that connected the pumps with the electric fountain, requiring the man-made lake to be drained and a new main installed. It took another month before the electric fountain was operational. Notwithstanding the professions of perfection and order, the first month of the Cotton States and International Exposition was anything but. Many potential fairgoers chose not to waste their money on an incomplete exposition and attendance was low, rising only with the arrival of the Liberty Bell in October and later with the visit of President Grover Cleveland.29

Given the soft attendance the exposition faced financial hardship and by October it was on the verge of financial collapse. The fair was two hundred thousand dollars behind, income was low, and two-thirds of gate receipts were mortgaged to bondholders. In addition, construction and electricity costs had been greatly underestimated. Although attendance rebounded in November, the exposition suffered from excessive debt and on the first Saturday of the month the exposition’s creditors ordered the Atlanta exposition foreclosed. On his way to the fair, the sheriff, as a matter of courtesy, stopped at Samuel Inman’s house to inform him of the bad news. Horrified at what was to happen, Inman proposed to raise one hundred thousand dollars in second-mortgage bonds with half the subscription coming from himself. He also lent the exposition fifty thousand dollars to help keep the fair afloat. In addition, Inman took control of the exposition’s expenditures, reducing every department’s payroll, salaries, and forcing department heads and officers to work without pay. These cuts, while generally not protested,

29 *Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 10, 18, 29.
did lead to a minor strike of Machinery Hall’s coal stokers, which was broken by having the exposition’s officials shovel the coal themselves.\(^{30}\)

The fair, saved financially, saw an uptick in attendance. On the 19\(^{th}\) of November, twenty thousand people attended Georgia Day, while a second Atlanta Day combined with South Carolina and Inman Day (a reward for saving the exposition) brought sixty thousand people to the fair. The exposition’s attendance was aided by hosting a large number of national associations’ annual meetings. For the last month and a half, the exposition’s attendance was so high that its final debt was insignificant. In the end, the Cotton States’ official record admitted that the “expense to the community had been very great.” However, it boasted that “twenty times as much had been realized by the business men of the city, while Atlanta added to her achievements one more miracle, greater and more brilliant than all the rest, increasing her laurels with international fame and winning the proud title of the bravest city in the world.”\(^{31}\)

Nashville citizens were no less obsessed with commerce and industry than Atlanta’s. However, unlike Atlanta, which was given the moniker “the Chicago of the South,” Nashville by the late nineteenth century had developed a reputation as “the Athens” of the region for its many institutions of higher learning. Although celebrating the South’s resources and prospects for industrialization, the Tennessee Centennial’s organizers wanted to make clear the South’s cultural sophistication.

The stated purpose of Nashville’s exposition was to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of Tennessee’s admission to the Union in 1796. The Centennial’s *Official History* proclaimed that while advertising and developing the “matchless and boundless resources of

\(^{30}\) Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 11.

\(^{31}\) Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 11-12; Justi, Official History, 219. Hosting annual meetings and special days was an important way for all expositions to ensure that attendance was decent.
Tennessee, to increase its population by inviting desirable settlers, and to increase its wealth by tempting foreign capital” was important, the exposition’s main goal was to honor and commemorate “the deeds of the pioneers of a great Commonwealth.” Indeed, the Centennial was explicit in its backward looking orientation, hoping to educate Tennesseans who were “ignorant” of the state’s history.32

The idea to celebrate Tennessee’s centennial with an international exposition came from Nashville lawyer Douglass Anderson. A year before the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Anderson sent a letter to the state’s major newspapers suggesting an exposition to celebrate the upcoming anniversary. Hoping to provoke a contest, Anderson named Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville, Columbia, Jackson, and Memphis as suitable cities to host the celebration. Anderson’s suggestion, however, was quickly forgotten in the initial financial panic of 1893. At a time when “labor was idle” and “capital in hiding” few were willing to invest the time and money to bring a great exposition to Tennessee.33

With economic stagnation continuing into 1894, several prominent citizens in Nashville came to view an exposition as a way to confront the depression and kick-start the city and state’s recovery. As a result, prominent Nashvillian, Captain W. C. Smith, floated the idea of hosting a world’s fair to celebrate the state’s centennial. “The financial depression and shrinkage in values in this city and throughout the county,” noted Smith in a speech to Nashville’s Commercial Club, “suggests and demands that an organized effort be made to divert the attention of our own people…from the general depression.” Club members agreed with Smith’s assessment and a

32 Justi, Official History, 3-4.
resolution was made to form a committee for the purpose of hosting a great exposition in Nashville. 34

The Commercial Club published its resolution to bring a World’s Fair to Nashville and the city and state press picked up on the idea. In early 1894 the club brought together a committee of twenty-five leading citizens to push for a State Convention in June. At the convention an Executive Committee was formed to establish the exposition’s departments and to ensure that the exposition remained on sound financial footing. Members of the Executive Committee formed a “Centennial Corporation” and each took out stock in the company. The committee was able to secure fifty thousand dollars from Davidson County. They were, however, unable to convince either the state or the city to contribute to the cause, both citing that private citizens had to contribute before public funds were made available. The Executive Committee began a massive publicity campaign for the exposition in early 1895 trying to elicit support from across the state but was met with general indifference. Due to the lack of interest a mass meeting was held on July 8, 1895 to determine whether or not there was to be a centennial exposition. In the end, it came down to whether Nashville would put up the funds. In a dramatic turn, late in the meeting city council arrived to tell the gathered group that the city would indeed contribute, with the consent of the state legislature, one hundred thousand dollars to the Tennessee Centennial Exposition Company. 35

The effect of this influx of capital was immediate. Led by Henry Mocker, a cooper who paid twenty-five dollars for a subscription, Nashville citizens rallied to the cause raising one hundred and twenty thousand dollars by the end of July. Also in July, the exposition company’s executive was reorganized and John W. Thomas, President of the Nashville, Chattanooga & St.

34 Justi, Official History, 15, 18.

Louis Railway, was made President of the company. Working without pay, Thomas guided the exposition company for the next two and a half years. His first order of business was to appoint Major Eugene C. Lewis, owner of the Nashville American newspaper and a civil engineer, Director-General of the exposition.36

Nashville’s West-End park was chosen as the site of the exposition and work began on the grounds in August 1895. In September plans were drawn up for the buildings with an exact replica of the Parthenon, to highlight Nashville’s Athenic qualities, the central feature. Construction started quickly and by October the foundation and cornerstone were laid. As work continued throughout 1896, the fair’s construction became an important source of income for Nashville’s labor force hit hard by the depression. The exposition also created a small boom in Nashville proper as a “City Improvement Club” formed to improve the sanitary conditions of the city, reduce smoke, remove fences, improve lawns and beautify homes. Despite the progress and support of Nashville’s citizens, it became clear to the exposition executive that the Exposition Company, without support from the state or federal government, would not be financially secure if the fair was held in 1896, the year of Tennessee’s centennial. Moreover, fearful that the election of 1896 would be too acrimonious and political tensions too great, the fair’s organizers pushed back the exposition a full year to the 1st of May 1897 and ending on October 30th. Despite the delay, work continued through 1896 and the state dutifully celebrated its centennial on June 1, 1896 at the unfinished exposition site with fireworks, a parade, reception and speeches.37


In late 1896 the Centennial Exposition was still without a federal appropriation. After careful lobbying and with support from Tennessee’s federal representatives a bill was finally passed in December giving the exposition one hundred and thirty thousand dollars of which thirty thousand was to go to the construction of a Government Building. Despite the federal appropriation the Tennessee State Legislature was averse to fund the exposition. A relic of the reaction to the over-spending of the Reconstruction era, southern state governments were reluctant and sometimes constitutionally restricted from giving funds to private enterprises. In the end, Tennessee gave the exposition only half of its requested one hundred thousand dollars of which thirty thousand dollars was to go to the Agricultural Building. Nevertheless, because of the financial acumen of the exposition’s executive committee, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition was one of the few world’s fairs that cleared all its debts.\(^38\)

There was one final hurdle for the Exposition Company: West-End Park was technically outside Nashville city limits, making the exposition “wide-open.” It could not be policed by the Nashville force nor could there be restrictions on the sale of alcohol. Nashville’s conservative citizens rallied against the exposition fearing it would corrupt the city’s weaker denizens. In response, the Centennial executive proposed that the exposition be incorporated as its own city giving it the power to fine, raise a police force, and restrict the sale of liquor. After some debate in the State Legislature and with the blessing of the Tennessee Supreme Court the two hundred acres of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition grounds were incorporated as Centennial City. Like other cities, Centennial City had a mayor and Board of Alderman, although these positions were not voted offices but appointed by the Tennessee Centennial Exposition Company. The new city’s Board of Alderman were authorized by the State to pass city ordinances necessary for the “preservation of good order and to protect the city’s morals and its health.” The Centennial

city’s charter allowed the city to create and fix “fines and penalties for the violation of these ordinances, such as gambling, selling whisky, brandy, etc., breaches of the peace and improper conduct generally.”\textsuperscript{39}

Laws against drunkenness, gambling, carrying deadly weapons, and prostitution were to ensure that the fair did not succumb to the problems of the modern metropolis. Other ordinances suggest that the fair’s organizers believed that visitors would not know how to behave in urban public space. Laws banned public nudity, cross-dressing, indecent or lewd acts, walking on the grass, and bathing in the “interior waters of the ground.” Clearly the Centennial executive believed that some visitors needed instruction on the correct performances of modern public behavior. By August, four months after the start of the fair, the city council added more ordinances. These new laws prohibited fireworks, music, explosives, keeping disorderly house, disturbing the peace, soliciting trade or alms, and smoking in buildings. The Centennial city council targeted exhibitors who sold alcohol after eleven on weeknights and eleven-thirty on Saturday and who kept a “disorderly house, or permit in his house or any tenement in his possession under his control, any person to be drunk, noisy and boisterous in his behavior, to the annoyance of any person.”\textsuperscript{40}

The Centennial City established its own police force known as the Centennial Guard, which enforced city ordinances as well as operated as a \textit{de facto} fire department. Every member of the force was required to sleep within the grounds and no guard was permitted to leave the fair without a pass. The Centennial Guard’s equipment consisted of a light cavalry sabre, a club, and pistol. Their uniform was Confederate grey and trimmed with black braid and edged with red cloth. Herman Justi, the Centennial’s official historian, commented that they made a “fine

\textsuperscript{39} Justi, \textit{Official History}, 92-93, 411.

\textsuperscript{40} Justi, \textit{Official History}, 489-91.
appearance in this neat and soldierly dress.” Beyond the guards, malevolent fairgoers could find themselves at the mercy of the Centennial City’s Secret Service Bureau, run by a former Pinkerton and consisting of 233 men. Those caught were judged at the city’s court presided over by the mayor. In what was essentially a police state, the Centennial Executive created a world of seeming harmony. But as the second passing of ordinances suggest, fairgoers did not follow the rules and disturbed many of the social decorums and public behavior expected by the Centennial City.

When the Tennessee Centennial Exposition opened on May 1, 1897 it was the largest and grandest exposition ever held in the South. Its stated purpose was to “show [Tennesseans’] patriotism, promote industrial, commercial, and educational progress, illustrate the perfection of art, the progress of science, the genius of invention, and, in fact mark ever step in the onward march of civilization.” Perhaps because of Atlanta’s exposition only two years earlier or because of the other expositions sprouting up in response to the success of the Columbian, national press attention was minimal. Nevertheless, for the five months of the exposition Nashville welcomed over one and a half million fairgoers.

For the expositions’ organizers the most important piece of evidence for the South’s progress was the fairs’ built environment. The grounds and buildings were object lessons writ


42 Justi, *Official History*, 408.

43 “All Roads Lead to Nashville” (Nashville, 1897), 1. Microfilm Reel 127: No. 15. SNMAH.

44 Justi, *Official History*, 439. The total attendance at the Tennessee Centennial was 1,786,714 but as the first truly international exposition in the South, Atlanta received the most national attention of any fair held in the region.
large with the power to shape visitors morals and behavior.\textsuperscript{45} As a result, the directors thought long and hard about the style and architecture of the fairs. Deeply influenced by Chicago’s White City both the Cotton States and the Centennial’s executives wanted to create a uniform site that suggested order and strength compared to the disorder and heterogeneity of Atlanta and Nashville proper. The White Cities of the exposition movement offered an explicit contrast between the top-down approach of the fair and the democratic disorder of the actual nineteenth century industrial city. “It is the accompaniment played by the distant city to the spectacle of the fair that makes the present exhibition to such peculiar interest,” wrote Nathaniel Stephenson of Nashville.\textsuperscript{46} Expositions were “fairylands” that overpowered with their “beauty” and “perfection.”\textsuperscript{47} At the same time, rather than simply follow the Beaux-Arts style of Chicago both executive committees wanted to put their stamp on city creation.

In Atlanta the dominant architectural style was the out-of-date Romanesque. Nashville, on the other hand, looked to ancient history by choosing Classical as its \textit{motif}. Both decisions presented a linear history in which past glories connected to the present and suggested an ordered and uniform future. In Atlanta there was some debate over whether to use a local architect but in the end the Buildings and Grounds committee decided, due partly to style and partly to budgetary concerns, to go with New York architect Bradford Gilbert to design and supervise the construction of the fair’s twelve main buildings. Gilbert, who had made a moderate name for

\textsuperscript{45} Tony Bennett, \textit{The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, and Politics} (New York: Routledge, 1995), 48. In the nineteenth century architecture was considered a “moral science.” It was believed that good architecture had the power to control and tame people’s behavior.

\textsuperscript{46} Stephenson, \textit{Tennessee Centennial Exposition}, 7.

\textsuperscript{47} “The White City more resembles fairyland than a material creation so wondrously complete is it in detail, so surpassingly beautiful and perfect as a whole,” reported the Charlotte \textit{Observer}. Whitehaed Kluttz, “The Nashville Exposition” Charlotte \textit{Observer}, July 4, 1897, p. 4.
himself in rail station design, planned six of the main buildings and was the supervisory architect for the other half.\footnote{Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 30. For a more in-depth biography of Gilbert see Bruce Harvey, “World’s Fairs in a Southern Accent: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, 1895-1902,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, Department of History (Nashville, 1998), 115-116.}

Despite the committee’s hope for a uniform architecture it was, in the end, undercut by its own decisions and budgetary restraints [Figure 2: Cotton States Exposition]. Whereas most expositions invested their time and money into exposition buildings, Atlanta’s were built in a roughshod manner. Gilbert in an article for Harper’s commented that as opposed to other fairs that used wood framing and staff, cost limitations meant that wood and shingle were used for many of Atlanta’s buildings.\footnote{Gilbert was able to see some benefit in this technique: it would advertise Georgia’s yellow pine. Bradford L. Gilbert, “The Architectural Features of the Atlanta Exposition,” Harper’s Weekly: A Journal of Civilization (September 21, 1895): 892.} Many of the buildings also diverged from the exposition’s Romanesque plan. For instance, local architect Walter T. Downing designed the Art Building in the Italian Renaissance style. In a bizarre decision the exposition’s Administration Building and main entrance was given a medieval design. The building was a composite of “old baronial castles.” The main tower recalled the Rheinstein, while the entrance archway “frown[ed] down with its deeply embedded windows and loop-holes,” and was entered through a doorway modeled on “the old door of the bloody tower, a part of the famous Tower of London.” The corner of the building represented Warwick castle a “magnificent specimen of ancient feudalism.”\footnote{The Cotton States and International Exposition. Pamphlet. Cotton States and International Exposition (1895: Atlanta, Ga.) – Souvenirs: Cotton States Subject File: Box 2; Folder2. KRC.} Gilbert took an almost perverse pleasure in frightening fairgoers as they entered the exposition grounds: “[A]s the visitor passes underneath the huge iron-spiked portcullis and past the threatening battlements and turrets, his imagination may cause a rise in his normal
temperature, and although he may not be able to enjoy the reality as some of us have done, he will hasten inside to breathe more freely.”

The twelve buildings of the exposition’s “White City” housed the fair’s departments and were accompanied by an additional sixteen structures not including the amusements of the Midway Heights. The twelve main buildings were the Manufactures and Liberal Arts, Fine Arts, Administration, Fire, Auditorium, Agriculture, Mines and Forestry, Machinery, Negro, Transportation, Electricity, and Woman’s Building. The exposition also erected the Georgia Building, whose state constitution “embarrassingly” prevented it from erecting its own building. The additional sixteen buildings represented a hodgepodge of interests. The most significant of these was the U.S. Government Building, which housed exhibits from the federal government as well as the Smithsonian Institute. In addition to the Georgia Building, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Illinois, New York, and Massachusetts constructed buildings to house exhibits. Despite the exposition’s overtures to Latin America, Costa Rica was the only foreign country to construct its own building. The East Indian Pavilion accompanied it as the other foreign exhibit with a separate building. The Plant System of Florida and the Southern Railway were the two railroads with buildings. Lastly, scattered around the exposition grounds was a cabin from the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, a “modern school house,” a “modern jail,” and a chimes tower.

The hodgepodge nature of the exposition undercut the executive committee’s desire for order and perfection. While the main theme was Romanesque, the Woman’s, Fine Arts, and Georgia Manufacturers’ Buildings were more classical than romantic. Although Gilbert’s

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52 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 30.

53 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 29-35.
“modern Romanesque” style was associated with urban design, the exposition’s naturalistic setting in Piedmont Park and the buildings’ shingled walls muddled the overall plan. The Cotton States and International Exposition’s appearance confused more than it clarified.54

Compared to the Cotton States exposition the Tennessee Centennial presented a uniform and architecturally ordered space. If the effect of the Cotton States’ overall plan was to confuse, the Centennial’s classical buildings and symmetry clarified the fair’s New South vision [Figure 3: Tennessee Centennial Exposition]. The choice of a classical motif emphasized the progress made by Nashville and the South in the years since the Civil War. Classical architecture also referenced in the minds of older southerners the decades before the war during which time planters mobilized antiquity as the basis for a proslavery argument and modeled plantation houses and public buildings on classical forms. At the same time, while classical architecture marked the fair’s progress, it also could suggest that when compared to the glories of ancient civilizations the South might be lacking or even degenerating.55

The Centennial maintained a high standard of cleanliness unheard of in real cities. In contrast to Nashville proper, the exposition’s White City formed a “heterotopia” in which southern society’s utopic desires were translated into a present reality.56 However, in the quest to create a “perfect” city the exposition exposed southerners’ unease with modernity. “[A]cross

56 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16:1 (Spring, 1986): 22-27, esp. 26. Foucault used the term “heterotopia” to describe spaces in which humans attempt to present and create a utopia. In Foucault’s analogy one’s vision in a mirror would be utopia, while the mirror itself would be a heterotopia. Heterotopia’s serve as spaces of illusion that expose real space or creates another real space that makes spaces outside a heterotopia look ill constructed and jumbled.
from [the exposition], on the other hill, there are changes that mark the presence of human misery,” wrote Nathaniel Stephenson:

The rolling masses of smoke eddy in and out among the steep slopes of the city, settle about the base of the Capitol, or stream up upon an idle wind and wrap the Capitol in grey. They are the banner of the modern city, and the modern city is another name for woe. All through the pageant of the fair here will abide this double game of hide and seek—on the one hill, with the light of heaven; on the other, with the dusk of the modern struggle for existence.  

In late nineteenth century Nashville, notes historian Don Doyle, horse manure “joined by the garbage, privy fumes, and contributions of assorted dogs, chickens, and hogs, [to create] an abominable stench on hot summer days. Dead animals were left in the streets for days before being dragged by the city scavenger to the river to be dumped.” The exposition space proclaimed a modern utopia at the hands of the New South elite, whereas the actual city of Nashville laid bare the cruel privations of industrial capitalism.

Every night garbage was removed and the Centennial City was equipped with a modern sewage system that unlike Nashville provided clean drinking water to visitors. In these ways, the Centennial was to be experienced as the perfect city. Following the path of Chicago’s White City, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition created a perfect world that was ephemeral. By presenting a city that ordered and enclosed technology and race, the Centennial allowed fairgoers to participate in a fantasy world where the dangers and industrial realities of the everyday were obfuscated. In this fantasy world, fairgoers escaped the constraints and frustrations of daily life

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58 Quoted in Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 76.
brought on by increasing change and racial instability. Put your faith in the New South, the fair seemed to say, and the glories of the past will combine with possibilities of tomorrow to create a future of order and peace, safety and good health.\(^{59}\)

The buildings of the Tennessee Centennial matched those of the Cotton States exposition and other international expositions. There were, however, some differences. Of the main buildings, Nashville’s Fine Arts Building differed the most as it was held in the Parthenon. Instead of a Manufactures & Liberal Arts Building, Nashville had a Commerce Building. It also added three other official buildings in the form of the Children’s, Hygiene and Education, and History buildings. States that erected separate buildings were Alabama, Illinois, New York, Texas, Arkansas, and Kentucky. The cities of Cincinnati, Knoxville, Louisville, and Chicago also erected buildings on the grounds. Shelby County (Memphis) constructed a small-scale replica of a pyramid to go with its city’s namesake. The only official foreign building was the Mexico and Central America Building. Peripheral buildings located in the White City included the Lion Roof Garden Restaurant, a replica of the Rialto Bridge, the Railway Terminal Station, a Casino, the Knights of Pythias building, a Club House, Photography Gallery, and an emergency hospital segregated by race. One of the crowning structures of the exposition was the Centennial Flag Pole, which stood three hundred feet high and built from southern lumber. The exposition also featured working cotton and tobacco fields.

Because of the long lead-time, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition was a singular architectural achievement. Despite having ten different architects or firms design the buildings, it was able to maintain uniformity. The classical style allowed the Tennessee Centennial Exposition to make claims on its past, present, and future. The nature of the buildings along with the copious amount of Greco-Roman inspired statutory referenced several histories at once. By

\(^{59}\) Justi, *Official History*, 98.
adopting a classical motif Lewis placed Nashville squarely in the realm of southern, American, and Western tradition. At the turn of the century, classical design made claim to a city’s modernity. With the beginning of the City Beautiful Movement, uniformity and order with reference to the classical past was viewed as the epitome of modern city design. As architectural historian Catherine Bishir notes, “political and cultural elites drew on the imagery of past golden ages to shape public memory in ways that supported their authority,” presenting a vision of “stability, harmony, and patriotism.”

In his Opening Day address, J. W. Thomas made clear the Centennial’s purpose as an “object lesson” that would inspire the “youth of the land” to “undertake still greater achievements and strive to reach perfection’s heights.” A. G. Brown argued in a Nashville Banner article that it was time the South devoted itself to “the education of the masses and communities.” In an echo of Karl Marx, he continued:

[A] revolution is going on in our lives and manners, our habits and opinions, wherever steam power and electric agencies go, and that these agencies are doing their work in every quarter of the globe. Old things are passing away, and all things are becoming new under the influence of forces which disintegrate the past and reveal the future. Dead and dying rapidly are the many subjects of contention which alienated nations and divide


parties heretofore, while the social arrangements of men are conforming themselves more
and more to the doctrine of the common brotherhood of all.63

In this world where “every thing that is solid melts into air, everything that is holy profaned,”
Brown suggested that the fair’s “intelligent men and women” go to the Nashville, Chattanooga,
& St. Louis Railway exhibit to “be guided in their efforts to render the surface of the earth a
more pleasing abode for the habitation of rational beings.”64

The exhibits housed in the Manufactures and Liberal Arts/Commerce, Agriculture, Mines
and Forestry, Machinery, Electricity, and Transportation buildings tied directly to the New South
program of industrial and commercial progress. The Fine Arts, Woman’s, and Negro buildings
presented exhibits that outlined paths to cultural improvement alongside the New South’s vision
of a stable social, cultural, and racial hierarchy. The objects contained within these exhibits
became a “set of resources” through which southern fairgoers actively inserted themselves in the
New South vision of the fairs, placing themselves as contributors in its development.65 The
sights, sounds, smells, and haptic qualities of the exhibits were a powerful argument for the New
South. The spectacle and sheer volume of exhibit space and the displays themselves joined with
their ordered and sequential display to allow visitors the opportunity to identify with power: to
see the New South vision as their own and regulate and channel their behavior to best affect its
outcome. This power, as Tony Bennett makes clear, was “manifest not in its ability to inflict pain
but by its ability to organize and coordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the


64 Brown “Centennial Exposition,” 3; Karl Marx and Frederich Engels, The Communist
Manifesto (New York: Penguin Books, 2011); Marshall Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air:

65 Bennett, Birth of the Museum, 47.
people in relation to that order.” The Cotton States and International Exposition and the Tennessee Centennial Exposition were spaces in which southerners, white and black, were asked to join and contribute to the New South’s “imagined community.”

Contained within each building were exhibits and displays meant to educate, train, and inspire. While each exhibit reflected the exhibitors’ desires and intentions they tended to promote the New South vision of the fairs. The exhibits often contrasted inferior methods and products of the past with the superior items of the present while suggesting the possibilities for the future. For instance the *Official Catalogue* of the Cotton States described the exhibits of the Transportation Building as creating a teleological history: “There can be seen the slow, tedious and cumbersome methods employed in ages past, and down through the succession years to our present time; the contrast causing us to wonder the yet possibilities of the great unknown future.” Exhibits such as these confirmed the path laid out by New South boosters. The past was “slow, tedious and cumbersome,” the present was better, but the future was filled with unknown possibilities that could be only achieved through the New South program of industrialization and social and moral improvement. The exhibits of the exposition’s buildings operated as “performative resources” meant to program one’s thought and behavior in the task of securing the South’s modernity. “The character of its exhibits is largely the character of an exposition,” wrote Walter Cooper in his history of the Cotton States exposition, “and in this case


68 *The Official Catalogue of the Cotton States and International Exposition* Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. September 18 to December 31, 1895 (Atlanta, 1895), 87.
they illustrate its purpose and the ideas upon which it is built.”

The exhibits in each of the buildings were meant to educate and instruct, “[t]o disseminate knowledge and instruction in all branches of the arts and sciences that tend to make life more pleasant and comfortable, and to promote the general welfare of the people.”

New South spokesmen understood the South’s image problem was based on reality. In a pamphlet published between the expositions, the Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis Railway admitted as much: “An impression prevails extensively North, that people of the South are exceeding ignorant. To a certain extent this is true. The number who can neither read nor write is a burning shame to the legislation [sic] of the South.” While not addressing the literacy skills of southerners, the expositions did address southern ignorance. Journalist Charles Kindrick reported back to New Orleans that the Atlanta “exposition is an educational factor for the southern people, and all should see it who can….The influence of the world’s fair on the taste of the people of this country is manifest in almost every home.” A. G. Brown in the Nashville Banner connected civilization with the “education of the masses and communities” at the Centennial exposition. The Highest Board of Award in Atlanta released a statement saying that “the good of an exhibition of this kind will be manifested in the improvement of popular intelligence and industry, in diffusion of correct standards of taste and skill.”

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69 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 73.

70 New York at the Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, GA (Albany, 1896), 229.

71 Read What the South Offers, 7. I’ll leave the irony of this sentence to the reader.


74 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 75.
Northerners, especially, were interested in the educational possibilities of the expositions. “The grown folks,” wrote Maude Andrews for Leslie’s Weekly, “will see all sorts of interesting things at the Government building in the morning—real object-lessons to their ignorant eyes…What a great education this will be to the farmers cannot be calculated.”75 New South spokesmen residing in the South’s cities reiterated this view. The Atlanta Constitution in an article entitled “The Exposition as an Educator” hoped that the “farmers of the south will make it a point to visit the exposition with their families to the end that they may enjoy the vast benefits which the great show confers on those who study its various features.”76 The railroad and business elite behind the exposition wished to demonstrate the South’s progress, while acknowledging that the region had a ways to go. By both promoting and educating they planned to kill two birds with one stone.

Within the expositions’ buildings the educational nature of the fairs was made clear. The Cotton States and International Exposition’s Manufacturing and Liberal Arts Building measured 260 by 351 feet with a floor area of over one hundred thousand square feet, making it the largest and most imposing building of the exposition. Inside, massive trusses, constructed in graceful curves, supported the roof, while a raised gallery along the edge of the building’s interior allowed for more exhibit space as well as an elevated perspective on the crowd below.77 In Nashville the Commerce Building served the same purpose, and like Atlanta it was the largest and most imposing of the exposition. At 591 by 315 feet it was almost twice the size of Atlanta’s

75 Maude Andrews, “The Atlanta Exposition” Leslie’s Weekly Illustrated (September 26, 1895): 199.


building. The dome of the building rose to a height of 175 feet, while its interior featured aisles and naves outlined by elevated galleries twenty-five and forty-five feet high. These buildings were cathedrals to commerce. They contained manufactured products from across the globe, making them a “microcosm of the industries of the world” and presented “conclusive proof of the progress of mankind.” 78 They overpowered, disorienting the visitor in “a maze of beauty and attractiveness.” 79 They erased the processes of production for the products themselves, creating wonder at the organizational power of the southern elite to produce stupefying technology. 80 At the expositions production and consumption were explicitly linked. They made clear the consumptive possibilities of industrial capitalism, showing the products that would flood the South if the region had a more industrial workforce, a steady source of capital, and a modern people.

The Manufacturing and Liberal Arts and Commerce buildings brought southerners a global cornucopia of manufactured and commercial goods. In doing so, they presented a New South that viewed status not simply as one’s place within the community but by what one could buy and own. It was a South removed from the old bonds of rural communities and replaced by the disorder and dislocation of the marketplace. 81 At the same time, in their overwhelming size and comprehensive nature, they hid this disorder by presenting a façade of order and control. Fairgoers may have felt overwhelmed by the buildings at the same time as they were given over

78 New York at the Cotton States, 173. In Nashville the Foreign Section of the building amounted to forty thousand square feet and featured exhibits from Italy, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Russia, France, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Hungary, Belgium, Canada, China, Japan and Switzerland. Justi, Official History, 333.


80 Bennett, Birth of the Museum, 81.

81 Ayers, Promise of the New South, 19-20.
to trust the men who were able to plan and construct them. To believe that the New South vision of the expositions would bring about this utopia of consumer goods and cessation of wants and desires.

While the Manufactures and Liberal Arts and Commerce Building presented a world of commercial possibilities, the expositions’ Agricultural Buildings confirmed the South’s strength in agricultural production. The exhibits contained within the buildings were more than could be found at a typical agricultural fair. They presented the New South vision of a diverse and modern agricultural economy. Measuring 150 by 300 feet with a central dome rising 107 feet, the Cotton States’ Agricultural Building presented a comprehensive picture of the South. Exhibits featured the region’s agricultural possibilities, grains and livestock that were raised in the South but also the commercial products and implements related to agricultural production. Its purpose was twofold. On one hand, the building demonstrated to southerners an agricultural world that moved away from subsistence and cash crops, to one in which diversified agriculture linked to industrial production created a southern world filled with wonderful agriculture goods and wares. On the other hand, it demonstrated the agricultural-based possibilities available for northern investment. The building contained exhibits like that of the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company of Winston, North Carolina, which featured a display made entirely of tobacco. In its exhibit, Reynolds demonstrated the South’s bounty of tobacco—the entire display could be made of it—while making clear the productive and consumptive possibilities of the agricultural commodity—the entire display could be consumed. Other corporations followed Reynolds’ lead and were made entirely of corn and cereals. Consumption of the products was also encouraged. “Pretty girls in smart caps, gowns and aprons are in attendance,” reported the New York committee to the

82 New York at the Cotton States, 185.

exposition, “and liberally supply visitors with samples of their wares, most of which can be devoured on the spot or carried away without further trouble.” Aligning well with the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, the Cotton States and International Exposition’s Agricultural Building presented a South open for business, while giving an opportunity for southern companies and industries to participate in a tradeshow like atmosphere.

The Tennessee Centennial Exposition’s Agriculture Building took a more didactic tone than Atlanta. If the Cotton State’s building was to demonstrate the commercial and industrial possibilities of southern agriculture, Nashville’s building intended to instruct southerners in modern agricultural practices. The Tennessee Centennial’s Agriculture Building was double the size of Atlanta’s and featured a central dome of 100 feet with six lesser domes, four of which surrounded the centre dome. The Centennial’s building originally was constructed by the exposition company but was later sold to the state of Tennessee when it finally approved an appropriation for the fair. As a result, the exhibits became more of an advertisement for Tennessee as place of investment and immigration than originally intended. Although the building contained agricultural goods and wares, it was known for its colossal paintings of Tennessee agricultural life. These paintings maintained the racial hierarchy of Tennessee agricultural production. If the black-run Negro Building conveyed the industrial and commercial possibilities of African Americans, the white-run Agriculture Building made sure to locate them back in the fields. The most popular and largest painting was that of a cotton field featuring “negroes at work…the baskets of the pickers standing out conspicuously.” The tobacco painting was painted in all the shades of the plant and “represented a negro working in a field of

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84 New York at the Cotton States, 185.

85 Justi, Official History, 360.
tobacco.” As much as the building advertised the bountiful crops of Tennessee it also advertised that in the New South, African Americans continued to do the backbreaking work of the region. In this New South vision old racial hierarchies were maintained and potential immigrants led to believe that if they came to start a farm they would not be the one’s doing the hard work of picking the cotton or tobacco. It was an agricultural utopia built on the backs of the region’s rural African Americans; it was Jim Crow modernity.

Training rural southerners in modern farming techniques, with their reliance on commercial fertilizers not only would improve overall production but bring southern farmers under the influence of the region’s business and commercial elite located in Nashville. The Tennessee Centennial’s Agriculture Department conveyed the need for modern agricultural techniques and instructed southerners in these methods by locating two cotton and tobacco fields outside the building. Herman Justi noted that the “exhibit was to show what improved methods of cultivation can do in the increase of the cotton crop.” It was tough to make a go of cotton in Tennessee so “the intention of this experimental field was to show what improvement might be made over the present slip-shod methods of cultivation; to demonstrate that upon suitable land, highly cultivated, with liberal use of commercial fertilizers, it could be made remunerative.” Despite the modern nature of the fields, their laborers were distinctly of a traditional form: African Americans were seen working daily.

Perhaps no building more clearly communicated the idea of progress than world’s fairs’ Machinery Buildings. The machine and technology were central to late nineteenth century claims of progress and it was doubly important for the South, a supposedly backward agricultural

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region, to demonstrate its technological prowess. Both the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial’s Machinery Buildings were imposing structures, each measuring over forty five thousand square feet and centrally located on the fairgrounds. In both buildings, exhibits featured displays of machines and technologies from companies and individuals across the South and nation. They demonstrated the path of progress. In the machines of the age, southerners were witness to technological development that was to improve their lives and place the United States on the forefront of human history. “Fires glow in the great furnaces; wheels, big and little, whirl in every quarter; great leathern belts wind their way about the building; dynamos generate untold volts of electricity; pumps and lathes, planes and drills are hard at work, all obediently responding to an unseen but irresistible force, and blending into a comprehensive scene of activity that stirs the pulses and quickens the brains of the lookers-on,” reported the New York committee of Atlanta’s Machinery Building. In order to demonstrate the perfectibility of a technological age the buildings themselves erased the smoke and smut of late nineteenth century industry. At the Centennial Exposition’s Machinery Building all of the power sources, belts and ropes, smells and smoke behind the machines were contained in a separate building and hidden from sight. The result was to hide the “unsightly, to exclude artificial heat, and to avoid the smell of oil…in order that a splendid line of exhibits might be inspected with comfort during the hottest days of the summer.” The reality of industrial progress, then, was obfuscated, the terror and heat of the nineteenth century factory erased for the comfort of middle class observers.

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88 Paul Greenhalgh comments that at world’s fairs the “most frequently suggested vehicle for achieving the goal of progress was technology.” Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, 24.

89 *New York at the Cotton States*, 205.

The Electricity Building also contributed to the New South vision of industrial, and material progress. Electricity in the form of the electric light was still a new experience in the 1890s. Although its use had increased, for many Americans but especially southerners, electricity was something to be feared. Throughout the 1880s and early 1890s national magazines carried an ongoing debate weighing the costs and benefits of electrical power. Electricity at the expositions contributed to more than lighting the fairs but were a means by which the experience of electricity was normalized and made safe. John P. Barrett, in charge of electricity at the World’s Columbian, noted that the fair “brought electricity to the people in the light of a servant not as an awful master.” For the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions the possibility of using electricity in agricultural production was one of the main goals of the fairs. Charles Kindrick, who connected electricity with “human progress and human happiness,” came away from the Atlanta exposition believing that in the near future “farms will be cultivated, crops harvested and labor performed by electricity.” The Atlanta and Nashville Electricity Buildings in their display of the “rapidity of electrical development” and the demonstration of the “practical application [of electricity’s] many and varied uses,” made electricity and electrical apparatuses comprehensible to southerners and suggested the possibilities of an electric future.

The use of electricity to light up the fairs created wonder and awe as night turned to day [Figure 4: Tennessee Centennial at Night]. “While the crowd stood wondering with delight, the wizard had waived his wand, and a scene of enchantment was spread out on every side.”

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wrote Herman Justi. “The genius of electricity had been invoked.” Electricity was key to making the White City into a fairyland as “thousands…were drawn to the Exposition nightly to witness what experts pronounced the greatest triumph thus far achieved in electrical lighting and decoration.” References to expositions as fairylands, especially at night, were central to making the new technology feel safe. The idea that the exposition connected to something outside of reality, a fairyland where the problems of the everyday were removed, allowed “technologies to be experienced in a relaxed, leisure atmosphere where machines seem to enhance sensory experience, enrich pleasure, and become servants to human whims.” Introduced to electricity and electric light, all southerners, white and black, urban and rural, were witness to the future at the Atlanta and Nashville fairs.

In creating an overwhelming display of technology, the expositions tapped into what historian David Nye calls the nineteenth century’s “technological sublime.” The technological sublime was the religious feeling aroused by the “confrontation with impressive objects,” it “emerge[d] from and help[ed] validate new social and technological conditions.” The tens of thousands of light bulbs that lit up the expositions at night were a manifestation of a New South future in the present, creating an overwhelming argument for the path laid out by New South boosters. Recalling his trip to the Centennial from Monteagle in rural Tennessee, Walter Morgan remembered the electric lights as one of the defining features of the exposition. Morgan

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97 *Official Catalogue of the Tennessee Centennial*, 53. The fairs did indeed use tens of thousands of light bulbs. For instance the Tennessee Centennial featured 18,000 incandescent lights, 12,000 of which were used only for decorative purposes.
also recalled his traveling companion, Ms. Levan, responding when asked what she thought of the electric lights: “Well honey, I thought I seen the glory of God.”

While educating southerners in the ideology of progress, the exhibits of the expositions also trained their bodies in middle class comportments. In Atlanta the Machinery Building featured an exhibit of “Physical Training and Condition; Hygiene” that contained displays of “public baths, lavatories; sanitary appliances for ventilation, drainage, sewerage, disinfection.” In Nashville, the Hygiene and Education Building featured all sorts of products related to cleanliness and hygiene. One of the more peculiar and overtly didactic spaces proposed for the Cotton States exposition was the Model Workingman’s House, which was to be occupied by a family of four throughout the length of the fair. The purpose of the house and exhibit was to demonstrate what could be accomplished on an income of five hundred dollars a year. The cottage was furnished with “all the conveniences and comforts of life” and every day “the head of the family” received a day’s worth of the five hundred dollars. The Constitution reported that the “moral of the exhibit will be to show just what amount of comfort and happiness can be secured from a small income” and that the “display will be watched with great interest and the poor, as well as the rich, will learn the lesson of economy that is intended to be taught.”

The workingman’s house presented the New South vision for a content and servile working class. It embodied and legitimated the ideology of the region’s mill owners who controlled the space of mill hands’ living quarters and the factory floor to stem a rising class-consciousness amongst southern white workers. With the region settling after the Populist uprising of the early 1890s,


100 “Seeing the Sights” Atlanta Constitution, July 22, 1895, p. 5.
the workingman’s cottage was a lesson to both the New South middle and working class that the region would feature a distinct racial and class hierarchy.  

The open spaces of the fairs and congregation of visitors at popular places that encouraged one’s gaze to pass from the objects on display to each other ensured the visitors entered an “exhibitionary complex.” Writing of Vanity Fair, Herman Justi reported: “Some are there merely to see and to be seen, and some merely to see without preference of being known at all. But the general desire is to be seen, and it was curious how many people who held themselves most carefully aloof from the mildest sort of a sensation…exhibited sensation indicating pleasure when told on the streets: ‘I saw you doing Vanity Fair last night.’”  

If they internalized the lessons of the fair, behaved in an orderly fashion, and trusted their more educated betters, southerners were told that a capitalist utopia was around the corner.  

While most of the buildings contained within the White City outlined the material paths of progress, the expositions’ Fine Arts Buildings presented moral, cultural, and intellectual progress. They were also the buildings that made most apparent, according to late nineteenth century logic, the ways in which the South and southerners lagged behind the North and Western Europe. At World’s Fairs the Fine Arts Building presented culture as a “hierarchical system, 

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separating the high from the popular, the functional from the ethereal and the expensive from the cheap.” It moved the exposition beyond a “trade fair” and into the realm of culture. It was in the Fine Arts Building that the cultural sophistication of the host city and visitor became apparent, the place where it was necessary to maintain middle class comportments.

In Atlanta and Nashville it was apparent the degree to which the South lacked in the high arts. In Atlanta the exhibits of the Department of Fine Arts were classified geographically, four-fifths of which came from either New York or Philadelphia with nearly one-tenth from France, the Netherlands, and Italy. The South was barely represented. Cooper in his history tried to make amends for this by suggesting that many southern artists resided in New York and that in the South women made up “a large majority of Southern artists” and so their work was placed in the Woman’s Building. Nevertheless, he could not escape the fact that: “Practically all [the artwork] came from cities outside the Cotton States.”

Although positioning its Fine Arts building at the center of its exposition in the Parthenon, Nashville nevertheless betrayed the degree to which the South lacked a modern high culture. While Atlanta had difficulty securing the major modern artists of the period, Nashville was successful in bringing in paintings by Claude Monet and members of the impressionist school. Theodore Cooley, head of the art department, secured works by the great artists of the day as well as work by “old masters,” including Raphael and Rembrandt. However, by bringing a truly credible and international art exhibit to Nashville the lack of southern artists was noticeable when compared to the preponderance of great European artwork.


104 *Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 77.

105 Art historian Judy Larson is skeptical that all the works of the “old masters” were authentic. Larson, “Three Southern World’s Fairs: Creating Regional Self-Portraits through Expositions,”
Despite the lack of southern artists, the expositions’ fine arts buildings were the best places to inculcate middle class behavior and transfer cultural capital to fairgoers. Beginning in the eighteenth and extending into the late nineteenth century, high-art was viewed as a way to improve society.\textsuperscript{106} The purpose of the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial’s art buildings was to improve southerners by training their behavior and morals in modern bourgeois society. Not simply paintings and statues, the exhibits of the art building were “props which the visitor might utilize for particular forms of self-development.”\textsuperscript{107} By mingling with the middle class and observing their behavior toward art, it was hoped that rural and working class southerners would emulate bourgeois comportments. In doing so, the organizers of the expositions attempted to transfer cultural capital to the southern masses. French Marxist sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, has noted that capital as culture can exist in both “embodied” and “objectified” states. Embodied cultural capital is the “correct” ways one acts in a primarily middle class context. It must be worked on and is, therefore, linked to self-improvement. Objectified cultural capital, are objects invested with cultural meaning that allows for the improvement of one’s status. Objects, such as paintings, transfer cultural capital to their owners. Southern expositions’ fine art departments pedagogically and didactically attempted to transfer cultural capital to visitors thereby improving the standard of southern culture overall.\textsuperscript{108}

Various ways were attempted to control and manage fairgoers’ behavior in the art buildings. In Nashville a special prize was awarded to the best painting as chosen by fairgoers.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{106} Larson, “Three Southern World’s Fairs,” 15-17.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{107} Bennett, \textit{Birth of the Museum}, 10, 100.}

with the result that it “made many visitors to the Parthenon study carefully…the excellent collection so admirably placed for such a purpose.”\(^{109}\) Guidebooks and souvenir catalogues helped explain to visitors the meanings and various schools of paintings. The presence of guides and greeters made sure that rules prohibiting loud or offensive talk and the touching of exhibits were enforced. In Atlanta, all canes and umbrellas were to be checked for a fee of five cents to prevent fairgoers from poking holes in the paintings.\(^ {110}\)

In addition to this hands-on approach both the Atlanta and Nashville dailies ran amusing “true” stories of southerners’ ignorance and naïveté of art. Hidden in these comical pieces were instructions on how to behave in modern spaces. One story poked fun at rural fairgoers who believed that all the paintings in the Parthenon were painted for the exposition. Another suggested the value of the paintings to readers by making fun of a man who offered fifty dollars for one of the most expensive and most popular paintings at the fair. The stories were also willing to laugh at members of the middle class, indicating the way in which the southern *nouveau riche* were still somewhat unsure of themselves. “There came into the building a lady who was well-dressed and who had a refined and intelligent look,” reported the Nashville *Banner*. After spending some time looking at the sculptures and paintings in the Parthenon, she stopped and asked the attendant: “Will you be kind enough to tell me where the art gallery is?” As she began to leave she stopped to say: “I want to be somebody’s pardon.” Comical pieces created a sense of superiority in the reader over their bumbling characters, while at the same time teaching the proper behavior and reverence required in presence of high culture.\(^ {111}\)


\(^{111}\) “Heard in the Parthenon” Nashville *Banner*, October 25, 1897, p. 6. Throughout the length of the Cotton States exposition, the southern dialect humorist, Betsy Hamilton, ran a running gag of
The expositions combined uplift ideology with the commercialization of the art world in the late nineteenth century. Herman Justi noted that there were “few public or private galleries in the South, and the wall of her rich and well-to-do citizens have, until recent years, been almost bare of fine pictures.” The Fine Arts Buildings exposed not only the South’s dearth of artists but also the lack of sophistication of its most respected citizens. In nineteenth century society the possession of art signified one’s place in the social hierarchy, the South’s lack of galleries, both public and private, threatened the expositions’ thesis of southern progress. As a result, the fine art buildings not only trained fairgoers but also stimulated the commercial art market. In the six months of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition one hundred and twenty-five works of art, pictures, and statuary were sold to southern collectors alongside commissions for future work.

The Tennessee Centennial’s fine arts building went beyond the normal scope of an international exposition by constructing an exact replica of the Parthenon. While fine arts buildings were essential to assert a cultural hegemony that extended beyond the realm of trade and commerce, Nashville placed art at the center of its exposition. No single building was more commented on and discussed than the Parthenon. It was the singular achievement of the exposition and is still a prominent feature of Nashville’s present-day Centennial Park. The Parthenon, however, hid a deeper meaning for late nineteenth century Americans. The New South’s faith in progress and its concomitant fear of degeneration became

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saliently entwined in the Parthenon. Looking upon the Parthenon, southerners and Americans wondered if the Faustian pact of industrial capitalism was worth it.\textsuperscript{114}

The Parthenon stood on an elevated terrace at the centre of Centennial City. Because it contained the exposition’s fine arts exhibit it was the only fireproof building at the fair. It was constructed of a stone foundation, concrete floor, brick walls and a glass roof in a steel frame. Molded staff combined with fifty-eight fluted columns to give the building an exact imitation of the original exterior of the temple. The \textit{Official Catalogue} noted that the “sculpture on the pediments, metopes and frieze, as well as the painting, are in strict imitation of the original, and furnish an object lesson in classic architecture never heretofore seen in this country.” Two large doors provided access to the building, while a glass roof let in light. Outside the temple stood a forty-three foot high statue of Pallas Athene, while inside stood another statue of the Greek god.\textsuperscript{115}

While the Parthenon was a celebration of the past, it marked the progress of modern civilization through its “synthesis of the past” and its “prophecy of the future.” Although the epitome of architecture, the real Parthenon lay in ruins in Greece. In Nashville it was resurrected to its former glory, demonstrating the power of the present to bring back and make perfect a wonder of the past. In its collapse of time and space the Parthenon provided lessons for Americans. “It means, in a word,” wrote A.G. Brown, “that the more we study and imitate the creations of genius among those who have gone before us, the more we shall fan its flame and guide its direction to those who come after us.” Through the Parthenon, Brown drew a direct link between Greek civilization and American, read white, civilization. In the representation of the temple time did not flow linearly but exploded into the present in a cyclical fashion: “As bees

\textsuperscript{114} Justi, \textit{Official History}, 113.

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Official Catalogue of the Tennessee Centennial}, 86.
make the comb the same way in every hive, so civilized man repeats the same ideas, institutions and construction in the same order of progression forever. That is to say civilizations are alike and all strive after the same ideals.”116 The Parthenon in Nashville was the South’s statement it had arrived in the modern world by connecting the city to the glories of the ancient.

In spite of this enthusiasm for the past, many observers saw the Parthenon as a troubling object lesson of the rise and fall of civilization. To many, the ruins of the original Parthenon stood as a “monument to the birth, glory and decay of the first great republic.” “Can it be possible that our modern republic is fast approaching the zenith of its glory,” wondered one dignitary on Nebraska day. The same dignitary pleaded with the crowd to continue to invest their time and energy in supporting “our development as a republic” through the practice of their “moral and intellectual greatness” lest they too become ruins of the past.117 The temple condemned the modern world as its presence allowed an escape from the “stormy modern element” by fixing one’s attention on the “majestic simplicity, that sublime union of grace, dignity, power, which is the genius of the Greek race embodied in the Parthenon.” Some fairgoers upon confronting the building were led to ask, “What result is all this pageant of American material progress going forward?”118


117 “Great Celebration in Honor of Nebraska at the Exposition” Nashville Banner, October 8, 1897, p. 1.

118 Stephenson, Tennessee Centennial Exposition, 30-32.
Late nineteenth century Americans of all classes and races did not universally accept the pace of technological change that the international exposition movement celebrated. Even as present-time thickened with the simultaneity of electricity and the wireless, Americans looked increasingly to the past as a site of truth and meaning.\(^{119}\) As Dana Seitler has argued, “the disorienting experience of modern time—gave rise to a paradox: modernity sought a break with the past, but that break necessitated the past’s return.”\(^{120}\) The Parthenon represented this paradox. At the same time, the fairs inculcated a belief in the power of modernity and progress to transform the South. Fairgoers were made to understand that they were key components in the region’s industrial and modern future.

The fairs’ dream of the future was neatly captured by a *Puck* magazine illustration of the Cotton States exposition titled “The New South—The Triumph of Free Labor” [Figure 6: The New South]. In the left foreground stands a strong white male worker wearing a sash labeled “free labor.” He stands with one a foot on a plough while resting on a hammer, surrounded by bricks and industrial gears. He looks out approvingly at the crowd entering the fair. On the right side African Americans, dressed in their Sunday best, enter the exposition while paying respect to a statue of Abraham Lincoln. Behind them two Civil War veterans walk arm-in-arm, embodying the nation’s reconciliation. In the background is the Cotton States and International Exposition glowing under a rising sun labeled “prosperity.” Here was the New South vision of a region remade by industry and modernity: free labor brought prosperity. In this idealized illustration we see the New South’s dream of the future. While the reality was starkly different,


\(^{120}\) Seitler, *Atavistic Tendencies*, 1.
the vision of a biracial industrial society was real for the organizers and supporters of the expositions. At the same time, the illustration in *Puck*, a satirical magazine published in New York, suggests the ways in which nonsoutherners did not quite believe the South’s supposedly free labor would lead to general prosperity for all. For the time being, however, New South boosters continued to dream.\footnote{121 Udo Keppler, “The New South—The Triumph of Free Labor” *Puck* 38:972 (October 23, 1895), centerfold.}

Southern expositions, like all international expositions, were not homogenous spaces. Contained within the exhibits and displays of the White Cities were myriad of complementary and contradictory belief systems. The fairs looked to the future, while celebrating the past. They praised the machine, while remaining ambiguous of its true effects. Architecture suggested the stability and achievements of the past and subtly condemned the modern city. And yet, despite these contradictions, the South’s expositions attempted a unified vision. The exhibits of the fairs trained southerners in a particular ontological system: one that celebrated and made few excuses for the southern past, spread middle class values in the present, and suggested a future utopia in which a class and racial hierarchy joined to form a peaceful yet powerful South. It created a uniquely southern teleology of Time and History. As we shall see it was a modernity based on the segregation of race, a Jim Crow modernity.
“At the national exposition in Chicago…the only recognition that was given to the negro was to take care of the toilet rooms.” – Bishop H. M. Turner, “To Colored People” Atlanta Constitution

“I think that it is time to show them that we, the colored people of the south, have accomplished something—that we are indeed a great people, and that we have a future before us which very few of them dream of.” – H. R. Butler, “The Colored Exhibit” Atlanta Constitution

“Two surprises were in store for the thousands of visitors who assembled in Atlanta […]. One was the negro exhibit, the other was the exhibit of the negro.” – Alice Bacon, The Negro and the Atlanta Exposition

On a late September day in 1895 the prominent African American spokesman and emigrationist booster, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, toured the grounds of Atlanta’s Cotton States and International Exposition alongside a reporter from the Chicago Inter Ocean. Looking at the displays of industry, education, and agriculture in the Negro Building, Turner commented that he had “no patience with the talk about the new negro as workman.” Blacks had always done the bulk of the labor in the South and to display them as workers was nothing new. Instead Turner placed “new negroes” in a different category. New Negroes were not laborers but African Americans participating in the new world of
commercial amusements and, far from being a positive force, brought blacks down in the eyes of whites.¹

Upon leaving the Negro Building, Turner and his companion strolled down the Midway. Stopping in front of the Dahomey Village, Turner remarked: “Here must be the ‘new negro.’” Confronting the white spieler, Turner demanded to know why, “you white men pursue the negro to Africa with your lying? You have for years lied about the negro in this country, and now...you are lying about the negro at home on his native heath.” The spieler demanded to know what this man could possibly know about Africa to which Turner replied that he had recently spent time in Africa pursuing missionary and emigrationist causes. Turner assured the gathering crowd that while West Africans “may be heathens and uncivilized,” they were “more peaceable and gentle than many of you civilized and enlightened white men here in America.” For fairgoers at the Cotton States exposition the Dahomey Village was an authentic taste of Africa, but Turner suggested that the “wild negro cannibals you have here, cavorting around like apes and baboons, never saw Africa. They are lazy, good-for-nothing negroes from New York, or some other town, where they have been taught to jump about like monkeys and yell like hyenas, while you tell these people that they are talking in their native tongue. Stop your lying about the negro!” The astonished journalist reported that the “crowd shouted, the showman looked stupefied, and the Bishop walked down the Midway, telling me there was no new negro.”²


² L. W. B., “Is He a New Negro?,” 41-42.
This brief anecdote makes clear the opportunities and spaces opened by the international expositions for African Americans to confront and challenge the white racial structure of the region and nation. In the liminal and ephemeral space of the Midway, Turner confronted a white man and the white race in a crowd of whites. At a moment when the growth of Jim Crow laws were limiting African American political and social participation in southern society, Atlanta’s Cotton States and International Exposition and Nashville’s Tennessee Centennial Exposition gave blacks an opportunity to voice their own narrative of the South’s past, present, and future. A narrative that often contested the one presented by whites.³

At the same time, African American participation in the expositions demonstrates the dialogic nature of black identity in the late nineteenth century. Many African American leaders adopted the rhetoric of progress and Social Darwinism. Far from challenging the methods of racial science, aspiring blacks challenged its conclusions. The expositions make clear a rising stratification within the black community and a growing tension among black spokesmen. Turner was prominent in emigrationist circles, and while he supported the cause of the Negro Building, he saw the future for African Americans in Africa not America. To the commissioners and organizers of the Negro Exhibits the future was a different New Negro than the one disparaged by Turner. In the space of the Negro Building they hoped to demonstrate the progress made since emancipation. To them the New Negro was educated and well versed in the modern techniques of agriculture and industry. Exemplified by Booker T. Washington’s “Atlanta Compromise” at the Cotton States, these black spokesmen located the future of African Americans as a separate and vibrant race rooted in the South. Lastly, while Turner was wrong about the Dahomey

³ David Guss, *The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism as Cultural Performance* (Berkeley, 2000), 8-11. Following the work Mikhail Bahktan, cultural anthropologist David Guss suggests the liminal nature of such events. By allowing African Americans to participate in their expositions, white southerners included blacks in the discursive space of the fair, opening avenues to celebrate and criticize southerners’ interpretations of the past, present, and future.
Village—the performers really were West Africans—he makes clear a growing divide within the black community. Some working class African Americans joined the culture industry and its commodification of black culture as a way to escape the old economies of the South. The expositions’ Old Plantation amusement, which featured blacks playing themselves in slavery, suggests the ways in which some African Americans exploited racist stereotypes as a means to participate in modern and sophisticated art forms. In an era and region in which blacks were excluded from even moderate paying jobs, working as a minstrel artist offered opportunities to escape agricultural and manual labor.4

In the face of these multiple performances and representations of blackness, attempts to present an ordered vision of race at the fairs came “unhinged.”5 As Alice Bacon, a white teacher at the Hampton Institute, wrote shortly after the Cotton States and International Exposition:

“Two surprises were in store for the thousands of visitors who assembled in Atlanta…One was the negro exhibit, the other was the exhibit of the negro.”6 The problem for many was which Negro took center stage.7


5 Kramer, “Making Concessions: Race and Empire Revisited at the Philippine Exposition, St. Louis, 1901-1905” Radical History Review (Winter 1999), 75-114, esp. 102. Kramer argues that the St. Louis exposition’s presentation of a perfect empire became “unhinged” by the performances of colonial subjects at the fair.

6 Bacon, The Negro and the Atlanta Exposition, 11.

At the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions the southern African American leadership embraced a historical narrative that had as its end a modern capitalist utopia. This chapter examines the ways in which African Americans adopted a modern persona and challenged images of blacks as a static and backwards people prior to the Great Migration. The Negro Buildings’ exhibits of progress and African American fairgoers’ performances of bourgeois sensibilities presented an image of African Americans as full participants in modernity, while at the same time confirming a southern racial order that separated black from white. In doing so, southern black spokesmen and women contributed to the formation of a Jim Crow modernity, in which African Americans functioned in society as a separate yet modern people. Jim Crow modernity was not a new idea, it was taking hold across the South, but at the expositions it was distilled down to a consumable ideology.

Speaking two months prior to the Tennessee Centennial, Richard Hill, chief of the Negro Department, asserted that southern blacks were on trial, facing “the most severe test as to what we have done, are now doing, since our emancipation.”8 Demonstrating the industrial, material, and educational progress of African Americans, the Negro Buildings presented an image of blacks as a progressive future-oriented people; an image many hoped whites would notice.9 The

8 Herman Justi, *Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition* (Knoxville, 1898), 196.

9 Fitzhugh Brundage argues that the optic nature of the Negro Buildings was quite intentional. Brundage, “Meta Warrick’s 1907 ‘Negro Tableaux’ and (Re)Presenting African American Historical Memory,” *Journal of American History* 89 (March 2003), 1368-1400, esp. 1369.
buildings’ make clear an engagement with a discourse of progress rooted in late nineteenth century conceptions of modernity. The buildings and exhibits were a direct challenge to an emerging racial science that suggested blacks were degenerating and incapable of progress. Frederick Hoffman, the influential actuarial scientist, claimed in 1896 that African Americans’ inherent racial traits and tendencies “must in the end cause the extinction of the race.” The evidence of material and moral progress presented by the Negro Buildings explicitly confronted these conclusions. For the buildings’ organizers Social Darwinism was wrong on one level; they themselves were evidence that not all African Americans were degenerating. They did not, however, question its methods and instead transposed degeneration and primitivism onto different classes and people.

The narrative of progress adopted by African Americans at the expositions was simultaneously liberating and constraining, dialectic and dialogic. Culturally, and perhaps biologically, the southern black elite argued they were different from Africans and lower class


blacks. The expositions’ Dahomey Villages and other displays of atavistic blackness made clear
the advancement of Africans in America to both black and white visitors. In comparing
themselves to “primitive” people, black spokesmen simultaneously embraced the science of
Social Darwinism while separating themselves from other people of color who had yet to
progress to the level of the black middle class. African American fairgoers, like the Negro
Buildings, performed a definition of blackness that was linked to the narratives of progress
presented at the South’s expositions. The ability for some blacks to perform modernity separated
them from others who failed to adopt a modern persona. Those who successfully navigated the
fair established themselves as “New Negroes” with a fully modern persona that suggested their
ability to transcend history and enter the ranks of a progressive middle class.13

The organizers behind the Negro Buildings were drawn from the South’s black elite. In
Atlanta the building’s commissioners consisted of well-known African American spokesmen
from each state in the region.14 On the other hand, Nashville’s Negro Committee was a local

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13 In her study of W. E. B. Du Bois’ photographic exhibit of middle class African Americans at
the Paris Exposition of 1900, historian Shawn Michelle Smith detects a “counter archive” that
contested the scientific image of blacks and the logic of biological racism and eugenics. This
chapter avoids Smith’s binary notion of a “counter archive,” preferring instead a dialogic model.
Smith, Photography on the Color Line: W. E .B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture (Durham:
Duke University Press, 2004): 44l. Writing on Meta Warrick’s “Negro Tableaux” at the 1907
Jamestown Exposition, Fitzhugh Brundage has come to a similar conclusion: “Warrick’s
work…was not a counternarrative per se but instead fit easily with the prevailing grand narrative
of social progress and upward mobility (for whites).” Brundage, “Meta Warrick’s 1907 ‘Negro
Tableaux,’’” 1371-72. See also Weare, “New Negroes for a New Century.”

14 The Official Catalogue of the Cotton States and International Exposition (Atlanta, 1895), 134.
The Negro Commissioners were as follows: I. Garland Penn, Virginia, Chief; Booker T.
Washington, Alabama; Rev. A. E. P. Albert, Louisiana; Jesse Lawson, District of Columbia; M.
M. Lewey, Florida; G. V. Clark, Tennessee; W. H. Crogman, Georgia; R. J. Perkins, West
Virginia; Isaiah T. Montgomery, Mississippi; W.A. Hawkins, Maryland; J. B. Middleton, South
Carolina; W. H. Stewart, Kentucky; W. C. Coleman, North Carolina; N. W. Cuney, Texas; Rev.
W. O. Emery, Arkansas.
affair with the city’s black elite and middle class forming the building’s brain trust. The Negro Commissioners and Committee members’ occupations consisted of ministerial, entrepreneurial, judicial, medical, and educational positions. Despite absent from the official discourse of the fair, African American women also made their presence felt. Black women contributed to many of the exhibits in the Negro Buildings and meetings of women’s organizations, including the National Association of Colored Women, raised their profile.

Rooted in New South cities, these elite men and women went beyond the aspirational middle class identified by historians Michelle Mitchell and Kevin Gaines. Through their economic achievements they participated in status building institutions and events such as the Negro Committees. They were the living embodiment of the progressive spirit of the Negro Buildings. Their participation in the representational ventures of the expositions helped to reposition the discourse on black progress in the late nineteenth century South. They imbibed the spirit of the southern New Negro and embraced American bourgeois values that formed what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has called the “politics of respectability.” These elite men and women defined African American identity on behalf of the black community. In doing so, they presented a vision of African Americans that emphasized racial solidarity, while embracing an

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15 Justi, *Official History*, 195. The Nashville Negro Executive Committee was a follows: Richard Hill, Chief; W. L. C. Mosely, Secretary; Rev. R. B. Vandervil; Bishop M. B. Salter; Thomas Tyree; Dr. F. A. Stewart; J. H. Petway; Rev. C. H. Clark; W. H. Key; Dr. W. A. Hadley; Rev. James A. Davis; S. H. Sumner; S. A. McElwee; Rev. Preston Taylor; Samuel A. Walker; W. S. Thompson; W. T. Hightower.

16 The members of the Negro Committee for the Tennessee Centennial Exposition who appear in H. F. Kletzing’s *Progress of the Race* were exclusively drawn from these occupations. Kletzing, *Progress of a Race* (Atlanta, 1898).
accommodationist approach to racial inequality that confirmed economic and cultural stratification amongst southern blacks.  

We should be careful, however, of condemning elite and middle class African Americans for their accommodationist rhetoric and adoption of white standards of behavior. While accommodationism may look like a poor strategy, for fin de siècle blacks it opened doors to criticize the white power structure and was a means to assert their rights as American citizens. Southern whites, moreover, did not uniformly accept accommodation and many believed that even “separate fingers” were too close. Booker T. Washington faced threats throughout his career from those who thought his position on social and economic rights was too radical. In the end, the Negro Buildings presented a vision that aligned well with Jim Crow South. Blacks were willing to progress as a separate people without immediate social equality. At the same time, they created a separate space within southern society that allowed them to critique and contest the white south.

African Americans at the expositions exemplified two complementary definitions of modernity: the belief in material, moral, and economic progress on the one hand, and the participation in a new commercialized public culture on the other. That different members of the race performed these definitions simultaneously and separately suggests the ambiguity of an

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“Afro-modernity” in the late nineteenth century. While the white middle class was free to participate in commercial culture, many African Americans were wary of being associated with a culture that traded in stereotypical images of blacks as licentious buffoons. African Americans at the expositions, then, held a variety of complementary and contradictory goals. They offered accommodationist rhetoric alongside images of race pride and critiques of the South’s racial system. They challenged the conclusions of Social Darwinism without questioning its methods. Blacks at the fair embodied multiple identities that elided perceptions of a homogenous and united people. The Negro Departments provide a window to a moment when the Jim Crow South became fluid at the very same time it was solidifying outside the space of the fairs. To a moment when blacks were given an opportunity to present their own version of the nation’s past and present and to put forth their own dream of the future alongside whites. In the end, the Negro Buildings presented a vision that aligned well with southern whites’ version of a Jim Crow modernity. Black spokesmen were willing to progress as a separate people without immediate social equality. At the same time, they created a separate space within southern society that allowed them to critique and contest the white South.

When it was announced that the nation would gather in Chicago in 1893 to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus’ arrival to the Americas, many African Americans were excited to present their progress and history at the great exposition. Before the World’s

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Columbian Exposition opened its gates, however, African Americans were made to understand that there was no place for them at the national celebration. The exposition’s executive committee squashed plans for a separate black exhibit and encouraged blacks to submit individual exhibits to the all-white committees of their respective states. Unsurprisingly, few black exhibits made it past the committee stage.²⁰

Outraged at being denied an opportunity to present African American achievements before a national and international audience, Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells published The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition. The pamphlet—handed out to fairgoers at the exposition’s entrance—made clear the treatment and discrimination faced by blacks, while outlining African American progress and development in America. In the end, the exposition’s management conceded to black demands for representation by granting them a “Jubilee” or “Colored People’s Day.” This time Douglass and Wells split on whether blacks should participate in the token day. Douglass, then serving as United States minister to Haiti, supported the day and took the opportunity to address the nation from the Haitian pavilion. Calling on the world to “[m]easure the Negro,” Douglass forgot that there were few opportunities at the exposition to “measure” blacks, especially as less than one thousand African Americans attended the day. Whites were free, however, to examine caricatured blacks on the fair’s Midway or view Africans and other people of color at the ethnological villages that lined the exposition’s “avenue of nations.”²¹

²⁰ Rydell, All The World’s a Fair, 53.

²¹ For African American participation in and reaction to the World’s Columbian Exposition see Rydell, All the World’s Fair, 52-55. Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells-Barnett eds., The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not In The World’s Columbian Exposition, Robert Rydell ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). While African Americans were largely excluded from the World’s Fair, there was nevertheless a black presence. Lacking a cohesive presence, blacks made their presence known; whether in the form of laborers or in the exhibits made by Wilberforce, Hampton Institute, and Atlanta University. It is important to note, however, that
It was not unprecedented for African Americans to be excluded from the Columbian. The 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition was the first major American fair to deny African American participation. Only one official exhibit was devoted to blacks: a statue by a white sculptor, entitled “The Freed Slave.” The statue featured an African American male holding up the Emancipation Proclamation with chains broken at his feet. In addition to the statue, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church asked to display an exhibit. The AME was denied an exhibit but allowed to erect a statue of its founder under the condition that it would be removed sixty days after the fair closed. Even Frederick Douglass was nearly excluded from the fair. Chosen as a dignitary for the opening day ceremonies, Douglass was refused entry by a police officer who believed that a “Negro” would not be invited to participate. Luckily for Douglass, Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York happened upon him arguing with the officer and vouched for him. A full year before the official end of Reconstruction it was clear that African Americans were not thought of—in reality or symbolically—as a part of the nation. Despite participating and playing key roles in the founding of the United States, African Americans were denied the opportunity to contribute to its national celebration in Philadelphia.22

Due to its position as the largest and most important southern city in the 1880s, New Orleans was more inclined to allow the participation of its large black population at the 1884-1885 World Cotton Exposition. Using a logic that was repeated in Atlanta and Nashville, the directors viewed African American inclusion as a way to convince northern visitors that the

despite their limited inclusion, contemporary African Americans viewed the Columbian Exposition as an exclusionary space. Christopher Reed, All the World is Here!: The Black Presence at White City (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

South possessed an answer to the “Negro question.”\textsuperscript{23} The director of the exposition, E. A. Burke, also extended the fair’s educative mandate to the region’s African Americans. Burke hoped to “reach out our hand to our brother in black; to shed upon that unfortunate race the sunlight of science and invention, and implant in him the desire to come out of the slough of ignorance and make a manly effort to occupy with us the improved farm, the workshop, and the factory.” It is unsurprising that the first great exposition in the South sought to inculcate modern progress in what it viewed as its most deprived and debased citizens.\textsuperscript{24}

Blacks from around the country took great interest in the World’s Cotton Exposition. Robert Rydell notes that coming after the 1883 \textit{Civil Rights Cases}, “many blacks regarded the Colored Department at the New Orleans fair as noteworthy for existing at all.”\textsuperscript{25} For the first time at an exposition, a department run by African Americans was to present a black vision of progress to the nation and world. Moreover, many blacks at the exposition were not content to simply display their progress: they were determined to confront the white power structure of the region and nation. At the exposition, blacks made clear their “broad demands for political, economic, and social justice.”\textsuperscript{26} In their addresses, African American leaders spoke of the need for a united vision and a response to discrimination across the nation. At the same time, each concession was allowed to determine its own racial policy. The buildings erected by southern states, for instance, denied African Americans entry. Protesting an Illinois exhibit for Atlanta’s Cotton States exposition in 1895, John C. Buckner, a black representative in the Illinois House, declared that at the New Orleans exposition’s southern buildings the “blackest Hottentot was

\textsuperscript{23} Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 74.

\textsuperscript{24} Quoted in Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 82.

\textsuperscript{25} Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 80.

\textsuperscript{26} Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 81.
welcome, while colored citizens were denied admittance.” 27 At the exposition a color line was maintained for African Americans only. Not given a separate building, the New Orleans’ exposition served as a trial run for the larger and more prominent displays of the Atlanta and Nashville expositions.

Despite the heady days of the early Reconstruction period by the 1890s African Americans had witnessed their civil and social rights erode. With the powerful and often violent reassertion of white Democratic control of the South’s state legislatures in the 1870s and 1880s, African Americans were increasingly on the outside looking in. The 1883 Civil Rights Cases and the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision effectively condoned segregation, political discrimination, and removed federal oversight of the South’s racial affairs. Having lost the right to vote in most southern states by the 1890s, African Americans were subjected to a violent policing of an oft-ambiguous color line. Jim Crow laws ensured blacks unequal treatment in public spaces, while whites used the manufactured specter of the rape of white women as an excuse to lynch over one thousand African Americans between 1890 and the end of the century. 28 With what rights they had won after the Civil War gone and their social and political lives increasingly regulated and policed, African Americans’ strategies of resistance fragmented on a number of lines. This fragmentation was most saliently seen in the animosity between W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T.

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Washington at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the 1890s, however, African Americans were more likely to divide over regional and class lines than ideological ones.29

Given the spotty history of black participation in international expositions and the legal/political discrimination of the Jim Crow South, it was a great surprise to many blacks (and whites) to hear of their inclusion in Atlanta’s Cotton States and International Exposition only two years after being denied in Chicago. Two years later, Nashville’s Tennessee Centennial Exposition prominently featured a Negro Building. These exhibits were meant to convey to the nation the good relationship between the races in the South. New South spokesmen in the 1890s understood that the region suffered bad publicity; black leaders, such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, had demonstrated the horrors of lynching to a national audience. Many northerners, while sympathetic with the white South, still harbored reservations about the treatment of blacks. Knowing that the national spotlight was on their cities and the acknowledged need to attract

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northern capital south, organizers used the Negro exhibits as a way to confirm the South’s supposed racial harmony and demonstrate its ongoing uplift of southern blacks.30

The inclusion of African Americans at the Cotton States Exposition was partly to attain a federal appropriation for a government exhibit. The committee consisting Abram L. Grant, Wesley J. Gaines, and Booker T. Washington went before Congress to solicit funds for the fair. Supported by Representative Murray, a black congressman from South Carolina, the committee pushed for an appropriation on the basis that Atlanta would be the first exposition to allow the full participation of African Americans.31 In their speeches the four men highlighted both the race pride and the accommodationist rhetoric consistent with many southern black leaders. Gaines argued that the exposition would “give his race an opportunity to make an exhibit of its development and progress,” pointing out that the opportunity had been denied in Chicago “because Congress and the Northern people were afraid it would offend the South and drive away patronage.” Grant, likewise, reassured Congress that while blacks intended to demonstrate their development and progress, it would not lead them to the North. “The negroes and the

30 Walter G. Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated: Including The Official History of the Exposition (Atlanta, 1896), 8; Justi, Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, 193. George Fredrickson, following the work of C. Vann Woodward, emphasized the paternalistic nature of New South boosters and their embrace of African American progress. Fredrickson noted: “When [Henry] Grady [and other New South boosters] pointed to the Negro’s progress with optimist pronouncements about race relations, he was plainly contributing to the image of a South that was peaceful, progressive, and endowed with a dependable labor force, an image that would have appealed to Northern investors while appeasing Northern humanitarians” (215-16). This image was exactly what the South’s exposition organizers hoped to convey. George Fredrickson, Black Image in the White Mind. See also Paul M. Gaston, The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1970): 117-150.

31 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 24. Historian James Campbell notes that Gaines was “one of black America’s leading apostles of the New South creed” and a good friend of Washington. James Campbell, Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 86.
whites understood each other,” Grant suggested, “and the South was the negro’s home. There he was going to stay.”

Months before Booker T. Washington implored southern blacks and whites to “cast down their buckets,” Atlanta’s black leadership was assuring northern whites that no matter their economic or political progress blacks belonged and would stay in the South.

The final word of the session went to Representative Murray whose support of a separate Negro department suggested an inclusive vision of the nation and American civilization. “The colored people of this country want an opportunity to show that their progress,” spoke Murray, “that the civilization which is now admired the world over, that the civilization which is now leading the world, that the civilization which all the nations of the world look up to and imitate, the colored people, I say, want an opportunity to show that they, too, are part and parcel of that great civilization.”

Having reassured Congress that their vision of progress would remain geographically located in the South, the appropriation was approved with an amendment that the Exposition “provide a separate building for the Negro Exhibit, instead of locating it in the Government Building, as had been proposed.”

From the point of view of the expositions’ organizers the Negro Building represented a new era in the region’s long and troubled history of race. When Washington, Gaines, and Grant went before Congress they threw their support for a southern racial ideal in which African

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34 Cooper, *Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 27.

35 Walter Cooper, the exposition’s official historian, concluded: “Undoubtedly, [the Negro committee’s] presence and the assurance of a Negro exhibit did much to secure the appropriation.” While Nashville organizers never officially credited the Negro Department for federal funding, it can be safely assumed that they took notice of the lesson of Atlanta. Cooper, *Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 28, 7-8.
Americans lived apart from southern whites but jointly strived with them to advance the region’s industrial and material progress. Central to this vision was the New South desire for an industrial workforce consisting of blacks and the region’s poor whites. The Negro Building represented the extent to which southern whites viewed African Americans as an industrial race. While the day’s racial science believed African Americans to be strictly rural workers unable to participate in the industrial economy due to their supposed tropical race traits, New South boosters understood them as necessary cogs in a future industrialized South. This vision contrasted with the lived reality of African American laborers who were confined to agricultural status or were trained as outmoded artisanal workers for the new industrial economy. By taking part in an industrial exposition they suggested other possibilities. The Negro Building illustrated the way in which white urban elites supported the technical education of the majority of African Americans, while conceding that some blacks may achieve a status that was objectively similar to that of the best educated whites. It is important to remember, however, that because the expositions were illustrative of hoped desires reality often conflicted with the vision of the fairs. If at the expositions there was a suggestion of advancement on the technological level, many New South devotees looked at skilled industrial labor as whites-only occupation.\(^{36}\)

The Governor of Georgia, William Yates Atkinson, declared that nothing was “more instructive than in the marvelous progress shown in every line by this emancipated people in their own building, designed by their own architect and contributed to and controlled solely by their own race.”\(^{37}\) Walter Cooper, in his history of the Atlanta exposition, viewed the Atlanta


Negro Building as illustrative of the ways in which African Americans had surpassed their “natural” limitations to achieve material and moral progress, while giving credit to southern whites for supporting industrial education.\textsuperscript{38} White commentary on the Tennessee Centennial’s Negro Building struck a balance between black progress and white paternalism: “The white race of the South has generously and wisely aided the Negro race to solve the problem of self-help,” proclaimed a pamphlet for the Centennial, “and it is pleasant to note that many Negro leaders have met the advances of their former masters in a gratifying spirit of thankfulness and have utilized the advantages afforded them with surprising intelligence.”\textsuperscript{39} The fairs’ organizers viewed the Negro exhibits as illustrative of a developing Jim Crow modernity, in which African Americans became a modern and progressive people but remained indebted to southern white paternalism. Blacks would progress on white terms, becoming modern but locked in the region’s racial hierarchy.

The Negro Buildings served another purpose. They illustrated that the South had wrought order out of the supposed disorder of the Reconstruction period. For New South boosters the Negro exhibits were illustrative of the abject failure of Reconstruction, that “the Negro” was naturally inferior to whites, and that it was a mistake to let non-white southerners control the region’s future. It was “unjust on behalf of the negro to put him in places of power for which his ignorance made him absurdly inadequate,” proclaimed the official history of the Cotton States.\textsuperscript{40} Governor Atkinson suggested that the Negro Building was proof that the Reconstruction experiment of equality was a failure as “God never tried to make [the Negro] the equal of the

\textsuperscript{38} Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 57.

\textsuperscript{39} Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition (Nashville, 1897), 20. Microfilm Reel 128, No. 6. SNMAH.

\textsuperscript{40} Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 57.
white man.” The building demonstrated the paternalistic largesse of white southerners and Atkinson welcomed “all mankind to visit us and witness both the problem and process.”\(^{41}\) In demonstrating a peaceful and ordered relationship between the races and making clear blacks’ material and moral progress, the South’s international expositions provided a counterpoint to the longstanding argument over whether the United State should abdicate its “responsibility for southern race relations.”\(^{42}\)

For the exposition organizers the Negro Buildings and exhibits were indicative of the South’s modernity. When placed in a racial hierarchy in which black inferiority was taken as fact, white paternalism in support of black progress created an image of a benevolent and caring white South. While the reality was starkly different—by the start of the Cotton States exposition eight African Americans had been lynched in Georgia that year—the image of a progressive white and black South was essential to demonstrate the region’s modernity. Although blacks may have lagged behind white southerners, the fact that they were progressing materially and morally was solid evidence of the South’s modernity as a whole.\(^{43}\)

The extent to which northern visitors accepted this vision of a Jim Crow modernity was, however, uneven. While some northerners praised the South’s handling of the race question as evidenced by the “peaceful relations” of the expositions, others were left unconvinced.\(^{44}\) A reporter from the Brooklyn \textit{Eagle} noticed that while there was some of degree of equality at the exposition, outside the liminal space of the fair, southern blacks continued to face “ostracism.”

\(^{41}\) Atkinson, “Atlanta Exposition,” 393.


\(^{44}\) \textit{New York at the Cotton States}, 278-79.
“The negro is barred from many places [in Atlanta],” he reported back to New York. “The old distinctions are slowly fading and breaking down, but it will be many years before the negro is admitted his real freedom.”\footnote{Handbook to the Cotton States and International Exposition: Being a Faithful Account of What a Representative of the Brooklyn Eagle Saw When He Visited the Fair (Atlanta, 1895). Microfilm Reel 126: 3. SNMAH.} While the Brooklyn Eagle reporter hoped that the old distinctions would “fade,” they only hardened in the years following the exposition. Southern expositions demonstrated the compatibility of racism and modernity and Americans were quick to adopt the South’s Jim Crow modernity.

Lastly, a separate Negro Building fit with the late-nineteenth century’s “search for order.” The building took its place alongside the Children’s Building, the Woman’s Building, the Manufacturing Building, the Liberal Arts Building, the Government Building, and the Fine Arts Building. In the nineteenth century the presentation of an ordered worldview in the form of museums and expositions became a form of cultural power.\footnote{Tony Bennett, Birth of the Museum, 2; Conn, Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 33. See also Robert H. Wiebe, The Search For Order, 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).} Beyond the racist dictates of whites, the categorizations of the expositions’ buildings were evidence of the South’s modernity. Spaces such as expositions allowed visitors to insert themselves in a particular vision of history and society—one that separated black from white. The South’s expositions, in their systems of classification, positioned fairgoers as flâneurs who used the “performative resources” of the fairs to shape their behavior and “cognitive horizons.”\footnote{Bennett, Birth of the Museum, 10. See Walter Benjamin, The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006): 72.} The Negro Building, while certainly consistent with Jim Crow was also indicative of a new governmental logic. It demonstrated to
outsiders that the South was not a primitive hodgepodge ruled by irrational racial instincts but an ordered and harmonious society that enclosed race and put it in its proper place.\footnote{Bennett, \textit{Birth of the Museum}, 23. John Cell has argued segregation was in fact a modern and rational system. Cell, \textit{The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).}

The black leadership of Atlanta and Nashville, despite some early reservations, rallied behind the Negro Exhibits viewing them the best way to demonstrate the advancement of African Americans in the South. The exhibits were drawn mostly from black institutions focused on agriculture and technical education. And while the separateness of the buildings was not without controversy, those seeking to demonstrate the progress of African Americans as a separate but vibrant race generally approved of them. On a practical level, the Leavenworth \textit{Herald}, a black newspaper from Kansas, argued that a separate exhibit was needed because if the Negro Exhibit was dispersed among the white exhibits blacks’ progress “would go wholly unnoticed by the visitors at the fair.”\footnote{“Atlanta Exposition,” Leavenworth (Kansas) \textit{Herald}, February 9, 1895, p. 2.} The separate nature of the building was a source of race pride for the \textit{Herald}: “Some object to Negroes exhibiting because we all have a separate building. We ought to have a separate building. We are American citizens, but we are a separate and distinct race. We would to God that we were more ourselves, more united in ideas and actions and would stop being ‘white.’”\footnote{“Untitled” Leavenworth (Kansas) \textit{Herald}, March 9, 1895, p. 2.} Black spokesman and Atlanta pharmacist H. R. Butler echoed the sentiment in the pages of the Atlanta \textit{Constitution}: “Why is it that at this late hour we are raising this kick about being separated? Why I am glad of it, I say that we should take advantage of this opportunity and go into this work with our whole souls. We should show them
what a separate people can do." With the reality of Jim Crow settling in, many blacks in the South were willing to embrace separation, viewing it as an opportunity to demonstrate the abilities of the race and exhibit race pride.

The Negro Building at Atlanta’s Cotton States exposition was located in the southeast corner of the exposition away from the fair’s main entrance [Figure 7: Cotton States Negro Building]. It was not, however, hidden. The building was, in fact, at the busy Jackson Street entrance to the exposition park. At twenty-five thousand square feet it was one of the larger buildings on the grounds and was erected by two black contractors at a cost of ten thousand dollars. Chief of the Negro Department was I. Garland Penn, a school principal from Lynchburg, Virginia. Born two years after the Civil War, Penn, due to the support of his parents, attended both grammar and high school. Following his studies, Penn took a teaching job in Virginia, rising to the position of principal. Prior to taking his position as chief of the Atlanta Negro Department, Penn was most well known for compiling a history of African American journalism entitled The Afro-American Press and Its Editors. Twenty-eight years old at the time of the Atlanta exposition, Penn embodied the spirit of the southern New Negro. He was educated, proud of his race, and willing to work with whites to ensure the maintenance of civil

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51 Butler, “The Colored Exhibit,” Atlanta Constitution, April 3, 1895, p. 8. Like many African Americans involved in the exposition movement, Dr. H. R. Butler was a “self-made” man. Born in North Carolina in 1862, Butler worked a variety of jobs while taking night classes. Eventually he attended Lincoln University and Meharry Medical College where he earned his M.D. At the time of the Atlanta exposition, Butler was running a successful pharmacy and drug company. Rev. E. R. Carter, The Black Side: A Partial History of the Business, Religious and Educational Side of the Negro in Atlanta, Ga. (Atlanta, 1894), 136-138.

52 Theda Perdue, Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition, 23. Perdue argues that the Negro Building’s peripheral position signaled its marginal status. Significantly, she notes that the building did not appear in some of the birds-eye renditions of the exposition.

and social rights. Penn also placed himself at the top of an increasingly stratified racial hierarchy. More educated than his slave born parents and more sophisticated than the black sharecroppers surrounding Lynchburg, Penn saw it as his moral duty to uplift his race, while maintaining a distinction between himself and members of the black working class.54

The entrance to the Negro Building featured an allegorical pediment that told the story of black progress. On one side of the pediment was a depiction of a slave mammy in 1865 with a one-room log cabin, a log church, a rake and basket. On the other side was Frederick Douglass accompanied by a comfortable residence, a stone church and, what Penn described as, “symbols of the race’s progress in science, art and literature, all representative of the new negro in 1895.” In the center was a plow and well-fed mule. According to Penn, this represented the freedom of African Americans from slavery: “for the colored man today plows his field, while thirty years ago he without almost an exception plowed for another.”55 A romantic image given the number of blacks ensnared in the South’s system of sharecropping and debt peonage, it nevertheless made clear the explicit race pride of the building and its confrontation with white stereotypes that cast blacks as indolent.56 The first image encountered at the Negro Building was a progressive allegory of African American life in America.57

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Upon entering the building the visitor was met by a large statue of a black male in loincloth with broken chains around his wrists. Under the statue was the motto: “Chains broken, but not off” [Figure 9: Chains Broken Statue]. The statue, like the pediment, was viewed as an allegory of progress. Indeed, the New York commission to the exposition reported that “if the present rate of progress is maintained for twenty-five years to come, it needs no optimism to predict that the chains will have entirely disappeared and little, if any, trace remain of their have been worn.”

Likewise, in his Negro Day address, black reverend J. W. E. Bowden, interpreted the statue’s muscular and powerful frame to be the “new Negro.” “What is he doing?” asked Bowden, “He is thinking! And by the power of thought he will think off those chains and have both hands free to help you to build this country and make a grand destiny of himself.”

In many ways the statue referenced the popular late eighteenth and early nineteenth century abolitionist image of a praying slave, pleading: “Am I Not a Man and a Brother?” As historian Johan Stauffer notes, the “Am I Not a Man and Brother?” figure was “the best-known white abolitionist image” of the nineteenth century. While the image of the kneeling slave maintained the African American body as servant and supplicant to God and whites, “Chains

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57 In *The Atlanta Exposition and South Illustrated* the pediment’s progressive vision is made clear: “The bass-relief design over the entrance shows the old log cabin, mule and plow; the companion piece, a neat, modern Negro’s home, church and a design showing the arts which the Negro has now mastered.” *The Atlanta Exposition and South Illustrated* (Chicago, 1895), 30.


Broken But Not Off” was a powerful reimaging of the slave figure. Muscular and standing the statue asserted that African Americans were no longer supplicant servants but an independent people reliant on themselves. That the statue retained his chains was a reminder that although slavery’s chains may have been broken its longstanding effects—poverty, discrimination, and exploitation—continued to be worn by African Americans at the end of the century.

The exhibits of the Negro Building were largely educational and agricultural. The first display came from the District of Columbia [Figure 9: DC Exhibit]. It consisted of art and statuary as well as some “principal patents by colored inventors on record in the Patent Office.” It featured portraits of Douglass, John M. Langston, Blanche K. Bruce, and Commissioner Jesse Lawson by the black painter Daniel Freeman. Three statues by W. C. Hill dominated the exhibit: a bust of Frederick Douglass, “The Obstinate Shoe,” and “The Negro With Chains Broken But Not Off.” Photographs showed the black public schools of Washington. Turning right and heading down the west aisle one viewed a photographic exhibit of the Presbyterian Board of Missions for Freedmen. The next exhibit was from the State of Virginia with the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute occupying twelve hundred square feet of space. The Hampton exhibit showed “the department of literary and academic work, mechanical drawing…plans and measurements of houses actually erected by students of the school.” The Virginia exhibit also featured the first African American savings bank. In the southeast corner of the building was the Alabama exhibit. It consisted of an industrial display by the State Institution, the Branch Normal and Industrial school and an agricultural exhibit by African American farmers. Following Alabama were the Tennessee displays. Central Tennessee College, Fisk University, Roger Williams, Knoxville College and the Le Moyne Institute made up the exhibit. Maryland’s display was dominated by Morgan College and was located near the building’s four thousand

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61 Cooper, *Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 60.
square foot restaurant and café, which was “patronized liberally by both races without the slightest friction.”

The Georgia exhibit was so large that it occupied both sides of the eastern aisle. In it, Clark University, Atlanta University, Atlanta Baptist Seminary, Spelman Seminary, Morris Brown College, Georgia State Industrial College, and Gammon Theological Seminary all made “exhibits of superior quality in industry.” The last noteworthy feature of the building was an exhibit that displayed the opposite of progress. Tucked away in a corner was a representation of the “other extreme of the race” marked “Uncivilized Africa,” featuring “crude manufactures” that represented the “uncivilized natives, the heathens of that country.”

As will be seen, black spokesmen behind the Negro Building took great care to provide object lessons that made clear the progress of African Americans.

The Negro Building’s reception was generally positive in both the white and black press. “Most of the exhibit space,” wrote the Atlanta Constitution, “is devoted to the educational displays in this building, and for that reason the exhibits are not gaudy and conspicuous as they are in other buildings.” Likewise, the Leavenworth Herald reported: “The ‘Negro building’ is not only one of the largest, but one of the most attractive, and it is all their own. Everybody goes to see it, and all white visitors, Northern or Southern speak of it as a revelation.” There were, however, dissenting voices. Charles Kindrick writing in the New Orleans Times Picayune was unimpressed with the displays of African American progress. Kindrick argued that the Negro Building showed that “the negro has simply been carried along by a motion he could never

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63 Cooper, Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 60-61.

64 L. W. B. “Is He a New Negro?,” 40.


generated” and that the exhibits were mostly by “negroes who have white blood in their veins. The real negro has little to with the exhibit.” For other observers the Negro Building was the defining building of the exposition. The Times Picayune, in contrast to its reporter, contended that as the “Eiffel tower was the striking feature of the Paris exposition, and as the Ferris wheel was the particular unique thing remembered at Chicago, the negro exhibit and the negro building will constitute the striking and novel feature of the cotton states exposition.”

Coming two years after the Cotton States exposition, the organizers of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition did not forget the lessons of Atlanta and included a Negro Building on the exposition grounds [Figure 10: Centennial Negro Building]. In the promotional material for the exposition the Negro Building featured prominently. A pamphlet circulated prior to the fair promised that the building would “illustrate the progress of the race in America from the old plantation days down to the present time. The colored people of Tennessee will thus have the greatest opportunity ever offered them to demonstrate the history of the past and the hope and possibilities of the future.” The Freeman also came out early in support of a Negro Exhibit in Nashville. “This exposition promises to be a repetition of the Atlanta affair,” reported the paper, “which did more good in bringing the races in close relationship than anything that has happened in a quarter of a century.” The Official Catalogue of the exposition highlighted the Negro

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69 “All Roads Lead to Nashville,” (Nashville, 1897), Microfilm Reel 127, No. 15, SNMAHL.

Building as the most “beautiful building on the grounds” and that it was “well worthy of a visit by all interested in the progress of the Negro since the days of slavery.”

In charge of the Negro Department was Richard Hill. Hill, the son of “Uncle Jim Hill” a slave fiddler and prompter who played at the balls and parties of Tennessee’s “best families,” was also the city’s superintendent of black schools. For the fair’s directors Hill was a symbolic “milestone in the history of the race to show how far up or down it has traveled in the journey of life.” According to historian Bobby Lovett, Hill’s occupation “brought him into black Nashville’s middle class and to the fringes of its elite Negro circle.” It also made him dependent on the city’s white patronage system. This is significant as Hill replaced the first chief of the department, the nationally prominent Nashvillian James C. Napier who resigned citing health concerns, although his resignation letter suggests that he was in disagreement with the representation of African Americans at the fair. With the contentious Napier out of the way, Hill, a confirmed follower of Booker T. Washington, set out to demonstrate the industrial and educational progress of African Americans in the South.

Two years after the Atlanta exposition and a year after the Plessy v. Ferguson ruling, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition opened to a nation where the stakes were raised for black participation at a national event. It is clear that in two short years blacks’ fortunes in the South had shifted significantly and much of the race pride on view in Atlanta was absent in Nashville.

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71 Official Catalogue of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition: May 1st to Oct. 31st 1897 (Nashville, 1897), 57.


73 Lovett, African-American History of Nashville, 236.

Gone were the busts of Douglass and Sumner, the allegorical sculptures, and pictures of progress and race pride, in their place was a far more accommodationist vision. Whereas the Atlanta exposition had been defined by Booker T. Washington’s “compromise,” the Nashville Negro Department chose W. H. Councill as their representative. Councill, one of the most prominent African American spokesmen of the day competed with Washington for white patronage. Going beyond a level of acceptable pragmatism, Councill supported whole-heartedly the white nationalist rhetoric of the South.  

At a speech for the laying of the cornerstone for the Negro Building, Councill emphasized the friendly relations between the two races and claimed that African Americans “received much more from slavery than did the slave-holders.” An accommodationist in the extreme, Councill nevertheless saw the building as an opportunity to demonstrate African American progress and confront white racism. During the same speech in which he emphasized black fidelity, Councill responded to whites’ racism:

Negro history has solved the negro problem from the negro side. There still remains the Caucasian problem. In view of what the negro has done for this country, in view of what the white man has done for the negro, will the white man continue and enlarge the work of encouragement to the struggling race; or will he use the shotgun instead of the Holy

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75 William Hooper Councill was Washington’s great antagonist in the 1890s. Born a slave in North Carolina and later brought to Huntsville, Alabama by slave traders, Council quickly rose in stature following emancipation. A Republican during Reconstruction, Councill changed allegiances with the Democratic rise to power. He was a favorite of white Democrats as he never ceased to embrace a historical vision that aligned well with white-nationalist ideology. Robert Norrell, Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington (Cambridge, 2009), 87-88.

76 Justi, Official History, 195-198.
Bible; the bloody knife instead of the spelling book? These are the problems of Caucasian brains.  

Southern African Americans, even those favoring accommodation, conceived of the Negro Building as a space of resistance, a place where an accommodationist rhetoric opened the door to a critique of the white racial system.

For the southern African American elite, the exhibits and displays of the Negro Buildings were to add up to a convincing vision of African American progress. “We only ask for the opportunity,” wrote a manager for the Negro Department in Nashville, “and we will show to the world that we are enterprising and progressive, skillful and energetic, and alive to all interests and possibilities concerned in this great American Commonwealth.” Speaking at Alcorn A & M College in Lorman, Mississippi, Atlanta Negro Commissioner Isaiah T. Montgomery—founder and one time mayor of the all black town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi—encouraged the school’s students to participate in and contribute to the Cotton States Exposition. Montgomery argued the Negro Building’s exhibits “will tend to show to the world and to ourselves the depth from which we have come: the height to which we have ascended, and our grand possibilities in the future. In these will appear the true relations that we sustain to the moral, industrial and social life of this great country.” A demonstration of modern progress was central to late nineteenth century claims to civilization. Through the Negro Buildings, African Americans marked their participation in a conversation over the limits and boundaries of


civilization. By making clear African Americans’ progressive nature, they laid claim to American modernity.

I. Garland Penn also hoped that exhibits would make clear to whites a cultural hierarchy within the black community based on one’s adoption of American bourgeois values. Penn suggested that the Negro Building showed that not all blacks were “like the indolent, indifferent and loud-mouthed class who give us such a bad name and that the progressive negro, such as will be at the exposition with his progress, is entitled to a different treatment than the low class, thriftless and filthy negro.” By demonstrating the ability and progress of the black middle class, Penn argued through the exhibits of the Negro Building that whites must recognize their rights. “If from the showing the new negro makes at the exposition he succeeds in securing the full measure of his rights he will be better able to lift his race up,” Penn told a white reporter. “As it is in some cases the bad negro receives as good treatment as the good negro and the latter has nothing to point him to without, as an evidence that man who respects himself will beget to himself his rights.” Demonstrating the split nature of uplift ideology—claiming to uplift the race, while separating oneself from a lower order—Penn intended the Negro Building to demonstrate to “both races that African Americans are a progressive people” and hoped that the exhibits would “stimulate the race in its progress.”

The Negro Buildings’ demonstration of African American industrial progress confronted head on a burgeoning racial science that linked race with industrial achievement. White racial theorists in the 1890s developed a theory of “industrial evolution” that cast industry as a racial accomplishment. Blacks, it was argued, could not become an industrial race due to their tropical

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80 “The New Negro At Our Show,” Atlanta Constitution, July 28, 1895, p. 4. Penn’s rhetoric demonstrates the way in which the black leadership attempted to shift their discourse of race from biology to culture. Black elites were not asking for universal equality. Instead, equality was reserved for those who had properly assimilated to white society. See Gaines, Uplifting the Race, 21.
race traits, which prevented them from withstanding the demands of industry. As Hampton educator Alice Bacon noted, as whites in the North and South reconciled after the war, “a feeling of indifference to the negro on the part of the Northern whites” had grown. “Travellers [sic.] looked out of their car windows at Southern railway stations and saw black loafers lounging on the platform, noticed the primitive agricultural methods, the worn-out farms, the girdled trees in the gloomy tracts of dying forest, the log cabins…and concluded that the negro was hopeless, incapable of progress, if not actually retrograding.” The buildings’ display of industry and progress combated prevalent theories of blacks’ degeneration on the American continent.

Confronting a scientific landscape that classified them outside modernity, African Americans challenged such images not by invalidating the science but denying its conclusions. History was progressive, African American spokesmen concluded: some races and people were destined to be left behind. The Negro Building presented a vision that African Americans who were “frugal, thrifty, and intelligent,” who were educated, had “natural gifts, put their time to good use, accumulating something, have good homes, and are refined in these homes,” were not on the losing end of modernity’s progressive narrative. By demonstrating blacks’ adoption of bourgeois values and industrial and material progress, the Negro Building contended that African Americans, of a certain standing, were a part of American civilization. “[A] few more of these Southern Expositions,” wrote a school principal from Greenville, Mississippi, “will roll back the

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81 For discussion of the ways in which class and industry became racialized into a theory of “industrial evolution” see Daniel E. Bender, American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

82 Bacon, Negro and the Atlanta Exposition, 6; For the ways in which northerners lost interest in southern African Americans see David Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

mist and the educated and refined, the thrifty, and industrious Negro will be seen as a brilliant orb, making his way athwart the heavens of progress and civilization.”

The Negro Buildings positioned southern African Americans within the pervasive logic of evolutionary progress and were spoken of in explicitly evolutionary terms by both white and black observers. The official history of the Cotton States Exposition claimed that the Negro Exhibit “was a sociological study, an ethnological fact marking the progress of an important branch of the human race under circumstances not hitherto existing.” In the eyes of white southerners the “gigantic experiment” of freedom as evidenced by the exhibits forecasted the future not just for African Americans “but of many more millions of the same race on other continents.” Whites at the expositions took on the role of the detached scientist observing blacks’ evolutionary progress and blacks for the most part provided them with the evidence.

The displays of technological achievement by African Americans at the Negro Buildings were important object lessons to demonstrate their civilizational progress in evolutionary terms. The object lessons of the buildings fit nicely with late nineteenth century scientific conceptions of progress and challenged scientists who put all people of African descent at the bottom of a civilization-evolutionary scale. For the elite African Americans who viewed themselves as

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85 Cooper, Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 57.

86 The Constitution reported in January of 1895 that the proposed Negro Building would arrange its exhibits so that the “various stages of progress of the race may be illustrated to the visitors. The various exhibits will be placed in their proper sequence and relation to each other, and the casual visitor may note the progress of the race as step by step it moved up to the present.” In the end, the Negro Committee abandoned this evolutionary sequence. “Progress of a Race,” Atlanta Constitution, January 20, 1895, p. 17.

87 Baker, From Savage to Negro, 45.
fulfilling an evolutionary narrative, the exhibits in the Negro Departments were object lessons of the progress made in their evolutionary development. The Negro Committee in Nashville made this explicit when they stationed John Tevi, a native of West Africa, on the steps of the Negro Building. Tevi’s purpose was to talk “entertainingly of the contrast between the American Negro and the Dahomean.”  

88 John Tevi was the perfect object lesson for the building’s linear narrative of racial progress. Like other artifacts of the past, Tevi made clear the advancement of the African in America to both black and white visitors. The African American leadership at the fairs frequently made use of such object lessons to illustrate their progress.

At the Cotton States Exposition fairgoers could visit a supposedly authentic Dahomey Village and an Old Plantation. The Tennessee Centennial replaced the Dahomey Village with Tevi but also featured a plantation amusement.  

89 Both of these amusements denied people of African descent coevality. The Dahomey Village represented West Africans as primitive people not far removed from the Stone Age [Figure 11: Dahomey Village]. The Atlanta Constitution stressed the Dahomeans’ primitive state, frequently referring to their nudity.  

90 West Africans were visually dissected in the press to demonstrate their primitiveness and evolutionary

88 Quoted in Larson, “Three Southern World’s Fairs,” 149.

89 The lack of a Dahomey Village at the Tennessee Centennial is likely due to the Dahomeans’ treatment at the Cotton States Exposition. In early January a mob of armed West Africans attempted to take the life of a concessionaire on the Midway. Since the end of the exposition the Africans had not been given anything to eat. Apparently, the concessionaire could not feed them because he had lost most of his money between the San Francisco and Atlanta expositions. The Times-Picayune reported: “The condition of the savages is deplorable. They say they have had nothing to eat except bread for several days and because of their rude huts and thin clothing they have suffered a great deal from the cold of the past few days.” It is unsurprising, then, that the “Dahomey Village” did not make it to Nashville. “Riot On the Midway,” New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 3, 1896, p. 1.

90 Upon their arrival to the exposition grounds the paper described them as “black and savagely nude.” “Her Gates Ajar,” Atlanta Constitution, September 18, 1895, p. 2.
inferiority. Such displays of foreign primitivism allowed southern white fairgoers to measure their race and their nation’s supremacy. For the Negro Committees such atavisms could be devastating. Indeed, many white fairgoers did not draw hard distinctions between the Dahomey Village, the Negro Building, and African American fairgoers. Maude Andrews in the Constitution reported that a Dahomean dance made her “think of a negro laborer scattering corn in the field.” Given the way in which all people of African descent were lumped outside of civilization, it is unsurprising that black laborers working on the Atlanta exposition’s grounds attempted to break in and confront the Dahomeans when they first arrived at the exposition.

African American laborers, whose status was precarious in the New South, were eager not to be lumped in with the atavisms of the Midway. For those blacks placing themselves atop an intra-racial hierarchy, such atavisms bolstered their claims to progress. Atavisms confirm modernity by establishing its difference to and break from the past. As literary critic Dana Seitler notes, “atavism is not just an abjected form of modern life, a sign indicating modernity’s Other;


92 Borrowing from Johannes Fabian, Loren Kruger writes, “The power of civilization as idea and ensemble of practices…depended on a paradoxical relation between modern citizen-spectator and colonial other; late 19th century anthropology…recognized the ‘primitive’ as our ‘contemporary ancestor’ while at the same time denying their ‘coevalness’ by assigning the primitive to a relic of prehistory rather than modern time.” Loren Kruger, “‘White Cities,’ ‘Diamond Zulus,’ and the ‘African Contribution to Human Advancement’: African Modernities and the World’s Fairs” TDR: The Drama Review 51 (Fall 2007), 19-45, esp. 21.


94 The Atlanta Constitution reported: “The arrival of the Dahomeyites caused great consternation among the negroes at work on the grounds, and they attempted to break through the gates enclosing the strange people several times during the day.” “Her Gates Ajar,” Atlanta Constitution, September 18, 1895, p. 2.
rather, it is an operation that makes modernity possible.”\textsuperscript{95} For African Americans concerned with evolutionary development, the Dahomey Village confirmed the modernity of the black elite.

While many white visitors expected to find the Negro Department filled with a “rude and barbarous race,” \textit{The Broad Ax}, a black newspaper, reported the opposite: “[A]ll such [fairgoers] were pleasantly disappointed; on the contrary they had the opportunity of beholding a characteristic Dahomey village, placed in contrast with the achievement of the race, in civilization, in literature, in industrial lines, in finances and in high arts.”\textsuperscript{96} Echoing the \textit{Constitution}’s views of West Africans, \textit{The Broad Ax} reported that “[t]he village representing the lowest savage life of darkest Africa, with its half-clothed, unkempt natives, proves a wonderful contrast with the surrounding evidences of culture and refinement of the American negroes.”\textsuperscript{97} African American fairgoers were also taken aback by the primitiveness of the West Africans.

“An educated, well-dressed, beaver-hatted negro man pauses in the promenade,” wrote Maude Andrews in \textit{Leslie’s Weekly}, “to frown disapprovingly on this musical expression of real African sentiments.”\textsuperscript{98} It was clear to the black elite that the Dahomeyans were not modern; they were outside civilization.\textsuperscript{99} Anthropological comparisons such as these confirmed the Negro

\textsuperscript{95} Seitler, \textit{Atavistic Tendencies}, 26.

\textsuperscript{96} “The Colored Race at Atlanta,” Salt Lake City \textit{The Broad Ax}, December 7, 1895, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{97} As a conciliatory note, \textit{The Broad Ax} did give the Africans some credit: “The exhibit also contains many things from Africa, showing what the race is capable of even without the aid of high civilization.” “The Colored Race at Atlanta,” Salt Lake City \textit{The Broad Ax}, December 7, 1895, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{98} Maude Andrews, “The Atlanta Exposition,” \textit{Leslie’s Weekly Illustrated} (September 26, 1895), 199. Given Andrews racial predilections this story was probably meant to be humorous in that the sophisticated African American observed a difference between himself and Africans that did not exist. Nevertheless, it does offer a glimpse into how the African American fairgoer responded to the Dahommey Village.

\textsuperscript{99} Frederick Douglass had asserted as much two years earlier in \textit{The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not In the World’s Columbian Exposition}. Douglass complained that while African
Building’s narrative of progress. Standing side-by-side with Africans, African Americans believed whites would surely see they were a modern people. The black elite transferred the image of black primitiveness from themselves to Africans.

African American reaction to the Dahomey Village makes clear the complicated relationship between southern blacks and the ongoing colonization of Africa in the late nineteenth century. On the one hand, the village confirmed black advancement in the Americas. On the other hand, the white press’ collapsing of the distinction between Africans and African Americans compelled black visitors to reimagine their connections with Africa. As Jim Crow tightened its hold on the South, emigrationists like Henry McNeal Turner suggested that African Americans could fulfill their destiny as a separate and distinct race outside of the United States. At the same time, the Negro Buildings’ contrast to the primitive depictions of West Africans undermined the emigrationist cause, helping to explain Turner’s outburst at the start of this chapter. The Negro Buildings’ support of a Jim Crow modernity located in the South forestalled a need to immigrate to Africa. African Americans could become a strong and separate people within the South. Their relationship to Africa was to uplift Africans. In this way, the Negro Buildings aligned well with the African American missionaries of the period who, as historian James Campbell notes, viewed the “uplifting their benighted brethren as an opportunity for African Americans to demonstrate their own relative progress and thereby advance their claim to full American citizenship.”

Emigrationists like Turner, who placed the future of African Americans were denied participation in the Chicago fair, Dahomeans were there “as if to shame the Negro, the Dahomians are also here to exhibit the Negro as a repulsive savage.” Douglass was concerned that the Dahomeans, who he implied were not “Negro” nor “civilized,” would transfer their savagery onto African Americans in the eyes of whites. In this way, Douglass both contested and confirmed the discourse of civilization prevalent at the World Columbian Exposition. Douglass, “Introduction,” *Reason Why*, 13.

Americans in Africa and not the United States, were left out of the New Negro paradigm made clear by the exhibits’ displays of modern progress and contrast to the atavism of the Midway’s Dahommey Village.\textsuperscript{101}

The Old Plantation, like the Dahomey Village, maintained the atavistic nature of people of African descent. However, rather than locating blacks’ primitivism on foreign soil, the Old Plantation suggested that contemporary rural blacks were outside modernity. If the racial harmony of the Negro Building was to convince northerners that southern whites had a humane answer to the “Negro Problem,” the Old Plantation eased northerners’ minds that the proper place for blacks was the South.\textsuperscript{102} For southern whites the Old Plantation was a piece of nostalgia. Here blacks were not part of a foreign country but a foreign time. The Tennessee Centennial’s official catalogue described the amusement as an entertainment that “consists of a representation of home scenes on the Old Plantation as it was before the war.” It confirmed that the “participants are negroes altogether, and their songs, dances, cakewalks and stump speaking are interspersed with music on the banjo, crap-shooting scenes, and all the events of the happy days long gone. It is not minstrel entertainment purely, but an effort to show the sunny side of the olden times, and the innocent, joyous amusements of a time that has passed away. And which is only remembered by the older men and women of the South.” Plantation shows borrowed from both the popular minstrel stage and the anthropological exhibits to depict a folkloric isolation that helped relieve the new urban middle class’s unease over modern civilization. In the end, the

\textsuperscript{101} On Henry McNeal Turner’s complicated and sometimes tortured logic for African American emigration see Campbell, \textit{Middle Passages}, 123, 133-134. Elsewhere Campbell calls Turner’s thoughts “a curious amalgam of racial chauvinism, evangelical Protestantism, and Social Darwinism.” Campbell, \textit{Songs of Zion}, 81.

\textsuperscript{102} The 1901 Buffalo Pan-American Exposition’s guide emphasized the ‘southerness’ and ‘authenticity’ of the Old Plantation act. Richard H. Barry, \textit{Snap Shots on the Midway of the Pan-Am-Expo at Buffalo} (Buffalo, 1901), 126.
Old Plantation was a cross between popular plantation shows like the *South Before the War* (1892) and Nate Salsbury’s *Black America* (1895) and living anthropological exhibits like the Dahomey Village.¹⁰³

In a performance of remembrance white southerners put blacks in their place. The Old Plantation played with well-circulated stereotypes of blacks as a happy-go-lucky people and undercut the seriousness of the Negro Building.¹⁰⁴ Maude Andrews, writing for *Harper’s Weekly*, explicitly connected the Old Plantation to the Dahomey Village presenting a vision of blackness that crossed time and space. “Real negroes are on the platform before us,” Andrews noted, “dancing wildly, and singing in that queer crooning animal way that always makes one look about for the wild beasts of Kipling’s jungle stores. Not very different in their movements and voices are these darkies, who have lived all their lives amid civilization, from those wild

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¹⁰⁴ The way in which the caricatured images of blacks could undermine the Negro Building was made clear during President McKinley’s visit to the Tennessee Centennial. The Baltimore *Sun* reported: “The most amusing incident of the visit occurred while the President was passing through the Agricultural Building. He had just visited the Negro Building and listened with evident pleasure to the singing of rare old plantation melodies and jubilees by the Jubilee Club of Fisk University. The President was still talking of this wonderful performance when his progress was suddenly blocked by the appearance of twenty or thirty colored people, dressed in the most grotesque and characteristic costumes imaginable, who began to sing some improvised verses about ‘Bill McKinley and his last great race.’ When they concluded the song with a hilarious buck dance the President’s efforts to maintain his dignity failed him and he broke into a hearty laugh.” No matter the extent of progress exhibited by African Americans at the expositions they would continue to be undermined by popular stereotypes that positioned them as humorous sideshows. “Exposition’s Climax,” Baltimore *Sun*, June 19, 1897, p. 7.
creatures in the Dahomey Village.”105 For southern whites the village was proof that the dreams of the Negro Building was simply black fantasy.

Although it is easy to dismiss the Old Plantation as another representation of the racism found at expositions, contained within the performances of its actors was a multi-vocality that incorporated “hidden transcripts.” The Old Plantation was one of the few spaces to perform a new commercial modernity that was absent from elite black discourses of high culture and hidden from the eyes of whites. Combining racist images with modern identities and pleasures, the black actors of the Old Plantation connected the South with the ascendant commercial modernity of the northern metropolises.106 While whites interpreted the “songs, dances, cakewalks and stump speaking…interspersed with music on the banjo,” as the “events of the happy days long gone,” to black fairgoers such entertainment could be seen and heard as something far different.107 The “weird and guttural sounds” accompanying the “scraping of the fiddle and the old banjo,” would be familiar to some blacks not as anachronisms but as modern sounds that spoke of the alienation of life in the Jim Crow South.108 Quartet signing and the cakewalk came directly from late nineteenth century African American cultural sites and were

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105 Maude Andrews, “The Midway at the Atlanta Exposition” Harper’s Weekly (November 23, 1895), 1109. In her diary of the Columbian Exposition, Emma Allensworth of Nashville also connected the Dahomean to African Americans’ supposed racial traits: “They are like the negro in laziness too. It was about one’o’clock when we went in and nearly all were lying around sleeping, smoking and talking.” Emma H. Allensworth Diary, #3214-z, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

106 Historian Karen Sotiropoulos has demonstrated the multifaceted nature of plantation shows and other forms of black minstrel culture. Sotiropoulos, Staging Race, 2. For the way in which black public culture contained “hidden transcripts” see Robin Kelley’s re-working of James C. Scott’s idea in Kelley, Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class (New York: Free Press, 1996).


popular among working class black folk. Compared to the performances of the Fisk Jubilee Singers at the Negro Building, the syncopated rhythms of the Old Plantation presented a sophisticated sound grounded in the here-and-now realities of racial oppression, exploitation, and commercial possibilities. Such rhythms and sounds would, by the early twentieth century, come to define the sonic landscape of modernity. Far from a premodern people locked in a rural economy, then, the southern black performers of the Old Plantation were a modern people exploiting the racist undercurrents of American society to their own advantage even if middle class whites and blacks only heard primitive rhythms and sounds. Not simply a white fantasy the Old Plantation was an entertainment on the forefront of modern commercial entertainment.

Even though blackface and minstrel amusements carried hidden transcripts to black audiences, they also constrained the actors within popular and damaging stereotypes. On the one hand, the freedom from nineteenth century musical standards led to the development of blues and rag and jumpstarted the careers of African American artists. On the other hand, the Old Plantation made clear the way in which the black elite could lose control of a defined image of blackness in the anarchy of the consumer marketplace. The Old Plantation, Dahomey Village,


110 Based on evidence from other plantation shows and late nineteenth century amusements we can be certain that the sounds of the Old Plantation were not simply white fantasy, but the real and developing sounds of African American popular music and culture. Webb, “Authentic Possibilities,” 65; Miller, Segregating Sound. For the way in which plantation and black-performed minstrel shows reflected real African American cultural articulations see Abbott and Seroff, “‘They Cert’ly Sound Good to Me’: Sheet Music, Southern Vaudeville, and the Commercial Ascendancy of the Blues” in Ramblin’ On My Mind: New Perspective on the Blues, David Evans ed., (Urbana, 2008): 49-104; Ragged But Right; Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889-1895 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007); Alan Lomax, The Land Where the Blues Began (New York: New Press, 1993); Ronald Radano, Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Sotiropoulos, Staging Race, 1-11. For the way in which the black and white middle class may not have fully heard the performances of the Old Plantation see Clare Corbould, “Streets, Sounds and Identity in Interwar Harlem,” Journal of Social History 40 (Summer 2007), 859-894.
and the Negro Buildings became contested sites in a black public sphere closely monitored by whites. These multiple performances of blackness were prescient of a commercial and public racial identity. As much as the Old Plantation was a performance, so too was the black elite’s participation in the fairs a performance of white inscribed standards of acceptable bourgeois behavior. In some ways, then, the Old Plantation made more clear the restrictions placed on black life in the Jim Crow South. If the Negro Building and the black elite’s performance of bourgeois comportments hid the constraints placed on African Americans, the Old Plantation brought them to the fore.  

Confronted with multiple performances of blackness, the Negro Buildings served as instructional tools for those blacks not “evolved” as the black elite. The black newspaper the Savannah Tribune reported that the exhibits were a “splendid object lesson to the less industrious and intelligent.” The exhibits could even jump-start the evolutionary process among lower class blacks. “While the Exposition was not created to teach the world better,” wrote The Freeman of the Tennessee Centennial, “the enterprise does afford an opportunity for the Negro to teach the world a great lesson of themselves. The natural progression of evolution in many cases is far too slow; and a little forced culture is nothing amiss.” According to this logic, evolution among people of African descent moved at different paces. For the members of the black elite, it was clear to them that they had evolved to a point where they were equal to whites and should be treated as such. The entire presentation of the Negro Building suggested the latent ways in which many local African American leaders adopted a Lamarckian view of human evolution.

111 For the ways in which the consumer marketplace, the public sphere, and black intellectual life collided in the early twentieth century see Baldwin, Chicago’s New Negroes.


113 “Annent the Centennial,” Indianapolis The Freeman, June 5, 1897, p. 4.
development. The exhibitions of progress suggested the “heritability of acquired characteristics” that placed elite blacks on an equal plane with whites and separated them from other peoples of African descent.\footnote{As Robert Nye notes it is important to remember that in the late nineteenth century the individual and society were viewed on a continuum, not as binary opposites. Individual displays of African American progress suggested the ways in which progressive characteristics could stand in for the group. Nye, “Sociology and Degeneration,” 50.} Implicit in the Negro Buildings’ exhibitions of progress was a narrative that suggested that the African American elite had evolved to be a distinct race from Africans and perhaps lower class blacks.\footnote{Given the pervasiveness of evolutionary discourse in the late-nineteenth century this is not as great of a stretch as one might think. For instance, two years after the Tennessee Centennial, Henry Parks, an AME reverend, published Africa: The Problem of a New Century (1899), in which he argued that Africans and African Americans were distinct races of people. Replicating the narrative of the Negro Buildings, Parks argued that African Americans had evolved due to their three hundred year contact with Anglo-America, while Africans remained trapped in the past. Kevin Gaines has also noted the pervasiveness of Social Darwinian thought, heredity science, and eugenics among the black elite. On Henry Parks’ Africa see Mitchell, Righteous Propagation, 54-55; and Gaines, Uplifting the Race, 81-82.}

The members of the African American middle class behind the Negro Departments also asserted their evolutionary progress through a rhetoric of manhood. As historian Angela Hornsby-Gutting makes clear, the gendered structure of blacks’ participation in public celebrations “advanced the race’s claim that it had evolved into the highest state of ‘civilization.’”\footnote{Hornsby-Gutting, Black Manhood and Community Building in North Carolina, 131.} In an editorial The Freeman explicitly connected higher civilization and African American manliness as it was displayed in the Negro Building at the Tennessee Centennial. “Let the cultured Negro array himself,” wrote The Freeman, “with all the truths of science and the power which knowledge gives, come forth upon this arena, where is pitched upon the most peaceful heights, the heights of liberty, the war for peace, and demonstrate in his
manly bearing the outlines of unimpeachable dusky brow.”  

Richard Hill’s management of the Negro Department was referred to as “every inch manly and full of race love.”  

Likewise, Atlanta’s Negro Building was characterized as a “manly effort.”  

Asserting the Negro Building as an embodiment of African American manhood, the black middle class connected itself to a prevalent discourse that linked manliness and civilization.  

The black elite were not ready, however, to abandon those left behind. As a result, lower class blacks needed to be uplifted, while Africans needed to be civilized. This lesson was not lost on white observers. Leslie’s Weekly reported that the Negro Building was “representative of the more advanced class of blacks, but is suggestive of possibilities of growth and development which are most hopeful and encouraging.”  

Alice Bacon commented that the Negro Building was a “revelation” to the “ignorant country people.” And that “those who went away after seeing and believing, carried with them a new incentive to industry, a new hope for the future, and a new reason for bearing patiently present disadvantages in the certainty that they were but temporary and could be overcome by effort.”  

Like the other exhibits at the expositions both white and black observers hoped that fairgoers who had not internalized the lessons of civilization and modern progress would be overwhelmed by the displays and conform to the

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117 M. A. Majors, “Nashville Tennessee” Indianapolis The Freeman (May 29, 1897) 3.


119 “A Huge Assembly” Atlanta Constitution (September 26, 1895): 5.


121 John Y. Foster, “The Meaning of the Atlanta Exposition,” Leslie’s Weekly Illustrated (December 5, 1895), 363.

122 Bacon, Negro and the Atlanta Exposition, 24.
moral and social standards of the New South. Moreover, it was believed that in doing so the “Negro Question” could be answered by a slow incrementalism that did not openly challenge the South’s racial hierarchies.

Given the pervasiveness and popularization of evolutionary theory in the late nineteenth century it is not surprising that prominent African Americans were influenced by its logic. Faced with an ideology of progress on one side and degeneration on the other, historian Walter Weare correctly contends that the black elite was given “little choice except to believe passionately that the race, like [Booker T.] Washington himself, was going to go up from slavery, that history was on their side, that the invisible hand of Darwin would favor the man farthest down, whose greater struggle rendered him the fittest.”123 Even W. E. B. Du Bois, who later moved away from a biological conception of race, initially adopted late nineteenth century notions of evolutionary progress.124 In explicit contrast to the Old Plantation and Dahomey Village, the Negro Department presented people of African descent as forward moving and full partakers in modernity. It also asserted, however, that those Africans who remained in Africa had developed at a slower pace. In doing so, the building, unfortunately, confirmed a historical narrative that viewed slavery as a civilizing force.

The Negro Buildings demonstrate the dialogical nature of black elite identity in the late nineteenth century. By adopting a narrative of progress that was based on a racial science that often excluded them, the members of the black elite challenged the conclusions but not the science. They lent credence to both an intra- and inter-racial hierarchy. If, as the black elite


124 W. E. B. Du Bois, The Conservation of the Races (Washington, 1897): 9-10, 12, 15. For a further discussion of Du Bois and the discourse of civilization see Bederman, Manliness & Civilization, 27. That international expositions were key vehicles for the disseminations of social and biological evolutionary science is the main point of Robert Rydell’s work. Rydell, All The World’s A Fair.
asserted, they were superior to lower class and rural blacks as well as Africans, they also, then, confirmed the science that placed them outside American civilization. Caught within the scientific and racial logic of the day, the Negro Buildings and exhibits demonstrated the black elite’s right to equality, while at the same time confirming a racial hierarchy of human life for white observers.

Following some members of the black press, historians have interpreted the expositions to be segregated spaces. And while it is true that the expositions were discriminatory spaces, they were not officially segregated and their organizers worked hard to make it known within the black community that they were welcomed. The South’s expositions gave African Americans an opportunity to present their own vision within the official discursive space of the fair. For members of an aspiring class the entire exposition and not just the Negro Building became an important stage on which to present and perform the progress made since Emancipation. In the end, the expositions operated more as open than closed space. Significantly, this occurred at a moment when *de jure* segregation was sweeping the South. In the liminal space of the

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125 Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 147-151; Rydell, *All The World’s A Fair*, 85. Hale, borrowing from the work of Rydell, maintains that the Cotton States exposition was segregated. Recognizing that African Americans were allowed into all the fair’s buildings, Hale asserts they were denied refreshments anywhere but the Negro Building. Her evidence, like Rydell, comes from a single black newspaper in Atlanta. Taking a more comprehensive approach demonstrates a less rigid system in both Nashville and Atlanta.

126 The evidence presented by black participation in the Atlanta and Nashville expositions suggests the fluidity of the color line into the 1890s. Never a hard and fast system, segregation was often quite porous. It is important to note, however, that blacks participated in southern expositions at whites’ pleasure, ensuring that whites never gave up their power in the South’s system of racial hierarchy. See C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957); and Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). For an update of the Woodward thesis, which argues against a monolithic Solid South see Mark Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy: Beyond Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).
exposition grounds southerners presented an image of peaceful coexistence between the races, one which many African Americans were quick to utilize even if they had to ride Jim Crow to get there.  

Not all African Americans, however, were in favor of the expositions. The main opposition came from the northern black press led by the Cleveland Gazette. As early as February 1895 the Gazette was calling on blacks to boycott the Atlanta exposition. Principally, the Gazette feared that the exposition was a setup to prove the inferiority of African Americans. When it became clear that the exposition would present a creditable Negro Exhibit, the Gazette emphasized the fair’s Jim Crow character. Along with the Washington Bee, the Gazette ran stories of discrimination at the Atlanta exposition. Two years later, the Cleveland Gazette emerged again as the main opponent of the Tennessee Centennial. Like

127 The black newspaper, the Kansas City Topics, reported on the Atlanta exposition: “There will be no separate gates and foolish separations that so exasperate colored citizens from northern states. Of course the separate car law is in force and this will keep from the exposition thousands of northern colored people. Mr. Penn has assurances however, that the accommodations will be equal to those of the whites. These separations and restrictions are as obnoxious to refined colored people of the south as to those of the north, but the more thoughtful of the race recognize this as but one phase of American prejudice.” “Negro Exposition,” Kansas City Topics, August 8, 1895, p. 1.

128 Some black Nashvillians, led by the Nashville Citizen, did try to organize a boycott of the Centennial. However, most voices against the expositions came from the North. “Untitled,” Kansas City American Citizen, March 12, 1897, p. 2.


130 For instance, the Gazette reported that a member of the press gang was refused a soda water at the Agriculture building. “In many places of amusement,” reported the Gazette, “like the roof garden, black visitors are not allowed at all. It is also true that the gate-keepers and the attendants in several buildings are not as courteous and attentive to black patrons as whites.” The Washington Bee also reported “prejudice in the worse extreme” at the Atlanta fair. Theda Perdue suggests a typical level of segregation at the Atlanta exposition. However, there is enough contrary evidence to suggest that the exposition’s segregation was anything but rigid. “They Do Draw It,” Cleveland Gazette, December 7, 1895, p. 1; “The Bee Tells the Truth,” Washington Bee, November 30, 1895, p. 1; Perdue, Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition, 31.
Atlanta, the *Gazette* interpreted the Negro Building to be an extension of Jim Crow. Others took the expositions as an opportunity to agitate against segregation. Ida B. Wells in the Chicago *Conservator* demanded that the Tennessee Centennial executive end the discrimination of blacks on the railroads in time for the fair.

With the racial dynamics of the day, it is a given that African Americans faced discrimination going to and within the expositions. Many northern blacks understood that a trip south put them in danger and made a good calculation that a visit was not worth it. That northern African Americans had to ride in segregated rail cars upon entering the South kept many away. Even though it claimed that “Northern Negroes can be treated fair in the South,” the Kansas City *Topics* reported that black Kansans would not make an exhibit or attend the Atlanta exposition because “[they] strongly hate the South and do not feel that they want to go there because there is a jim crow law and colorline.” Other black newspapers that covered the

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132 Quoted in “Untitled,” Kansas City *American Citizen*, February 12, 1897, p. 2.

133 The *Weekly Blade* suggested that there were few exhibits from northern blacks because of the “fear of the outrageous discrimination practiced against these people by several of the railroads running into Atlanta: the southern railroad system being possibly the only exception.” Despite this the *Blade* still saw the exposition as opportunity to end racial discrimination: “But this exposition will do more to break up this diabolical outrage than anything that has ever happened.” The Southern Railroad, perhaps seeing an opportunity, frequently advertised in the black press during the expositions that African Americans would be “treated well” on its cars. “Every convenience is offered by this road to the colored people,” advertised the Southern Railroad in late October. Few northern African Americans, however, took up the railroad’s offer. Dr. Hammond, “A Race Triumph,” Parsons (Kansas) *Weekly Blade*, November 23, 1895, p. 1; “The Southern Railroad,” Washington *Bee*, October 12, 1895, p. 1; “The Southern Railroad to Atlanta,” Washington *Bee*, October 26, 1895, p. 1.

expositions, however, were in favor of them and reported a relative absence of “race prejudice” at the fairs.\textsuperscript{135}

When the Cotton States and International Exposition opened on September 18, 1895 Booker T. Washington was not the only black presence at the fair. As the exposition executive marched with the United States Army through the streets of Atlanta to the fairgrounds, they were accompanied by the Second Battalion of the Colored Infantry commanded by Lieutenant Colonel F. H. Crumbley and the Lincoln Guards, an African American militia from Macon, Georgia.\textsuperscript{136} Increasingly denied a strong public military presence, black soldiers made their presence known.\textsuperscript{137} Moreover, African Americans, like whites, flooded the fairgrounds on opening day. The New York \textit{World} reported that in Atlanta “[t]he people swarmed into the buildings – black and white, Georgia Colonels and all.”\textsuperscript{138} Blacks attended in decent numbers throughout the

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{The Freeman} reported in May 1897 that the “most enjoyable feature at the [Nashville] Exposition is an absence of race prejudice.” By June the newspaper had tempered its assessment but remained supportive of the southern exposition movement. Chas. H. Stewart, “The Tennessee Centennial a Visit to the Sunny South,” Indianapolis \textit{The Freeman}, May 1, 1897, p. 8; Chas. H. Stewart, “The Negro Day,” Indianapolis \textit{The Freeman}, June 5, 1897, p. 1; Lizzie C. Williams, “The Athens of the South,” Indianapolis \textit{The Freeman}, June 26, 1895, p.1. The Indianapolis \textit{Freeman}, Salt Lake City \textit{Broad Ax}, Charlotte \textit{Observer}, Parsons (Kansas) \textit{Weekly Blade}, Savannah \textit{Tribune}, Kansas City \textit{Topics}, Baltimore \textit{Afro-American}, and the Leavenworth (Kansas) \textit{Herald} all had positive reviews of the Negro exhibits and buildings.

\textsuperscript{136} “Miles of Moving Soldiers,” Atlanta \textit{Constitution}, September 19, 1895, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{137} Both Steven Hahn and Kathleen Clark have emphasized the importance of military display in maintaining black rights. Clark, \textit{Defining Moments: African American Commemoration and Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Steven Hahn, \textit{A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

course of the expositions, peaking during congresses and on days devoted to African Americans.\textsuperscript{139}

In an effort to combat stories circulating in the black press of discrimination at the Atlanta exposition, I. Garland Penn frequently sent articles to black newspapers making clear the openness of the exposition space. In response to a question from the assistant managing editor of the \textit{Christian Guardian} in Toronto, Canada regarding the treatment of blacks at the exposition, Penn responded: “There are no such signs on exhibit buildings as are intimated [by the \textit{Literary Digest}], and the colored people are welcome to all buildings, and reports to the contrary are only circulated by designing men of our race to prevent an attendance of colored people….The fact is the colored people are treated exceptionally good (just as their exhibit and demeanor merits)—far better than many expected.” Penn included with his article the testimony of five prominent black Atlantans who all reported that they attended the exposition without problems. He also suggested, however, that only a certain class of blacks—those whose “exhibit and demeanor merits”—could expect to be treated well.\textsuperscript{140}

Alice Bacon seconded the testimony of Penn, commenting that “[w]hile there is no social mingling of the two races, they met and observed each other on the fair grounds, in the street

\textsuperscript{139} It is difficult to determine, with any degree of accuracy, the number of African Americans who took in the fairs. Herman Justi in his history of the Tennessee Centennial noted that the “attendance of negroes on special days, and in fact at all times, was large.” The Savannah \textit{Tribune} reported of the Cotton States Exposition that “the attendance of the colored people is fair, especially those of other states. The colored citizens of Atlanta are doing much to solve the Negro question by conducting various kinds of paying business.” In the end, it is safe to assume that blacks did not attend that fairs at anywhere near the rate of whites but this does not preclude them from a salient presence at the expositions. For instance, the Baltimore \textit{Sun} reported that twenty thousand African Americans attended the Tennessee Centennial on Negro Day. Justi, \textit{Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition}, 198, 398; “Saying About Atlanta,” Savannah \textit{Tribune}, December 7, 1895, p. 2; and “Colored People’s Work” Baltimore \textit{Sun}, August 16, 1897, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{140} “Negro Editors Meet,” Atlanta \textit{Constitution}, November 22, 1895, p. 11.
cars, at the railway stations, at public meeting, in their walks about the city streets. They shopped in the same stores, they looked at and discussed the same exhibits and they exchanged ideas now and then as they passed each other that produced their effect on both sides.”

The Savannah Tribune reported that “negro visitors can enter any building that is open to whites, and there is no limit to their enjoyment of the exhibits and side shows.” In Atlanta, for a brief moment, the color line became fluid.

Like Atlanta, the Tennessee Centennial was accused of being a segregated space. In response to such accusations, journalist and un-ambiguous African American, John Edward Bruce under the penname Bruce Grit published an account of his trip to the exposition. In it Bruce confirmed the open nature of the exposition space:

I visited every building on the grounds, especially those to which local kickers said negroes would not be admitted, viz, the Woman’s building and the Auditorium. At both these places I was treated courteously, as I was in all other buildings I visited. It was said also that negroes could not buy refreshing drinks in the Agricultural building, where there is a soda water fountain. I went over there, bought soda water and drank it on the spot. The roof didn’t fall in, and nobody called me ‘nigra’ either. I had a similar refreshment in the Machinery building, where I also partook of some delightful sweet cider, which was served to me by a white woman of tender years and prepossessing face, who politely requested me to call again.

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Bacon, Negro and the Atlanta Exposition, 23.

“The Negro at the Exposition,” Savannah Tribune, November 2, 1895, p. 1. Stewart M. Lewis, an African American editor from Washington, DC, told the Constitution that “I went into every building and studied the exhibits. Nowhere was discourtesy shown me. The negro is treated as well here as he is treated anywhere.” “The Colored Press,” Atlanta Constitution, November 8, 1895, p. 11.

Bruce Grit, “Colored Men in Business,” Salt Lake City Broad Ax, September 18, 1897, p. 4.
While it is important to recognize that discrimination took place at the fairs, the evidence suggests that the expositions opened space for African American participation not only as objects on display but as fairgoers free to engage in most aspects of the fairs. At the expositions, African Americans, side-by-side with whites, performed a Jim Crow modernity.

The various congresses hosted by the Negro Departments also increased the black presence at the fairs. The congresses, what we would call conferences, were the events that most clearly put forth a program of African American progress. The congresses held at the Cotton States Exposition included societies of black soldiers, religious congresses, the YMCA, temperance societies, the National Afro-American Press Convention, education, the National Association of Colored Women, and significantly, a congress on Africa presented by the Gammon Theological Seminary.144 Most congresses were held conjointly between a local African American church and the exposition space. While offering “an exhibition of progress in fact and figure,” the congresses were often explicitly political.145

It served the interests of the white executive to have African Americans attend the exposition – not only to convince northerners of harmonious race relations but to provide much needed revenue.146 On both counts they were successful. The Brooklyn Eagle reported that “everywhere you see the negro” and that there was “no place about the exhibition where he is not

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145 *Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 62.

146 The Atlanta *Constitution* reported: “The negro will form an important factor in the attendance upon the exposition and the fact that their interests are being well looked after will cause many to come who would not come if they thought that there would be any difficult in their being cared for.” “The Negro Board,” Atlanta *Constitution*, June 14, 1895, p. 9.
as good as anybody else.” The New York committee in its history of the Atlanta exposition noted that the “negroes are another never-failing subject for the observation and the study of Northern and foreign visitors. They abound everywhere.” The Atlanta Constitution reported that northern visitors were taken aback by the sophistication of African Americans at the Cotton States Exposition. The newspaper suggested that northerners forgot that blacks had been in “close and familiar contact with the most refined and highly civilized people to be found in the world, and that the most progressive of the race have imbibed something of the energy, enterprise and aspirations of the people with who their lot is cast.” Hijacking African Americans’ performances of progress, southern whites took credit for blacks’ development and in doing so maintained that southerners had the answer to the “Negro question.”

The ability to perform bourgeois sensibilities was paramount to the educated black elite’s assertion that they should be treated as equal partners in American citizenship. As a result, African American newspapers frequently commented on the behavior and dress of blacks at the fairs. The Weekly Blade reported: “The easy, graceful, polite attention of ladies and gentlemen in charge of the exhibits were among the things to be very highly commended.” Charles Douglass, son of recently deceased Frederick Douglass, emphasized the importance of African Americans performing middle class sensibilities at the expositions. “A large gathering of well dressed, intelligent and well behaved colored people,” said Douglass, “cannot but make a

147 Hand Book to the Cotton States and International Exposition: Being a Faithful Account of What a Representative of the Brooklyn Eagle Saw When He Visited the Fair (Atlanta, 1895): 11-12. Microfilm Reel 126: 3. SNMAHL.


149 “Negro Day,” Atlanta Constitution, October 20, 1895, p. 16.

favorable impression among those who know us as menials in rags and ignorance.”¹⁵¹ Such performances, Douglass suggested, could improve whites’ treatment of a certain class of blacks.¹⁵²

In Nashville, African Americans continued to focus on their behavior as a sign of racial progress. The Freeman warned blacks that at the exposition they would be watched and should behave accordingly: “The thousands of our people…should conduct themselves prudently, because we are on dress parade.”¹⁵³ Apparently blacks did take The Freeman’s advice and performed bourgeois comportments. “The behavior of the colored people upon the grounds,” wrote Charles Stewart for The Freeman, “the immense attendance and the good natured humor displayed in every incident and during every hour of the day reflect with credit upon the manners, the patriotism and the character of the colored people of this city and State.”¹⁵⁴ Recognizing that they would be scrutinized and cognizant of the stereotypes surrounding the race, many African Americans took extra steps to ensure that they adopted middle class comportments and thereby confirm their modernity.¹⁵⁵

African Americans’ performances did not go unnoticed by the white press, which commented favorably on black fairgoers. Remarking on the six thousand African Americans

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Bacon, Negro and the Atlanta Exposition, 23-24.

¹⁵² Douglass went on: “This favorable impression was noticeable to a remarkable degree in the manner of our treatment in public conveyances and in the shops of Atlanta….Now I claim that our going to Georgia in such numbers, with head erect, acting and talking like free men and women had much to do with our respectful treatment.” Quoted in Bacon, Negro and the Atlanta Exposition, 23-24.

¹⁵³ M.A. Majors, “Nashville Tennessee,” Indianapolis The Freeman, May 29, 1897, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ Chas. H. Stewart, “Crowned With Success,” Indianapolis The Freeman, June 12, 1897, p. 5.

¹⁵⁵ Michelle Mitchell has noted the importance of public performance to the black middle class. Mitchell, Righteous Propagation, 115.
who came to Nashville for “Negro Employees Day,” local newspapers reported “a lack of boisterousness” among visiting blacks. “It became so noticeable,” reported the Nashville Banner, “that it was the subject of general comment at the depot. A better-behaved or more orderly crowd of people never passed through the gates.”\textsuperscript{156} The “exhibitionary complex” of the fairs gave African Americans an opportunity to demonstrate their progress and undermine images of blacks as rural and backwards. It also meant, however, that whites were given opportunities for surveillance not found in Atlanta and Nashville’s black areas.\textsuperscript{157}

Although white observers were pleased by the order displayed by African American fairgoers, elite blacks were sensitive to the presence of lower class blacks. To these observers the behavior of poor blacks undermined their performances of bourgeois sensibilities. John Edward Bruce noted that while there was a “well-dressed and well-ordered crowd” at the Tennessee Centennial, there were also blacks who were “bumptious, overbearing, odoriferous and greasy in public places.”\textsuperscript{158} Bruce’s complaints about lower class blacks seem out of character. Bruce, who later became the personal secretary of Marcus Garvey, was often a defender of the poor black masses. His biographer, Ralph L. Crowder, notes that Bruce’s ideological position “combined elements of Black nationalism and separation with political and civil protest.”\textsuperscript{159} That Bruce was complaining about blacks who may undermine a vision of progress suggests the stakes for


\textsuperscript{158} Quoted in Larson, “Three Southern World’s Fairs,” 168.

African Americans at the South’s expositions. Here the appearances and smells of lower class blacks threatened the images of progress performed by middle class African Americans at the fair. Like their white counterparts, poor blacks were encouraged to behave according to middle class sensibilities and stood out for failing to do so.

Prior to his speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition, Booker T. Washington was a well-known but not famous African American educator. His speech at the opening day exercises propelled him overnight to the most prominent African American in the nation. With Frederick Douglass deceased, Washington became the de facto leader of his race. While Washington and his program of accommodation and industrial education has since been met with scorn, in 1895 it was generally accepted as a prudent course of action. Indeed, Du Bois, Washington’s great antagonist, initially responded favorably to the speech he would later deem “The Atlanta Compromise.”

Like the Negro Building and the black middle class at the fairs, Washington presented an image of blacks as law-abiding, well behaved, and willing to work hard in the South. Washington biographer Robert Norrell notes: “In its larger thrust, the Atlanta exposition speech represented Washington’s attempt to counter the belief that free blacks had declined in character and morality from the time of slavery.” Washington was verbally expanding on a narrative of progress that incorporated the sights, sounds, and smells of African Americans at the exposition. For southern blacks at the turn-of-the-century this was viewed as a

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160 DuBois declared the speech to be “a word fitly spoken,” and “the basis of a real settlement between whites and blacks in the South.” Quoted in Norrell, *Up From History*, 128.

161 Norrell, *Up From History*, 125.
genuine way to improve the economic conditions of their race and challenge the social order of the New South.\textsuperscript{162}

Black opposition to the Negro Departments came less from opposing ideological camps than from regional experiences that influenced the social and political agendas of their proponents. It is unsurprising that northern black newspapers took exception to the Negro Buildings. Better off socially, economically, and politically, northern blacks in the 1890s had achieved many of the goals still out of reach for their southern counterparts. Looking southward they could not comprehend the level of daily racial terror faced by southern blacks and harshly judged those viewed to be corroborating with a racial system that so plainly exploited them.\textsuperscript{163}

Southern blacks were not insensitive to the accusation. Henry McNeal Turner made clear in his defense of the Negro Building in Atlanta that he was not a “white man’s nigger.” He condemned northern blacks for not supporting the exposition because of the discrimination faced by blacks in the South. Noting that the Chicago exposition saw blacks “Jim Crowed by the nation” and not just in train cars, Turner suggested that African Americans take every opportunity to demonstrate their worth and self-respect. “If I had to choose between railroad

\textsuperscript{162} Washington later abandoned these plans after becoming involved with the colonial German government in Togo to replicate the labor system of the New South in West Africa. Andrew Zimmerman does an excellent job in tracing the transformation of Washington’s thinking and demonstrating the way in which his work with the German government was an important catalyst in shifting his thinking away from an emancipatory social and political agenda. Zimmerman, \textit{Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, The German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

\textsuperscript{163} The Cleveland \textit{Gazette} made this point a month prior to the Tennessee Centennial: “The Afro-American visitor from the northern states must leave all self-respect behind and be prepared to yield to every degree of insulting discrimination while in this so-called commonwealth of ours. The indignities usually imposed upon us are not considered particularly offensive to the Afro-Americans of the south, simply because they are used to them and, in this state anyhow, they are afraid to make an earnest effort for the improvement of their condition, but to the northerner, contemptuous treatment must seem condemnable.” “Tennessee Centennial,” Cleveland \textit{Gazette}, April 10, 1897, p. 2.
degradation and the exposition degradation,” argued Turner, “I would infinitely prefer the latter, for the exposition allows me an opportunity to show to the world that I can be clean, mannerly, cultured and refined and deserve better treatment, and it is the surest way to get it.” 164 Northern blacks were right to argue that the white oppression in the South was intolerable, what they failed to see was that the expositions offered a rare opportunity for southern blacks to present a counter program of race pride in a region and nation increasingly convinced that African Americans were degenerating.

Even as Booker T. Washington stood before a full auditorium at the Cotton States and International Exposition and claimed that: “In all things that are purely social, we can be as separate as fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” The truth of the exposition presented a more complicated reality. 165 While the Negro Building surely represented Washington’s proverbial “hand,” African American fairgoers suggested that they may not be the easily separated “fingers” that he claimed. In their dress and behavior, in their exhibits of agricultural, industrial, and educational progress, and in the adoption of the language

164 Bishop H. M. Turner, “To Colored People,” Parsons (Kansas) Weekly Blade, February 9, 1895, p. 1, 4. This appeal was published in a number of black newspapers as well as the Atlanta Constitution. Throughout the run of the expositions the Negro committees expressed exasperation with the northern black press, chalking the negative reviews of the Negro Buildings up to northern ignorance. Reporting on the lack of northern black interest in the Negro Building for the Atlanta fair, The Freeman described an exchange at a meeting on the exposition in Washington, DC: “Col. Livingston in answer to a query put by Miss. Lucy K. Moten, principal of the Normal school here, ‘Whether the colored visitors would be protected from the violence of the ignorant and cracker class,’ assured her there would be no distinction made at the Exposition grounds and that ample protection would be given every law abiding citizen. Quite a deal of ignorance was shown by some Northern colored people regarding the South—they seem to fancy it was inhabited solely be barbarians. It is to be hoped that some of them will go there and find a black face is treated no worse there than in the Capital City of the country.” “Washington City News” Indianapolis The Freeman, June 8, 1893, p. 3

165 Washington, Up From Slavery, 129.
of evolutionary science, southern African Americans presented a case for black progress and modernity.

Late nineteenth century Americans were a part of what historian Steven Conn has called an “object-based epistemology.” To most Americans, objects were as important as texts in producing knowledge and meaning. The exhibits in the Negro Building, then, were more than simple representations of African American progress; they were “object lessons” that argued for a new appreciation and understanding of black life. They presented a thesis of black progress not only as a verb but as a noun. In the late-nineteenth century museum, visitors would stare and consider an object on its own terms and then in the context of surrounding objects. In the case of the Atlanta and Nashville expositions, the Negro Building in toto was contrasted with the other representations of progress and primitiveness scattered throughout the expositions.

Nineteenth century international expositions often presented Africans and African Americans as backwards primitives whose past was static and not progressive. The fairs’ organizers created temporal disjunctures in which African and African American peoples were behind Euro-American progress. Ethnographical showcases of “primitive” Africans and amusing and nostalgic performances of slave life reinforced the ideological distance between blacks and modern white Americans. However, southern expositions’ Negro Buildings provided a space for African Americans to assert themselves as contemporaries, integrating themselves into the nation and the fairs’ discourses of progress.

At modernity’s core is a belief in perpetual material and moral progress through scientific rationality, secularism, and individualism. Southern African Americans engaged in the conversation surrounding modernity by demonstrating that they were not the backwards and primitive people depicted in late nineteenth century popular culture. Nor were they degenerating

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and becoming extinct, as the day’s evolutionary science would have it. Instead southern African Americans argued that they were a separate and vibrant race, whose material, moral, and industrial progress demanded they be considered equal partners in American civilization. The southern black elite also saw it as their mission, through the expositions, to bring to members of their race the sophisticated and bourgeois culture associated with modernity, while pressing for the civilization of Africans, who in their mind, clearly lagged behind. Consequently, they did not completely challenge the day’s racial science, offering a dialogic as opposed to dialectic critique. The Negro Buildings offered a present of peace and goodwill and a future of harmonious relations with whites, while ignoring the racial turmoil and violence engulfing the South. In the end, however, the New Negroes of the New South presented a southern interpretation of their race and offered their dream of the future and in doing so laid claim to a discourse of civilization and progress that they were often excluded from.
Chapter 3. New Women, New South: Femininity and Womanhood at the Expositions

In September 1895 a young woman from Kentucky, “with eyes bluer than the grass of her native heath and a glance more intoxicating that a draught fresh from a bourbon still,” arrived in Atlanta to take in the fair. A decade earlier an un-chaperoned woman in public space would have been code for a prostitute, but in the liminal space of the exposition older gender and sexual signs were disintegrating as women from across the South traveled to Atlanta to witness the region’s great spectacle. As she took in the Government Building, the Kentucky girl was met by “four savages from Dahomey” who carried on a litter an actor dressed as the African explorer and imperialist Henry Morton Stanley. The African performers were nearly naked wearing only loincloths and beadwork across their chests. After dropping off their passenger, the men waited while the woman’s “eyes opened in wide wonderment.” The Kentucky girl was not the typical demure southern belle. “With a sudden determination,” reported the Atlanta Constitution, “the young lady gathered her skirts and tripped up, smiling sweetly, in front of the wild-eyed cannibals.” She asked if the Africans would take her for a ride but the Dahomeans, according to the Constitution, only “grinned grotesquely and grunted” and “leered gently at the young lady.” Before anyone could stop her, the girl jumped on the litter and the “savages were trotting off at a swinging gait.” The sight of a young white woman carried on a palanquin by four scantily clad black men gathered a crowd. The event ended, however, without incident and the Constitution
reported that the girl “was happy and the savages, too, grinned with joy as they turned and trotted back for their master, who had finished his business, and was calling for them.”

In this brief anecdote gender, race, and empire intersected at the Atlanta exposition. As late as the 1890s southern women lived circumscribed lives. The factories, vaudeville theaters, and department stores of the industrial cities of the North had only begun to make inroads in the South. These places of work, entertainment, and consumption had changed the roles of American women in public space. Emerging from the private sphere, women took on new cultural positions, while publicly experimenting with new political, social, and economic identities. Operating in a similar manner, the Cotton States and International Exposition and Tennessee Centennial Exposition transformed the gendered nature of public space in the South. Within their controlled and ordered boundaries, southern women were set free from male chaperones and traditional constraints. At the fairs, southern women transgressed gender, social, and racial lines to experiment with new identities. At the same time, this transgression did not lead to subversion but rather renewed social and racial hierarchies, providing a framework for imperial understandings of self.

Although the story of the Kentucky girl is no doubt exceptional, it makes clear the larger impact of the expositions’ on the South. Many African American men had been lynched for simply glancing at a white woman and now four semi-nude black men were carrying a white woman around in a public space. Laced with sexuality, the story demonstrates the power of empire to transform social relations. In the expositions’ imperial milieu, southern white women were given new social and racial powers. As primitives and savages the African men were contained by the civilization of the white South. The Kentucky girl had nothing to fear because as historian T.J. Boisseau notes, as a New Woman she would have “wed an emergent American

1 “In All Its Glory,” Atlanta Constitution, September 28, 1895, p. 5.
feminist identity to nation-, class-, and race-specific identities and to the colonial implication which attended them.” Like the late nineteenth century African explorer, Mary French-Sheldon, who represented herself as the white queen of Africa and frequently wore a white gown on expeditions, the Kentucky girl, “signaled a change in American women’s relationship to the public sphere and the nation-state, it reveal[ed] new womanhood’s reliance upon class, racial, and national hierarchies for its expression and specifically upon primitivism as a foil.”

At the South’s expositions, southern white women were given new powers and spheres of influence rooted in race and empire. While the purpose of the Woman’s Building was to demonstrate southern women’s balance of tradition and modernity, the experiences of the fair expanded the role of women in the South.

The rhetoric surrounding the Woman’s Building and women’s participation at the Atlanta and Nashville expositions closely followed the Negro Building and African American participation. Both groups—black men and white women—were viewed as outside the official political sphere of the South and yet both groups were also recognized as essential parts of southern culture and society. Indeed, African American and white women’s efforts for a deeper inclusion in southern public life accounts for their participation at the fairs. Like African Americans, southern white women saw the fairs as an opportunity to present themselves as modern to the region and nation. This, moreover, was not lost on the fairs’ contemporaries who frequently connected the two buildings as the most important of the expositions. For northern and southern fairgoers alike the Woman’s Building was evidence that the South was a part of the American modern.3

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3 Both groups were frequently linked in the press: “The new woman and the new negro are in evidence here, and they are attracting universal attention,” reported the Chicago Inter Ocean.
The Woman’s Buildings, however, did not simply replicate northern ideas of femininity and womanhood. While the late nineteenth century was characterized by the emergence of the New Woman, who demanded and participated in the expansion of the public sphere, New South women operated within a more circumscribed definition of womanhood and femininity. Caught between an industrializing society and the need for women to uphold the pretenses of antebellum ladyhood, southern women negotiated new public roles. A study of southern women in the late nineteenth century, then, must recognize the ways in which region, class, politics, and race played in women’s self-refashioning at the end of the century.4

The women behind the Woman’s Buildings came from the region’s elite families. Through the buildings’ exhibits they presented an image of southern womanhood that balanced modernity and tradition. As a result, southern women represented themselves in much the same manner as other people viewed to be on the periphery of modernity. Historian Lisa Langlois has observed that Japanese women operated as keepers of Japanese tradition in order to produce a teleological narrative of progress. At the World’s Columbian exposition in Chicago in 1893, Japanese men adopted a modern persona that made clear distinction between a historical feminine Japan and a modern male nation. The representation of Japanese women as both traditional and modern allowed Japan to claim that it had not lost its authenticity in its drive toward modernity. Likewise, the ability of southern women to present themselves as both

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traditional and modern gave the South a progressive narrative and a living history that confirmed its modernity.⁵

Through collections of colonial and Civil War relics, meetings of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and by emphasizing an older southern womanhood, the Woman’s Buildings confirmed for fairgoers that the South had not lost its “authenticity” in its drive toward industry. At the same time, southern women did not deny their modern selves. Throughout the buildings southern women demonstrated their participation in progress through exhibits, lectures, and object lessons. Countering the popular image of the southern belle, the New Women of the New South welcomed suffragists, intellectuals, and independent women to the Woman’s Building. The Woman’s Building was not the location of a single definition of southern womanhood but rather reflected the diverse and often paradoxical positions of women in the New South.

Away from the Woman’s Building, southern women also made their presence felt. In the space of the fairgrounds, middle and working class women, whose sense of self differed greatly from the elite women of the Board of Lady Managers, performed and defined new definitions of womanhood. Like department stores, expositions provided safe and public space for women to move unaccompanied by men. World’s fairs were an opportunity to try on new behaviors, roles, and abilities.⁶ By performing their gender, southern women pushed the boundaries of feminine identity while learning the limits of this identity in the exhibitionary complex of the fairs.⁷


Southern white women were not the only female presence at the fairs, however. African American women were present in ways that were subtle and obvious, empowering and exploitive. The Negro Buildings’ definition of blackness was a mostly male enterprise. Nevertheless, southern black women created a shadow Woman’s Board and invited prominent black female speakers to give talks at the Negro Building and in local churches. During the Tennessee Centennial, the National Association of Colored Women met and created their first constitution. On the other end of the spectrum, black women could be found working in the expositions’ nurseries and kitchens. The figure of the mammy was frequently employed by the expositions’ organizers to confirm the supposedly peaceful nature of race relations in the South, while selling northern visitors on popular depictions of the region.8 Lastly, black women’s culinary skills created a southern taste that was sold to and deemed authentic by fairgoers. In these ways, the Atlanta and Nashville expositions provided an opportunity for black women to speak for themselves, while constraining them in the popular stereotypes of the late nineteenth century.

The Woman’s Building and the female presence at the fair were also a part of the formulation of American empire. As historian Laura Wexler has argued, the late nineteenth century cult of domesticity was directly tied to empire. The Woman’s Buildings contained rooms decorated to be tableaux vivants of southern sentimentalism and domesticity. Southern women represented a southern civilization that was viewed as superior to foreign people of color and was essential in the creation of an empire based on domesticating and civilizing the colonial Other. This was made obvious by the Woman’s Buildings’ inclusion of “primitive” and “savage” artifacts of women from throughout the world. Moreover, the performances of “primitive”

women in the Dahomey, Turkish, and Chinese villages stood as contradistinctions to the “proper” behavior of white female fairgoers. Through these contrasting representations, visitors to the expositions were witness to the supposed superiority of southern womanhood and the place of America in bringing civilization to the world.9

At the South’s expositions, women redefined southern femininity in a national and international context. The Boards of Lady Managers offered a new form of womanhood that embraced the mythology of the southern belle, while inserting her into the public discourse of Progressivism and industrial reform. These women argued that their domesticity and role in maintaining racial hierarchy was particularly suited for imperial adventures. Lastly, African American women, denied official space at the expositions, embraced similar progressive narratives as white southern women and continued to fight against Jim Crow. Southern women, then, operated at both the periphery and center of the New South. Denied formal political status and viewed as subservient to the traditional bonds of patriarchy and Old South mythology, they were, at the same time, central to the South’s argument for its modernity. The expositions’ proclaimed that a *southern* New Woman had arrived in the region.

The rise of women in the social and political sphere was one of the most significant transformations of the late nineteenth century. While women would not achieve the right to vote until 1920, the various women’s movements, literary, social, and reform clubs that emerged after the Civil War played important roles in bringing women to the forefront of political and social discourse. Moreover, industrial capitalism and mass consumption changed middle and working class women’s relationship to public space. No longer confined to the home, middle class women

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were expected to become the family’s main consumer. Working class women, on the other hand, freed from the constraints of family, led lives that placed pleasure and consumption ahead of family formation. Frequently, the target of middle class ire and reform measures, working class women spent their earnings on fashion, entertainment, and at the local saloon. Life remained the most unchanged for rural women. However, through local farm organizations and participation in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), rural women also took on new and more public roles in their communities. Other women, mostly elite and upper middle class, were appalled by these changes and devoted their lives to maintaining older definitions of womanhood and femininity. Nevertheless, by the 1890s women’s position in American society had shifted closer to the center of public life.  

Transformations in women’s lives differed according to region, class, race, and ethnicity. No more so than for southern women, white and black, rich and poor. The Civil War was a watershed moment for southern women. However, the gains made by women in the absence of their husbands and sons were more ephemeral than real. At the same time, women did not forget their experiences during the war and instead used them to influence and support southern manhood. Almost immediately after the war, southern white women organized into Ladies Memorial Associations that supported and sustained the memory of the Confederacy and Old

South. These associations were not aimed at expanding women’s rights but redefined southern white womanhood in the age of black freedom. For southern white women, support for southern men was essential to maintain their social position ahead of recently freed slave women. As opposed to being activist and reformist, southern women in the immediate aftermath of the war strove to maintain old bonds of femininity and gendered order.

Despite their conservative nature, Ladies Memorial Associations and later the United Daughters of the Confederacy placed women in a far more public role than they had prior to the war. As historian LeeAnn Whites makes clear, “the Ladies Memorial Associations worked to maintain the conventional forms of gender subordination even as they eroded its underlying substance.” By entering the public world, southern women expanded the influence of the domestic sphere. In doing so, they made southern domesticity and femininity inherent to postbellum southern identity. As a symbol of a “redeemed” South, white women were banner carriers for white supremacy. In order to preserve the white South from “Negro domination” and “Republican rule,” southern white men utilized the image of the white woman as the pinnacle of civilization, domesticity, and chastity. By protecting their women, southern men believed they were protecting the southern way of life.


12 Although this does not mean that the LMAs “served as mere puppets for male ambitions.” “Above all,” writes Caroline Janney, “these women saw themselves as patriots performing vital civic duties for their communities and the larger South, rather than as purveyors of male confidence.” Janney, *Burying the Dead*, 8.


14 Giselle Roberts, “The New Andromeda: Sarah Morgan and the Post-Civil War Domestic Ideal” in “*Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph*”: *Southern Women, Their Institutions, and Their
By the 1890s some southern women had embraced the suffragist movement and the New Woman. Southern suffragists, like their northern counterparts, responded to the problems inherent in urbanization and industrialization. These middle class women from the South’s growing industrial and railway centers wanted the vote in order to use their “natural” abilities to soften the effects of industrial-capitalism. Antisuffragists, on the other hand, came from the region’s elites and were often descendants of the old planter class. These women were afraid that the right to vote would take them away from their domestic pursuits and push them into the undignified realm of politics. Southern conservatives were also afraid that suffrage would bring back black enfranchisement and threaten the Democratic Party’s supremacy. Lastly, railroads and cotton mill owners came out against the vote, fearing that women would reform the South’s regressive labor laws and target corruption. Nevertheless, the South, while lagging behind the North by a decade or so, was in the 1890s feeling the effects of the Woman’s Movement.15

Beyond pushing for enfranchisement southern women formed and joined literary clubs and women’s organizations. In these local clubs, they discussed the great questions of the day and, as the clubs gained affiliation with a national network under the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, pulled away from their provincialism. The WCTU also gave many southern women their first experience in fighting for a political cause. Southern women in the 1890s, then, were not the belles of northern imagination, languishing on plantations, but were politically and


socially active, maintaining a version of domesticity and femininity that formed the basis of southern mythology and identity.\textsuperscript{16}

For southern black women, disfranchisement of their male counterparts opened the door for an enlarged public role. Through church associations African American women organized and asserted themselves in black public life. Understanding that they were frequently the targets of southern moral reform, southern black women adopted a “politics of respectability.”\textsuperscript{17} Black working class women were also more politically radical than southern white women. For African American middle class women, organizations such as the WCTU, before it became a white-only organization in 1898, and the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) along with other local clubs provided the same intellectual atmosphere and collective identity as white women’s clubs. Working as domestics and washerwomen, teachers and home keepers, African American women strove to define themselves against a racist onslaught that questioned their morality and ability to maintain the ideal household espoused by whites.\textsuperscript{18}

Southern women were not unaware of the changes occurring to the definitions of femininity and womanhood in the late nineteenth century. In a myriad of ways they embodied the transformations in gender across America. At the same time, southern women were shaped by their place. They embraced the speed and freedom of modernity, while remaining “dedicated


to the traditional virtues of quite resolve, of working their good influence within the home and church.”

Southern white women embodied the history and supposed purity of southern culture, while black women were viewed as its antithesis. Both groups fought against these stereotypes even as white women employed them to gain power in southern society. At the expositions the paradox of being both traditional and modern came together most obviously in the Woman’s Building.

There was precedence for the Woman’s Buildings at the Atlanta and Nashville fairs. The 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition gave women a separate space, if not a separate building, in a Women’s Pavilion. Here upper-middle class and elite women drew on “deeply rooted traditions of separatism and sorority” and devoted the exhibit to women’s artistic and industrial pursuits. Through the pavilion, Philadelphia’s elite argued that an expanded women’s sphere acted as salve to the horrors of industrial-capitalism. The pavilion was devoted to preserving and promoting a bourgeois understanding of femininity and the ideal household. For these women domesticity was not an oppressive ideology, as historian Mary Cordato argues, “it was a dynamic, multi-faceted concept that allowed Centennial women an opportunity to express themselves creatively and intelligently, to move confidently in private and public space, and to broaden the scope of women’s roles and behavior.” Nevertheless, both the American Women’s Suffrage Association and the National Women’s Suffrage Association protested the pavilion for

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19 Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 29.


its lack of open support for enfranchisement.\textsuperscript{22} Despite its failures to push for women’s rights, the Philadelphia Centennial pavilion did succeed in opening up woman’s sphere and expanding its public reach at an international exposition.

Seventeen years after the Centennial the women of the World’s Columbian Exposition took a more activist role while not denying the value and importance of domestic culture. The Woman’s Building at the Columbian was the first major building in the United States to be designed by a woman. In it the Board of Lady Managers led by Chicago scion Bertha Palmer attempted to represent the ideal of womanhood. Palmer made sure that the women of the building shined as examples of proper feminine behavior and the board publicly condemned conduct and dress deemed “un-feminine.” As much as they tried to ignore and distance the Woman’s Building from the suffrage question, many fairgoers and journalists associated the building with the women’s movement. In the end, the Board of Lady Managers, while promoting an expansion of women’s role in industry, science and the arts, reinforced a belief that women’s essential place was as wives and mothers in charge of modern households.\textsuperscript{23}

Given the rise of the New Woman and the success of the Woman’s Building in Chicago, it was without question that the Cotton States and International Exposition would feature a building devoted to southern womanhood. For a region cast as backwards and behind the times, the Woman’s Building was essential to the exposition’s argument for a modern Atlanta and South [Figure 12: Cotton States Woman’s Building]. “There is no feature of the Cotton States

\textsuperscript{22}Cordato, “Representing the Expansion of Woman’s Sphere,” 64.

Expositions that speaks for the new South more convincingly than the Woman’s Building,” reported the Chicago *Inter-Ocean*.  

The exposition’s openness to modern definitions of womanhood was clear from the start. At the laying of the cornerstone for the Woman’s Building, exposition president Charles Collier addressed the crowd, noting that the building was a “distinguished and emphatic recognition and approval of a new and vigorous factor in modern thought and modern civilization which seeks to broaden and expand the sphere of woman’s usefulness and to strike from her shackles with which centuries of ignorance and bigotry have bound her.”  

At the opening of the exposition Emma Thompson thanked the Board of Directors for acknowledging “new woman” as “neither the antagonist nor the rival of man, but his co-worker and helpmeet along broader, nobler and diviner lines, for as her powers and faculties have freer scope and larger growth, his burdens lessen.”  

For the men and women behind the expositions the Woman’s Building was representative of something far greater than the New Woman: it represented the New South.  

The two most important women on the Cotton States’ Board of Women Mangers were its president, Emma Thompson, the wife of a prominent financier and wholesale liquor dealer, and Rebecca Latimer Felton, who as one of five directors of the women’s exhibits was the only one who had experience at a major exposition. Felton was also the more radical, known as a leading figure in the southern woman’s rights movement she frequently spoke out on a number of topics including prison reform, temperance, education, and later woman’s suffrage. Felton would go on  

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26 *Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 97.
to become the first-ever female United States Senator in 1922. Together, the two were the driving force behind the building.27

Elise Mercer of Pittsburgh designed the Woman’s Building, which was one of three buildings not designed by Bradford Gilbert. The building included a library of books written by women, musical compositions, magazines, and copies of patents for inventions by women. The purpose of which was to “show to the world the progress women have made in every branch of literature.”28 The progress of American women was made more obvious by the library’s enjoining room, which featured exhibits from the Dyer collection of Indian relics.29 Space was provided for educational exhibits, including technical and industrial schools, as well as places for exhibits of book covers, woodcarving, furniture design, and artistic displays. Lastly, the building was divided into separate rooms in which different state associations designed their versions of ideal domestic space, while promoting the women’s activities of their state.30


28 The Official Catalogue of the Cotton States and International Exposition Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. September 18 to December 31, 1895 (Atlanta, 1895), 124; Cotton States and International Exposition. Congress of Librarian, November 29 & 30, 1895, Woman’s Building, Assembly Hall, Atlanta, Georgia, Cotton States and International Exposition 1895—Women’s Building Folder. Cotton States Subject File: Box 2. The Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia. Hereinafter KRC.

29 Theda Perdue, Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 73. Colonel Daniel B. Dyer, an Indian agent among the Modocs, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes, submitted his prize-winning collection to the Woman’s Building’s Committee on Indian Prehistoric Relics and Curios. The collection currently resides in the Missouri Valley Special Collection, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, MO.

30 Hand Book to the Cotton States and International Exposition: Being a Faithful Account of What a Representative of the Brooklyn Eagle Saw When He Visited the Fair (Atlanta, 1895), 60.
The Tennessee Centennial Exposition’s Woman’s Building was also an elite affair

[Figure 13: Centennial Woman’s Building]. All of the important members of the Woman’s Board of Managers came from the high circles of Tennessee’s three main cities of Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville. Many of the women could trace a lineage back to the American Revolution or earlier and all were deeply involved in cultural and philanthropic pursuits. The president of the Woman’s Board, Mrs. Van Leer Kirkman, was the granddaughter of Jacob Thompson, Secretary of the Interior under President Buchanan. Born in Nashville, Kirkman spent the first four years of her life in Cuba. Later she attended Fairmont College in Monteagle before travelling to Paris at the age of sixteen, spending two years visiting the great cities of Europe. At the time of the exposition, Kirkman was the second wife of Cumberland Furnace ironworks heir Van Leer Kirkman. In total the Woman’s Board consisted of one hundred women who were assisted by three hundred and twenty commissioners from around the country.31

The Woman’s Building was to be comprehensive in its presentation of “woman’s work.” “Here will be gathered together the most complete library ever made of books written by women,” reported the New Orleans Daily Picayune. “Here is a room filled with models of all the mechanical devises ever invented by women. Here are embroideries and patient handiwork of every kind, three whole rooms being given up to the art and lacework of women of Turkey, Egypt, Japan, and Russia.”32 Designed by Sara Ward Conley in the colonial style, the Woman’s

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31 “President Woman’s Department Tennessee Centennial,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 25, 1897, p. 14; “All Roads Lead to Nashville” (Nashville, 1897), 26. Microfilm Reel 127:15. SNMAHL; Elisabeth Israels Perry, “Memorializing the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Woman’s Building” in Gendering the Fair, 152.

Building was a replica of Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage. The exterior featured eight large columns supporting a portico. An observatory, from which the entire fairgrounds could be observed, was placed on the roof. The building was divided into sixteen rooms and filled with exhibits from the arts and sciences to household work. New York, Chicago, Chattanooga, and Georgia all had their own rooms. Cheatham County presented a model kitchen in which cooking lessons were given daily. Sumner County exhibited a Colonial bedroom, while Maury County produced a Colonial sitting room.\textsuperscript{33} Murfreesboro and Rutherford counties furnished rooms with relics of the United States’ three Tennessee presidents.\textsuperscript{34}

The Woman’s Buildings were to be both real and allegorical representations of the New South woman. Not denying or questioning woman’s position in the region’s social hierarchy, the buildings made clear that women’s roles in southern society were changing. Emphasizing domesticity, history, and industry the buildings seemed at once contradictory and coherent. They presented a southern femininity that was changing yet remaining the same. In their exhibits of civilization and domesticity they made an argument for the superiority of southern white womanhood, modernity, and history.

\textsuperscript{33} A full list of rooms and displays at the Woman’s Building: Rutherford County, Murfreesboro, New York, Marion County, McMinn County women gave a fountain for the entrance, the Indian relic collection was found in the South Hall, Bradley, Lincoln, and Bedford Counties’ exhibits were in the North Hall, Memphis Hall was the main hall of the building, Assembly Hall was furnishd and decorated by the women of Knoxville, Georgia Room, Chicago Room, Library, Model Kitchen, President’s Parlor, Turkish Room, Lace Room, Decorative and Applied Arts Room was given the largest room on the second floor, Mount Vernon Room, Sales Room, Hamilton County Room, Patents and Inventions Room, and the Colonial Bed Room. “Official Catalogue of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition,” 70-73.

In an address on Brooklyn Day at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, a Mrs. Peters asked the crowd gathered in the auditorium: “Shall woman enter the industrial world and become self-supporting and by industry is meant all work, whether of the head or the hand or shall she wait for a husband to maintain her?”35 At the expositions southern white women demanded full inclusion in the industrial world. They wanted to show the nation that they “were competing closely with [women] of the North in almost every field of mental and social progress.”36 The fairs at Atlanta and Nashville gave southern women an opportunity to demonstrate progress in modern life. At the same time, southern women occupied a different place in society than their northern counterparts. White women in the South were the standard bearers of tradition and the memory of the defeated Confederacy. As a result, the Woman’s Building and the Board of Lady Managers presented a particularly southern version of the New Woman: one that was progressive and future-oriented but did not disturb the social and racial hierarchy established in the 1870s and 1880s. For many southerners, women’s new public role made the modernity of the New South palatable.

Like elsewhere on the exposition grounds, women made evolutionary arguments for southern progress. “Within [the Woman’s Building] walls you will trace [women’s] steps from the lowly part she played in the primitive civilization of the race to the exalted position she now occupies as man’s co-worker,” boasted Emma Thompson at the Opening Exercises at the Cotton States exposition.37 This “law of evolution” explained a promotional pamphlet for the Centennial, was made most clear by a pioneer’s cabin situated outside the Woman’s Building,

35 “An Address by Mrs. Peters” Wheeling, WV The Wheeling Register, October 12, 1897, p. 1.
36 New York at the Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, Georgia (Albany, 1896), 47.
37 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated, 97.
which offered a “striking contrast to the elegant structure containing all the appliances of modern convenience, and the triumphs of modern art.”\textsuperscript{38} By preserving the tradition and patriotism of a pioneer’s cabin, Tennessee women made claims on both their lineage as “true” Americans as well as demonstrate their progressive nature. While some northerners might think that all southerners resided in such cabins, the Woman’s Building stood as counter-argument.\textsuperscript{39}

At the expositions’ Woman’s Building, the Board of Lady Managers’ argument for the progressive nature of southern womanhood was intimately linked to questions of work and industry. Through the exhibits the buildings suggested the progressive and modern nature of labor associated with “woman’s work.” Exhibits of lace and stitching, “feminine arts,” and needlework confirmed traditional definitions of femininity. At the same time, other exhibits, such as patented inventions by women, combined with lectures demanding a larger role for women in southern industry transformed traditional notions of women’s labor. Despite the hodgepodge nature of the building, observers’ left with a sense that southern women were indeed progressive and that woman’s role in the industrial economy was changing.\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Harper’s Weekly} noted that the Atlanta Woman’s Building was “distinguished chiefly for the absence of the customary proportion of needle-work and fancy knickknacks, and a preponderance of illustrations of woman’s accomplishments in the higher fields of art and industry.”\textsuperscript{41} Despite


these pretenses to modernity, the Women’s Board did recognize the need to uplift members of their sex who lagged behind. For them, object lessons such as the cottage industries of Russia were examples of the ways in which poor southern white women of the Piedmont and Appalachia regions could join the southern economy. Although in a way that preserved the South’s class hierarchy by modeling their labor on outdated notions of industrialization tied to cottage industries.42

Perhaps no other exhibit illustrated the southern push for women’s industry than a display of twelve living object lessons. Twelve women from different parts of the country performed various industries within the Cotton States’ Woman’s Building: a blind lace maker from Philadelphia, a woodcarver from Cincinnati, a glove maker from New York, a clay modeler, a designer of carpets and wall paper, an embroiderer, a decorator of china and porcelain, a stain glass worker, a miniature painter, an oriental weaver, “a Georgia cracker at her loom,” and an etcher on wood. In the late nineteenth century such skilled occupations as glove making remained the realm of men’s work. At the same time, these industries were undergoing rapid changes as they became industrialized. Thus, while the women “illustrate[d] most potently the woman movement of the south, which is distinctly industrial,” it was more of a movement towards cottage industries than the modern industrial labor found in the North and sought after by New South proponents.43

Questions of labor aside, southern women were determined to show their progressive nature, while uplifting those who lagged behind. As a result, both fairs featured cooking schools through which women’s domestic place was confirmed as it was modernized. The Tennessee

42 Hand Book to the Cotton States and International Exposition, 60.

Centennial featured a model kitchen in which southern middle and working class women were trained in proper culinary techniques. The classes were given for free and women learned “modern methods of cooking with all the improved appliances of the culinary art.” Lectures were also held at the Assembly room and topics included “The Art of Dining” and “What to Eat and How to Cook It.” In Atlanta, there was no model kitchen but cooking classes in the annex ensured that women learned to “make of herself a comforting household angel.” Through these lessons women learned how to “cook scientifically” and know “the exact chemical effects of all foods cooked there.” In this way, modern conceptions of taste and culinary skill replaced the traditional and outmoded tastes of the region’s white working class who shared a culinary tradition with African Americans. Such lectures and demonstrations were designed to transform southern women into the middle class ideal of wife as cook. “Many Women and children were given new views of the art of cooking, and, what is of more importance, the art of living,” concluded the Centennial’s official historian, Herman Justi.

The cooking lessons were also viewed as a way to ensure white supremacy. Southern women must be knowledgeable in the culinary arts as well as strictly manage their kitchens because it was believed that “under the regime of the new ‘freedom[,]’ servants will certainly be

45 “At the Woman’s Building” Nashville Banner, September 21, 1897, p. 7.
46 Maude Andrews, “This Is Woman’s Busy Day,” Atlanta Constitution, October 6, 1895, p. 6.
47 “The Girls—They Come” Atlanta Constitution, October [missing], 1895, p. [missing].
48 On the ways in which southern taste was racialized see Camille Bégin, “‘Partaking of choice poultry cooked a la southern style’: Taste and Race in the New Deal Sensory Economy,” Radical History Review 110 (Spring 2011): 127-153.
49 Justi, Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition (Knoxville, 1898), 150.
Notwithstanding the fact that southern black women had served as cooks in plantation kitchens and worked as domestics and cooks in the thirty years between the exposition and freedom, in the increasingly segregated world of the Jim Crow South the ideal white woman would also need to be the ideal cook. The expositions, then, were essential in the segregation of a southern taste divided by modern and scientific white cooks and “traditional” southern black “mammies.”

The Woman’s Building’s argument that white women under freedom would have to do the majority of their cooking seems bizarre and has more to do with the maintenance of a mythic Old South than New South realities. Only the large-scale plantations would have had enslaved domestic help, while most poor white women cooked for themselves and their families. Likewise, although the employment of black domestics was common after slavery, the majority of white women continued to operate their own kitchens. Moreover, whites in the middle and upper classes employed large numbers of African American women to be domestics and cooks. It is odd, then, that in the 1890s, thirty years after freedom, there would be a concern over the abilities of African American female cooks.51

Like the model kitchen, the Cotton States’ model cottage also presented an ideal version of southern womanhood and domestic life. Located just outside the Woman’s Building the cottage was lived in for the extent of the exposition by a family consisting of a husband and wife

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and four children. They were given a total of 10 dollars a week for which they were to pay for their food, clothing, rent, and “all necessary incidentals.”52 The model home was to demonstrate “how comfort and happiness are not incompatible with the ordinary wages of a workingman.”53 At the model schoolroom, women were shown “practical suggestions in every branch of preparatory school work” in order to help improve them in this new feminine occupation.54 Indeed, training was deemed essential by such figures as Margaret Stratton, Dean of Wellesley College. “[In all] phases of modern life women have come to bear a large part,” spoke Stratton at the Congress of Education at the Cotton States exposition. “They have been admitted to the rank and file of labor and only their own lack of training seems to hinder their advancement.”55 Women at the expositions were on the forefront of the social engineering schemes of the fairs as described by Tony Bennett. If the architecture of the exhibitionary complex was man’s domain, then women were responsible for the object lessons of social order.56

Southern women were much open in their embrace of suffragism and the New Women than the Women’s Departments of the Philadelphia and Chicago expositions. On Suffragist Day at the Centennial, Mary Caldwell Evans of Tennessee demanded that “[Woman] must be an equal or a slave; there is no middle ground.” However, despite the attention given to the

52 Leupp, “The Scope of the Atlanta Exposition,” 876.

53 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 97; “In Woman’s Behalf” Atlanta Constitution, September 19, 1895, p. 5.

54 “In Woman’s Behalf” Atlanta Constitution, September 19, 1895, p. 5. For the way in which teaching became a popular feminine occupation in the late nineteenth century South see Censer, “Women in Public,” Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 153-206.

55 “Women of Brains” Atlanta Constitution, November 1, 1895, p. 4.

movement at the exposition, the Nashville *Banner* reported that the suffrage cause was still “in the state of the ridiculed” but that it had “bright prospects.” The Woman’s Buildings had a tentative relationship with the suffrage movement. The New York *Herald* reported on the Atlanta building that “while not antagonistic to the woman’s suffrage or temperance unions, the members [of the Woman’s Board] believe there is better work to be done on entirely different lines.” Nevertheless, lectures on suffrage, by such southern suffragists as Florida Cunningham, attracted the largest audiences to the Woman’s Building.

Suffragists at the expositions linked domestic life to questions of political and racial power. “[Homemakers] are more readily appreciating as the question is better understood that only as women are free to develop wholly according to their own ideals of womanhood is the race to gain the ideal home-maker and the ideal home,” spoke Rachel Foster Avery at the Woman’s Building. One of the highest profile guests of the Cotton States exposition was woman’s rights activist Belva Lockwood, whose speech at the congress for the Federation of Women’s Clubs was one of the most talked about events in Atlanta. At the congress, Lockwood expressed her belief in the power of the New Woman “to be the leading spirit in those organized efforts for the advancement of the race.” Grasping at the new science of eugenics, Lockwood claimed that “[w]iser mothers and nobler men will then recruit the nation with a grander

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57 “The Woman Suffragists” Nashville *Banner*, September 3, 1897, p. 5. Suffrage Day was preceded by a suffrage congress held in the first month of the exposition. “Suffrage Convention” Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, May 12, 1897, p. 1.


59 “Plant Day Celebrated—Woman’s Suffrage Discussed.” Atlanta *Constitution*, October 29, 1895, p. 7; Maude Andrews, “This is Woman’s Busy Day” Atlanta *Constitution*, November 3, 1895, p. [illegible].

60 “Women on Divorce” Atlanta *Constitution*, October 11, 1895, p. 4.
offspring.”  The Woman’s Building was viewed as way to promote the “good mother, the noble woman, guided by firm, loving, womanly instincts” against “mundane mothers” and “absorptive women who take the sap of youth from their children, who bear daughters to offer them a sacrifice to mammon, and rear sons but to think of greed and worldly gain.” Southern suffragists were not so much interested in the political power that would offset the voting strength of African American men. Instead they viewed progress and the New Woman as evidence of the superiority of the white race and as a way to curtail the damaging effects of industry on the “southern way of life.” In effect, southern white women saw themselves as easing the tension between the modern and the traditional that lay at the heart of the New South.

Southern women, understanding themselves as modern, were also the guardians of the southern past. They saw themselves as bedrocks of tradition in the storms of modernity. In their mind, southern femininity provided a governor to the engine of southern industry. At the Woman’s Congress at the Cotton States Exposition, the Chicago Inter Ocean noted that the meeting was “not trying to put forward a new woman, but simply to bring out the old-fashioned women of the whole country and get them interested in the plan of enlarging woman’s work by taking advantage of women’s enlarged opportunities.” As a result, “old-fashioned conferences on


62 Maude Andrews, “This is Woman’s Busy Day” Atlanta Constitution, December 1, 1895, p. 6. In “Women in the Professions,” Helen Gardener likewise noted the importance of the Woman’s Building in breeding and producing good mothers: “Ignorant and undeveloped motherhood has been and is a terrible curse to the race….a superficial, shallow, incompetent, trivial mother has left a heritage to the world which can and does poison the stream of life as it flows on and on in an eternally widening circle of pain or disease or insanity or crime.” Gardener, “Women in the Professions” in Thought Blossoms from the South, 18-19. On the eugenic movement see Daniel Bender, “Of Jukes and Immigrants: Eugenics and the Problem of Race Betterment,” American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009): 191-213.
household duties and mothers’ meetings [were] sandwiched in with woman suffrage and woman’s advancement gatherings.”

Some southern women at the expositions were quick to distance themselves from the New Woman. One member of the Board of Lady Managers at the Cotton States told a northern newspaper that the southern New Woman was “just the same Southern woman we have always had, beautiful in her nature, tender in her sympathies, loving her home and brave in its defense, but the men have opened the doors for her to enter with them into a wider sphere of usefulness and be a greater help to them.” In this view, the new southern woman continued to support traditional gender hierarchies and southern manhood. If the sweatshops and factory girls of the urban north were combining with the middle class flâneuse of the department store and high street to upset gender order, then the southern woman continued to look “to man for our counsel and defense, honoring, loving, and helping him as we may.” “It is not a new woman in the South any more than it is a new negro in the South,” concluded the Lady Manager. “It is a Southern woman of the same old type in a new South, doing her duty new and keeping abreast of her opportunities as she did in the old days.” If the world was changing, then southern women, like southern African Americans, were viewed as possessing an older more traditional identity even as they struggled to become full members of southern society.

More so than in the North, which also saw the rise of ancestral organizations, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, women in the South were viewed as gatekeepers of history. As a result, the Atlanta Constitution suggested that “no single department of the women’s exhibit at the exposition will exceed in general interest that of the colonial committee.”


For the women of the colonial committee its exhibits emphasized both a colonial history and a nostalgia for the Old South. “Above anything, I desire to assert the supremacy of the southern colonies,” stated Mrs. William Lawson Peel, “Chairman” of the committee. “Many people are part to date the Christian era of the cotton states from the emancipation of the slaves. We will prove that we have been civilized for generations, and that there was no civilization superior.”

Locating southern “supremacy” in the slave era, Peel suggested that emancipation was not as rosy as northerners made it out to be. For some southern white women the colonial South was a mythic place of stability yet to be destroyed by northern aggression and New South industrialization. Indeed, southern women were by far the more partisan of exposition participants and occasionally responsible for outbreaks of sectional rivalry.

As historian Caroline Janney has argued, southern women were less likely to embrace reconciliation than their male counterparts. “Because women were not thought of as political,” writes Janney, “they could continue to espouse Confederate rhetoric and sympathy even as their male counterparts could not.” While the men of the expositions supported a reconciliationist vision that allowed for the integration of the South into the national industrial economy, southern women, as keepers of southern tradition, explicitly supported the Confederacy. In an interview with the woman in charge of the Confederate Relics Building, the Constitution noted that while veterans from both sides were overcome with emotion when looking at the relics, northern women were occasionally “disagreeable.” One northern woman chastised the exhibitor for its sympathetic display of Confederate relics. She asked if the southern woman thought America to be the “grandest tune in the world” and the woman responded: “No, madam, Dixie is the greatest

65 “Colonial Display” Atlanta Constitution, April 7, 1895, p. 3.
66 Janney, Burying the Dead, 153.
67 Janney, Burying the Dead, 156.
tune in the world to us down here; we are all good Americans now, but tragedy and sorrow has planted Dixie deep in our hearts and we will love it as long as there are southerners to sing it and a southern land to sing it in.” 68 Such moments of sectional partisanship were rare at the expositions. Nevertheless, when they did flare up, southern women were often at the center, performing their role of gatekeepers of southern tradition and history. 69

A brief glance at some of the few un-staged photos of the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions will note the preponderance of unescorted women taking in the fairs [Figure 14: Unaccompanied Women]. The Nashville Banner reported that on opening day “ladies formed at least half the crowds.” 70 Nevertheless, while opening public space to women, expositions, like department stores and high streets, placed women under increased surveillance. As Lauren Rabinovitz has argued, women’s subjectivity in the late nineteenth century was a subjectivity that acknowledged its surveillance. “[T]he strolling female pedestrian’s identity,” writes Rabinovitz, “depended upon seeing herself as constantly being viewed, upon forms of surveillance and self-censorship.” 71 And when women at the fairs overstepped their boundaries they were publicly admonished. For instance, prominent Nashvillian Miss Elsie Caldwell was arrested at the Centennial for picking flowers. Caught by an undercover Centennial Guard member, Caldwell and her companion resisted arrest but were overwhelmed by a troop of guards


69 The northern press often held the LMA “responsible for ‘inflaming the passions’ through their commemorative traditions.” Janney, Burying the Dead, 2.

70 “Swayed Through the Gates” Nashville Banner, May 1, 1897, p. 1.

71 Rabinovitz, For the Love of Pleasure, 9.
who responded to the undercover guardsman’s fired pistol.\footnote{Will be Investigated} While this incident stands out, its exceptionality obscures the ways in which southern women changed their behavior and modes of conduct to suit their new identities as public subjects and objects.

Like other expositions and local fairs the Midway was viewed as place where women could be corrupted by the sights and sounds of the entertainments. Fairgoers flocked to the amusements, while middle class writers warned them of the immorality of the space. “Heaven knows I am no prude,” clarified Maude Andrews in the \textit{Constitution}, “but perhaps because of that I feel like being more careful of a girl’s innocence than women who know less of life….To the naturally refined one the revelation is a sickening shock to her system, mentally and physically, and to the coarse one—well; after all I scarcely believe that there is in the realms of decency, even a coarse-minded woman who would enjoy such experiences as are to be found in a few of the nasty shows of the Midway.”\footnote{This is Woman’s Busy Day} To be sure, “coarse” women took in the fair and the police forces of the expositions worked hard to control them. In May two men were arrested and fined five dollars for attending the Centennial in the company of known prostitutes. Unable to prosecute the prostitutes’ attendance, Centennial City published an ordinance giving the Centennial Guard power to arrest any known \textit{filles de joie} found on the fair grounds.\footnote{A Centennial Ordinance: Public Indecency is Rigidly Punished by the Authorities}

Compared to the rough and tumble natures of late nineteenth century Atlanta and Nashville, the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial offered women safe spaces for public participation. In the ideal cities of the expositions, southern women became members of modern society. They were observed and categorized. Not as “well-groomed” or with the “superb air” of

\footnote{Will be Investigated} \textit{Nashville Banner}, August 28, 1897, p. 1.

\footnote{This is Woman’s Busy Day} \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, November 17, 1895, p. 24.

\footnote{A Centennial Ordinance: Public Indecency is Rigidly Punished by the Authorities} \textit{Nashville Banner}, May 20, 1897, p. 5.
New York women nor with the “dash of the Chicago girl, nor the eruditism of the Boston woman,” the southern woman stood out at the fair for her “delicious womanliness and strong individuality.” In doing so southern women took their place in the public arena of southern life.75 At the same time, the presence of working class women, “treating” girls, and prostitutes, suggests the ways in which the industrial-city corrupted the ideal. By presenting themselves unaccompanied in public, women challenged the South’s traditional gender roles and behavior.76

Northerners who came south for the expositions were impressed by the changes in southern womanhood. The Chicago Inter Ocean reported that only “a few years ago [southern] women were following the old rule of devoting their entire time to domestic and social duties.” Now, however, there were “many women’s clubs and organizations working in harmony with the men and women [were] talking of going to the polls to vote with the men.”77 The Women’s Building and the public participation of women at the expositions were essential to the South’s claims to modernity. Expositions, as Rabinovitz makes clear, constructed “a socially sanctioned public space for women’s participation, promising the possibility of mobile spectatorship in a safe urban environment, and this construction was integral to the definition of the modern.”78 At the same time, women’s role as bearers of tradition meant that they never intended to fully subvert the gender hierarchies of the South. As Caroline Janney argues, “gender excluded women from the national dialogue on reunion just as it continued to provide white southerners a

75 “Some of the Season’s Charming Debutantes” Atlanta Constitution, October 13, 1895, p. 6.


78 Rabinovitz, For the Love of Pleasure, 50.
source of power over regional politics and race relations.” Like their Japanese counterparts on the periphery of modernity, southern women’s embrace of history and tradition allowed southern men to welcome the changes wrought by industrial-capitalism. Nevertheless, by increasing their public presence and embracing national movements, southern women acted as agents in the slow transformation of gender roles in the South.79

Race was essential to southern white women’s (re)definitions of self at the expositions. The Women’s Buildings’ exhibits were viewed as evidence for the superiority of white civilization and the representations and embodiments of the New Woman were indicative of the progressive nature of the Anglo-Saxon race. At the same time, African American women at the expositions disrupted these narratives. Meetings of the National Association of Colored Women along with other gatherings within and outside the fairs presented southern black women as respectable members of southern society who were progressive and future-oriented. On the other hand, black working class women’s appearance at the fair was complicated by their occupations as cooks and nurses. For the African American women employed by the expositions their presence as domestics confirmed for whites blacks’ subordinate place in the South. Finally, caricatured depictions of mammies on the Midways’ Old Plantation restored the racial and gender order the Negro Building threatened and confirmed the odious position of southern black women in American popular culture.

Within the Negro Buildings African American women represented themselves as keepers of domestic space. At the Tennessee Centennial the Memphis exhibit consisted of a display of

79 Janney, Burying the Dead, 156. See also LeeAnn Whites, Gender Matters; Langlois, “Japan—Modern, Ancient, and Gendered.”
embroidery, fine arts, and fashion by African American women. In presenting evidence of their domesticity, black women challenged racist images of the black household as disorderly. Unlike the male dominated Manufacturing and Liberal Arts buildings, the Negro Buildings were open to the inclusion of women’s exhibits. I. Garland Penn believed that black women “showed more real interest and put forth more effort to install a creditable exhibit in the negro building” than many men.

Beyond exhibits in the Negro Building, southern black women held a variety of conferences and meetings at the expositions. In the days before Christmas the Cotton States exposition played host to a National Congress of Women organized by the Negro Department. The purpose of the congress was to make clear the “intelligence, beauty, and virtue” of African American women. The women speakers were lawyers, teachers, physicians, lecturers, journalists, authors, principals, and instructors as well as the wives of prominent African American men. The congress’ goal was to continue the uplift work of the African American middle class, while demonstrating to white southerners that African American home life was representative of the domestic ideal. “The women of our race, as the women of any race, can make or break us,” reflected Penn in the pages of the Constitution. “The colored women’s congress has a fixed purpose and that is to promote intelligence, refinement and morality in the negro home….By deliberation they mean to ascertain for themselves all that is before them for the proper uplift of their people to note the opportunities that are open to them and to prepare the womanhood of the

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80 “The Tennessee Centennial” Indianapolis The Freeman, May 15, 1897, p. 7.

81 “Relics Secured,” New York Herald-Tribune, April 28, 1897, p. 5. At the Tennessee Centennial, African American women formed a Woman’s Board and were given charge of producing exhibits that represented the progress of African Americans.

82 I. Garland Penn, “‘New’ Negro Woman” Atlanta Constitution, December 22, 1895, p. 22.
race for the snares that are in wait for them.”

Black women and the black home were on the vanguard of disrupting racist stereotypes of the black family.

In her study of the Cotton States exposition, historian Theda Perdue suggests that the Congress on Women at the Atlanta exposition featured the fair’s most explicit attacks on racism. Likewise, the Tennessee Centennial was witness to the establishment of the National Association of Colored Women’s (NACW) first constitution. The organization, “united in the effort to lift the masses as they rise,” took aim at the South’s racial system. At the Centennial the association adopted a resolution against Jim Crow railcar laws, demanded first and second class coaches where the laws existed, condemned rapists, lynching, and the “wholesale publication of crime by the newspapers.” They also resolved to humanize the convict lease system and endorsed the Frederick Douglass memorial monument. Ultimately, the organizers of the NACW convention were disappointed by the turnout, blaming low attendance on a yellow fever outbreak and the fact that many northern black women refused to ride in Jim Crow cars and so stayed home. While Glenda Gilmore has argued that black women progressives tended to keep their work hidden, their participation in the Atlanta and Nashville expositions contradicts this

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83 Pen, “‘New’ Negro Woman,” 22.


view.\textsuperscript{87} In a much more explicit fashion than men at the fairs, African American women vocally took a stand against the South’s racial order.

When black women were represented in the white space of the fairs it was in roles that confirmed their lesser place in the racial and social order. In her study of the image of the faithful slave in American popular culture, historian Micki McElya notes that representations of black female servants “equated the African American’s place in modern life with servility, obedience, [and] joviality.”\textsuperscript{88} It is unsurprising, then, that in spaces meant to celebrate the South’s modernity, concern over its dislocating effects on the racial order were lessened through representations of the mammy. The ubiquity of the mammy figure was so great that even southern \textit{white} women’s accents brought back images for ex-pat writers like F. Hopkinson Smith of the “old black mammy who brought me through from babyhood to boyhood.”\textsuperscript{89} Smith’s casual collapsing of race and gender at the fair suggests the stakes for southern white women attempting to maintain their spot in the South’s shifting social hierarchy. The figure of the faithful slave and mammy was essential to this task of re-establishing a southern racial order.

At the Cotton States exposition black women were represented in the Woman’s Building in ways that confirmed their subservient role in southern society. In the basement of the building was a nursery where “ladies visiting the exposition could leave their infants with black nurses to care for them while the ladies [took] in the show.”\textsuperscript{90} For 25 cents white women employed a

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\textsuperscript{87} Gilmore, \textit{Gender and Jim Crow}, 165. On the other hand, Francesca Morgan argues that the NACW was far more political than white women’s clubs. Morgan, \textit{Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 22-23.

\textsuperscript{88} McElya, \textit{Clinging to Mammy}, 16.

\textsuperscript{89} F. Hopkinson Smith, “Some Notes on Tennessee’s Centennial” \textit{Scribner’s Magazine} (September 1897): 342.

\textsuperscript{90} “M.W. Ray’s Diary for 1895.” Cotton States Exposition Addendum. KRC.
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mammy for the day. In doing so, they confirmed, even for just the day, their status as southern ladies who exercised authority over black labor.⁹¹ Moreover, the Women’s Building used black feminine labor to confirm the progressive nature of Anglo-Saxon womanhood. One of the proposed features of the building was an “old plantation room, with a negro woman at work carding, weaving and spinning cotton.”⁹² With living object lessons, the Ladies Board placed African American labor in an antiquated location that denied them a future role in southern society, while making clear white women’s progressive nature. The Women’s Building, then, gave all women fairgoers an opportunity to authenticate the power of their whiteness.

On the expositions’ Midways the faithful slave came alive through the Old Plantation amusement. Located near the entrance, a mammy character solicited fairgoers to come and take in the entertainment. Working an old fashioned spinning wheel, she wore a bandanna and smoked a pipe.⁹³ McElya argues that the slave mammy was an essential character in Old South mythology because it helped ease class tensions in the New South. Since the mammy was associated with the great plantations of the antebellum South, those after the war “who shared memories of mammy or claimed some affinity with a mammy figure were necessarily claiming a part of that class legacy and status.”⁹⁴ By walking through the Old Plantation amusement white fairgoers were able to take on a historic status regardless of their current class position.

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⁹¹ McElya, Clinging to Mammy, 142. As McElya makes clear, black domestic labor confirmed the power of whiteness.

⁹² “Cotton States and International Exposition—Souvenir Cards.” Cotton States Subject File, Box 2. KRC.


⁹⁴ McElya, Clinging to Mammy, 45.
When a northerner governor visited the Cotton States his interaction with the mammy actress of the Old Plantation is revealing for the ways in which it confirmed Old South mythology, while opening space for her to exploit the crowd’s belief in the faithful slave legend. Making a quilt in the same way she had “be fo’ da war,” the “mammy” told the governor that she was seventy-five and, playing into a stereotype of black female fecundity, had twenty children. More importantly, she turned the story of her children to the one son who was killed while faithfully serving his master during the Civil War. Having gained the governor and the crowd’s sympathy the woman solicited him for a nickel. The Constitution reported that her “request was met with generous response and when the governor passed around that hat it was filled with silver.” It is difficult to tell how true this story was or if the woman had created a composite from other stories she had heard. Nevertheless, she maneuvered whites’ belief in the faithful slave to her financial advantage, playing the crowd as she played herself. Southern black women used Old South mythology even as they were being exploited by it. For most fairgoers though, the women performing the role of the faithful slave confirmed a belief in black female labor as limited to domestic servanthood.

If the Old Plantation gave fairgoers a taste of the mythic Old South, then the Creole Kitchen at the Cotton States exposition provided them with a real taste of southern home cooking. The restaurant vied with Sheriff Callaway’s BBQ in attracting “visitors from the north who are naturally desirous of sampling some genuine southern cookery.” Through the restaurant visitors were welcomed to a mythic southern taste rooted in the past. The kitchen was a log cabin designed to look like “the negro cabins of ante-bellum days” and visitors were “impressed by its pretty southern atmosphere.” Despite the pretenses to the plantation past, the restaurant made clear the generational division of labor in the New South. The waitresses were African American.

95 “Comrades Now” Atlanta Constitution, September 22, 1895, p. 22.
“girls” dressed in “regulation black dress with white caps and aprons.” The Constitution noted that they represented “the working class of negresses of this generation.” These girls, however, only served southern taste and did not create it. Instead, “an old-fashioned negro woman” presided over the kitchen. The newspaper described her as a “genuine servant of the old times in checked homespun frock and bright bandanna head dress.” While she may not have been up-to-date with the scientific cookery of the model kitchen, the newspaper reported that her secret knowledge of cornbread has “kept her race in the possession of white faultless teeth and strong muscles.”96 In its unambiguous blackness, the Creole Kitchen acknowledged the role of African American women in making an authentic southern taste popular to all. For northern fairgoers looking for that “authentic” taste of the South, it no doubt confirmed for them the direct link between blackness and southern taste. At the same time, rooting southern taste in the slave past, the restaurant, like the other representations of black women at the fairs, allowed white diners to pretend they were the masters and mistresses of an antebellum plantation and confirm their contemporary power rooted in whiteness.97

With its clear reference to Aunt Jemima, who was also at the exposition selling her famous flapjacks, the Creole Kitchen provides a window into the complicated construction of race and taste in the New South.98 The restaurant embodies M. M. Manring’s observation of the role Aunt Jemima played in sectional harmony: “White southerners knew how to eat and celebrate,” writes Manring, “Yankees knew how to manufacture and distribute. Both could live

96 “Creole Cooking as It Is Seen at the Fair” Atlanta Constitution, September 24, 1895, p. 9.

97 Southern food defied the logic of segregation as white and black southerners enjoyed it. At the same time, whites frequently believed that black labor was essential to the creation of southern taste just as northerners associated southern cooking with “black food.” Bégin, “Taste and Race,” 131-133, 137.

in harmony as long as African Americans waited tables and fed the kitchen stoves.” Just like Aunt Jemima, then, the Creole Kitchen demonstrates how “[a] ‘southern’ ideal of racial order and leisure was married to a ‘northern’ approach to enterprise.” In the restaurant, race, taste, and consumption were joined in Jim Crow modernity. At the same time, while Aunt Jemima was a pastiche, the chef of the Creole Kitchen created complicated dishes that defined southern and Creole cooking. Her entrées and appetizers spanned southern, American, and French cooking. They included fried oysters, okra shrimp gumbo, tomato Mulligatawny, cornbread “a la Creole,” and roast beef. As Rebecca Sharpless makes clear, African American women were viewed as “mediators between nature and culture,” between the “primitive” and “natural cooking” of southern blacks and the “ordered white world” of taste. Northerners seeking an authentic taste of the South went back home with the Creole Kitchen fresh in their minds.

Representation of black femininity was never homogenous at the expositions. Within the space of the fairs southern African American men and women alongside white men and women attempted to define modern black femininity. Fighting against stereotypes of the “Jezebel” and mammy, southern black women presented themselves as progressive women who desired not only the uplift of their race but inclusion in a broader American womanhood. On the other hand, southern whites mobilized the image of the mammy and faithful slave to demonstrate the maintenance of racial and social order in a modernizing and industrializing South. Lastly, southern black women contributed, whether recognized or not, to the creation and marketing of a

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100 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 97.

101 “Creole Kitchen” Atlanta Constitution, October 12, 1895, p. 2.

102 Sharpless, Cooking in Other Women’s Kitchens, xxiii.
distinct southern taste. Despite the hopefulness of the NACW and the supposed peaceful race relations presented by southern whites, the expositions were always an ephemeral space. Twelve days into the Tennessee Centennial the Nashville *Banner* proudly reported that Mollie Smith and Mandy Franks, two “Negro” women, were lynched by an “unknown” mob for poisoning a family. Clearly, domestic laborers were not necessarily content and life as a black woman was precarious outside the space of the expositions.  

Southern women understood femininity, womanhood, and domesticity in the context of a civilizing discourse that had imperial ramifications. Within the Women’s Building and throughout the fairs, white women viewed exhibits and entertainments through a racial and imperial lens. The New Woman of the New South was an imperial agent whose power rested in her civilization founded on a mythology of the plantation belle and mixed with modern domesticity and femininity.  

Both the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial exposition’s Woman’s Buildings were divided into separate rooms in which various counties, cities, and states’ committees organized their versions of the domestic ideal. The rooms were a combination of local boosterism and femininity. For instance, at the Tennessee Centennial the ladies of Rutherford County decorated their room entirely in the red cedar the county was known for. Other rooms emphasized women’s traditional roles as caretakers. The Chicago room was made up to be a reception parlor with green carpet, walls and “imitation tapestry.” In each instance the room was a demonstration of  

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103 “Two Women Lynched” Nashville *Banner*, May 12, 1897, p. 1.  
104 Robert Rydell rightfully argues that imperialism was the not so subtle undercurrent to all American expositions. Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).  
ideal domesticity; however, in the context of the expositions and the Woman’s Building, the rooms were also a claim to an imperial power rooted in the language of race, civilization, and femininity.\textsuperscript{106}

In her study of the photography of \textit{fin de siècle} domestic life, historian Laura Wexler makes clear the imperial implications of such mundane items as family photographs. According to Wexler, the explosion of family portraits and pictures of ideal domestic scenes “differentiated hierarchically the lives of ‘civilized’ Americans from the lives of a variety of people not considered adequately domestic.”\textsuperscript{107} In the imperial milieu of the 1890s domestic images confirmed the civilization of Americans, while offering a clear contrast to foreign Others who did not live up to the domestic ideal. It also placed women at the center of the imperial project. If colonies were to be civilized they would need to adhere to the notions of domesticity and femininity. American white women were essential to the formation of American empire. In the “ambiguous zones of empire” that made up the Georgia Room, the Murray Room, and the other domestic spaces of the Woman’s Buildings, southern women claimed an imperialist vision of domesticity.\textsuperscript{108} The civilized nature of these rooms and parlors stood in stark contrast to the


\textsuperscript{107} Wexler, \textit{Tender Violence}, 23.

\textsuperscript{108} Laura Ann Stoler in her edited collection of essays on North American empire notes that spaces such as the household formed “ambiguous zones of empire.” She goes on to argue that “matters of the intimate,” such as domestic spaces, “are critical sites of the consolidation of colonial power, that management of those domains provides a strong pulse on how relations of empire are exercised, and that affairs of the intimate are strategic for empire-driven states.” Stoler, “Intimidations of Empire: Predicament of the Tactile and Unseen” in Stoler, ed. \textit{Haunted By Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1, 4.
“uncivilized” domestic spaces found on the Old Plantation and Dahommey Village. They stood as evidence of the superiority of white female domesticity and its civilizing abilities.

Like the before and after photographs Wexler identifies in her analysis of boarding and technical schools, the Woman’s Buildings were filled with exhibits that made clear white womanhood’s difference from “primitive” women. In the Cotton States’ building “Indian relics” from the Dyer collection were displayed directly beside exhibits of “the professional work of women.” Compared to the exhibits of white femininity, these relics were noteworthy because they were “unspoiled by civilization.” Likewise at the Centennial, the annex of the Women’s Building featured thirty-two cases containing women’s work in America, Africa, Polynesia, and elsewhere. Fairgoers were invited to compare the handiwork and note “the primitive ideas of women connected with form and color decoration.” The buildings also reflected the anxiety over the consequences of mass immigration to America. In an article accompanying descriptions of the Centennial, the Nashville Banner took the opportunity to disparage Greek women. “In no country in the world, supposed to be at all civilized,” reported the Banner, “is housekeeping in such a primitive and backward state.” Along with establishing southern white women’s superiority, the Woman’s Building maintained that southern womanhood was far superior to female immigrants arriving from the shores of Europe.

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109 Wexler, Tender Violence, 105.


111 Hand Book to the Cotton States and International Exposition, 61.

112 Justi, Official History, 151.

113 “About Modern Greek Housekeeping” Nashville Banner, May 15, 1897, p. 11.
Women’s progress in America was central to the argument for the superiority of American civilization. In a lecture at the Woman’s Building in Atlanta, Miss A. M. Ely noted that Egypt would remain “backwards” as long as its women did not improve. “Contrast for a moment these two countries,” asked Ely of her audience. “Egypt with its past, it stationary present, its hopeless future, and the United States with its marvelous development, commanding the respect and admiration of the world.” Of course, women fairgoers could take a short walk to the Streets of Cairo on the Midway to witness the “stationary present” of Egyptian women. The displays of the progressive nature of American women, made self-evident by the object lessons of uncivilized womanhood, and the images of ideal domesticity provided an easy lens through which visitors were made to realize the supposed superiority of American life. In the imperialistic rhetoric of the mid-1890s, such object lessons were not lost on fairgoers.

At the Tennessee Centennial’s Women’s Building consumptive practices were divided between American and orientalist experiences. While women bought lacework and paintings in the department store inspired salesroom, they also embraced the exotic by perusing the items of the Turkish Bazaar located in the building. Likewise, at the Cotton States exposition women bought “Oriental goods” at the Women’s Building. Southern women also embraced orientalism in their decoration of domestic space. The Columbus Room was decorated in “oriental” wallpaper that looked like tapestry and the “oriental lamps” hung from the frescoed ceiling brightened the room. In a collapse of time and space the room contained exhibits of

114 “Women of Brains” Atlanta Constitution, November 1, 1895, p. 4.


116 “Here’s the Midway Shows” Atlanta Constitution, September 1, 1895), p. 2. In this case they were of East Asian variety and sold by an H. F. Chutjien.
Indian mound relics alongside Burmese mummies.\textsuperscript{117} Both attracted to and repelled by non-European culture, eighteenth and nineteenth century Europeans laid the groundwork for imperialism by casting these cultures as backwards and weak, at the same time as viewing them as a place of escape from the “rationality” of Western civilization.\textsuperscript{118} As women from the working and middle class formed new subjectivities in relationship to commodities in the late nineteenth century, they took on a distinctly imperial identity. Consumption of oriental and racialized products confirmed a subjectivity of white superiority rooted in imperial conquest and racial imperative.\textsuperscript{119}

In her study of Orientalism, historian Mari Yoshihara demonstrates the way in which middle class American women played a central role in removing Orientalism from the rarified air of the academy to everyday cultural consumption and production practices. While Yoshihara is concerned with East Asian cultural and commercial artifacts, it is apparent that American women were on the vanguard of bringing a broad orientalist consumerism to the nation.\textsuperscript{120} Just as late nineteenth century advertising used racialized and imperialist images to sell everyday household products to women, the Board of Women Managers’ embrace of Orientalism confirmed the imperial dimensions of domestic space and consumption practices. By adopting Orientalist design, southern women challenged a perception of themselves as demure southern belles in favor of a modern concept of femininity linked to empire. In decorating their homes with foreign

\textsuperscript{117} “Her Gates Ajar” Atlanta Constitution, September 18, 1895, p. 2.


\textsuperscript{119} For the way in which consumption was imperative to identity and political formation among working class women at the turn of the century see Enstad, Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure. For an examination of the ways in which Orientalism played in American mass consumption at the turn of the century see Register, The Kid of Coney Island, 115-116.

and specifically Middle Eastern goods, late nineteenth century women opened their households to the world. They confronted, in the words of historian Kristen Hoganson, “the confines of domesticity by turning their homes into imperial outposts and by escaping – if only imaginatively – into the wider world.” Within the Women’s Building, southern women’s orientalist parlors spoke to an escapism that came from an embrace of empire. Demonstrating their knowledge of the day’s interior design trends, southern women made claims on a modern femininity whose consumptive practices were rooted in imperial power.

If the exhibits of the Women’s Buildings were too staid or mundane, white women could also witness living examples of primitivism and foreignness on the exposition’s Midways. While the imperial implications of the Midways’ ethnological villages will be given full analysis in the next chapter, it is important to note that these villages were viewed through a gendered lens. In one of her many articles giving the female perspective on the Cotton States, Maude Andrews gave advice on how to study the various “foreign” and “feminine types” on display at the fair.

Beginning with the Mexican Village, Andrews provides a racialized and gendered reading of non-American women. Mexican women are described as “mules” that “can carry a burden weighing three times as much as itself for a day with patience” and the other foreign women are described in the terminology of phrenology and physiology. Andrews, however, saves a series of invectives for the African women of the Dahomey Village. In the village, noted Andrews, “one finds the African women in her most horrible state—almost nude, entirely like an ape.” In her description of African women, Andrews suggests that some foreign people were beyond civilization and wondered if there were limits to imperial uplift. Describing the women of the Chinese village, Andrews reflected that “of all heathen women it seems to me that these

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would be the most difficult to inculcate with the desire to vote.” In Andrews’ view, there were racial limits to women’s rights and progress. While some foreign people could be civilized and, indeed, needed to be civilized, others, like Chinese and African women, were too primitive or heathen to warrant a civilizing effort. Moreover, in linking supposedly primitive Africans to African Americans, Andrews confirmed southern blacks’ position as outside civilization and the futility of philanthropic efforts by both private and public institutions.  

As a “racial study” that was “well worth investigating,” Andrews made clear the gendered implication of the ethnographic villages. Relying on her knowledge of racial types that was essential to her southern white womanhood, Andrews emphasized the superiority of her whiteness and the possibilities for extending civilization abroad. She positioned herself and by extension other female fairgoers as imperial agents. Just as the romance novels of the 1890s featured heroines escaping their homes to partake in imperial adventures, ethnic villages allowed women to enjoy the “pleasures of imperialism” without having to leave the United States. As historian Amy Kaplan notes, “women [were] invited to imagine themselves participating in the adventures of empire as a means of rejecting traditional roles.” Likewise, female fairgoers escaped the boundaries of their lives by becoming faux imperialists on the Midways’ ethnographic villages. More real than novels, the villages opened space for women to imagine new lives in the support of empire and nation.

At the Tennessee Centennial the Lady’s Board of Managers went out of their way to embrace the great geopolitical question of the day. In late September the Board organized a “Cuban Day” with lectures from women devoted to the “Cuban cause.” Such political displays

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123 Kaplan, The Anarchy of Empire, 95, 110-111.

124 “At the Woman’s Building” Nashville Banner, September 21, 1897, p. 7.
were not as important as the cultural work done by southern women. In their domestic practices, embrace of orientalism, and confirmation of racial superiority, southern white women provided a gendered framework for empire. In return, empire provided a new public space for southern women. Empire made the Kentucky belle at the start of this chapter possible. In the imperial moment of the New South, women gained a power rooted in their control over uncivilized people. With domesticity and femininity central to the imperial project, southern white women mobilized their unique power over black female domestic labor as evidence for their suitability in extending the civilizing process to foreign lands.¹²⁵

When given a chance to publicly display their conceptions of womanhood and femininity, southern women presented an image that was remarkably similar to their northern sisters. Not the demure southern belles of myth, women at the fairs performed a gendered identity that was oriented to both public and private space. In the Woman’s Building southern women made clear their embrace of the New Woman and in doing so provided further evidence for the modernity of the South. In addition to these formal exhibits, women performed a new middle class sensibility that was possible in the exhibitionary complex of the fairs and was extended to the New South cities of Atlanta and Nashville. This new subjectivity based on free movement was essential to casting public space and by extension the South as modern. At the same time, the ruptures of industrial-capitalism combined with a new working class oriented amusement culture threatened the ordered stability of bourgeois gender hierarchy. On the fairs’ Midways gender came unhinged. Prostitutes and working class women, foreign actors, caricatured stereotypes, and middle class thrill seekers met and demonstrated the heterogeneity

¹²⁵ For the way in which American women played a central as “cultural” and “beneficent imperialists” in the project of empire, see Carol Chin, *Modernity and National Identity in the United States and East Asia, 1895-1919* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2010), 83-103.
of late nineteenth century femininity. Concerned with these displacements, middle class southern women turned to reform and memory to assuage the crumbling of traditional gender hierarchy.

Women at the fairs were the official gatekeepers of southern memory. The Ladies Memorial Associations and United Daughters of the Confederacy kept alive both the tradition of the Old South and its mythology of faithful slaves and plantation belles. In doing so, they maintained a stable footing for the ever-changing whims of industry and mass consumption. By maintaining the South’s history, southern women supported southern men by allowing them to fully embrace modernity. The men behind the expositions wanted nothing to do with formal exhibits of the Confederacy and the Old South. While they were willing to celebrate the South’s manhood through Civil War memorials and reunions, they did not want the fairs to look backwards. Southern women allowed the South to be both traditional and modern. They presented a distinctly southern modern identity that was sold to the North in the form of Dixie oriented consumerism.

For southern black women, long acquainted with the subjectivity of surveillance, the expositions were spaces in which to demonstrate their respectability. In many ways, the African American household was at the center of white questions over the fitness of blacks for modern life. As a result, black women responded by demonstrating the ideal domesticity of the black middle class household, while centering their reform efforts on working class black women’s homes. For whites at the expositions, black women’s visibility came in the form of domestic workers and caricatured representations of the faithful slave. The presence of black women’s labor at the expositions assured white southerners that African American women’s place in the modern world was to be characterized by servility. If Aunt Jemima was an isolated representation of Jim Crow modernity at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago then the Creole Kitchen, nurseries, and restaurants of the South’s expositions were examples of it writ
large. More so than the Negro Building, black women’s everyday presence at the fairs confirmed for southern whites and Americans generally the possibility of a Jim Crowed modernity.

Modernity segregated by race was essential to American fantasy of empire abroad. By comparing and contrasting themselves to the Other, Euro-Americans defined themselves as modern. For southern women, the embrace of orientalism had the effect of confirming the region’s modernity. If for many northerners the South was America’s Other, then the representation of imperial, oriental, and anthropological displays became object lessons that confirmed the South’s integration into the nation. Sectional reconciliation was essential to construction of empire. Embracing tradition and modernity, racial hierarchy, and imperial language, southern women were key cultural producers in the imperial moment of the 1890s. What southern white women at the expositions made clear were the possibilities of a racially stratified empire in which foreign people of color were both a part of and excluded from the American body politic. In performing the Jim Crow modern and perpetuating Old South mythology, southern women made modernity palpable to southerners.
Chapter 4. “From Pitiful Resources a Great and Expanding Empire”: The Expositions and the Formation of a New South Empire

“How rapidly [the South] has adapted herself to these new conditions—how she has grown to the requirements of her larger duty—how she has builted from pitiful resources a great and expanding empire, [The New South] shall now proceed to tell.” – Henry Grady, The New South

 “[The American republic] is a new evangel to the down-trodden of all countries…Tested by its inherent right and living force, always working with grand results for the uplifting of oppressed humanity, it yields supremacy alone to the advent of the mighty influence of Christian civilization, of which it is the offspring.” – Judge Dickinson, Fourth of July Celebration, Tennessee Centennial Exposition

In February 1895, seven months before the opening of the Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta Constitution managing editor and New South booster, Clark Howell, published an article promoting the fair in the international magazine The Review of Reviews. While the article traced the history of the exposition movement in Atlanta and promoted the city and region’s resources, it also emphasized the international purpose of the fair. For Howell, the Atlanta fair aimed to increase the independence of southern manufacturing and cotton production by creating links with foreign nations, particularly the republics of Central and South America. Howell, however, noted three obstacles to expanding U.S. commercial interests in the region. The first problem was transportation: European and British companies had a monopoly on steamship lines. American goods were often required to go from New York to Europe and then to South America, although Howell did note that transportation links between the United States and the Caribbean were improving. The second obstacle was language. The language and culture
of South American cities led their merchant class to conduct more business with Europe than the United States. The final hindrance to trade with South America was the region’s newly formed republics’ encounter with the inherent problems of multiracial democracy. According to Howell, this problem could only be solved by the peculiar history and knowledge of white southerners.1

The solution for Howell was quite simple. Latin American republics must learn from the South’s management of the races. He noted that Brazil was “working out slowly and painfully the industrial and social problem precipitated…by the emancipation of four million slaves” and that this obstacle was characteristic of “all the countries of South and Central America, and also by Mexico.” According to Howell, Latin America’s only chance to enter the modern industrial world was to “look to the cotton states of America for precedents and suggestions for the solution of this difficult problem.” To an extent not yet fully appreciated by historians, New South spokesmen understood their region through a global framework. Howell and his fellow New South ideologues viewed the maintenance of social and racial relations as part of what historian Erin Clune has called the “larger global processes of emancipation and colonialism.”2

This chapter traces the ways in which Jim Crow modernity at the Atlanta and Nashville fairs foreshadowed the formation of a Jim Crow empire after 1898. The Cotton States and International Exposition and Tennessee Centennial Exposition presented arguments for a distinctly southern imperial expansion while providing a blueprint for the incorporation of non-white colonial natives into the United States. Concern over how imperial subjects would or


would not be incorporated into the body politic was central to both imperialists and anti-imperialists.\(^3\) Solving the problem of a multiracial society by incorporating the labour of African Americans while denying them the rights of citizenship, the South presented a framework for the imperial modern of the early twentieth century. White southerners understood what it meant to be colonizers, to have dominion over another people.\(^4\) The expositions, in their ordered presentation of race became living representations of colonial space. Jim Crow modernity became Jim Crow empire.

Historians have long viewed the South in the late nineteenth century as existing within a colonial relationship with the North. In *Origins of the New South*, C. Vann Woodward argued that the North after the Civil War saw the South and its “natives” as “outlets for missionary and political expansionism.” By the 1870s and 1880s northerners and foreign investors, despite giving up political control, maintained significant power over the southern economy. Looking at land and railroad ownership, timber and cotton production, Woodward concluded that the South remained a vassal to northern capitalists post-Reconstruction. While Woodward’s colonial thesis has been revised and in some ways refuted, many northerners in the late nineteenth century continued to view the South as a foreign region within the nation.\(^5\)

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Recently historian Natalie Ring and literary critic Jennifer Greeson have returned to the notion of a “colonial” South in the late nineteenth century. Ring contends that the South and its “problems” were viewed within an imperial and transnational framework. For northern and southern Progressives, the South was not simply a distinctive region but a place that “shared commonalities or perceived commonalities with other countries and cultures.” For Ring the South became a laboratory for U.S. imperial structures. As she notes, “efforts to educate and train the southern citizenry, restructure the public health system, rehabilitate agricultural life, and reconcile the ‘race problem’ with the principles of democracy mirrored imperial impulses guiding the spread of American empire.”

Likewise, Jennifer Greeson argues that the Reconstruction South was a “proving ground for the civilizationist mastery of the modern United States.” Greeson notes that literary and travel writing on the post-Civil War South depicted the region as a colonial space with vast resources lain fallow due to the inability of its “native” population to develop them. Ring and Greeson’s insights are valuable. They demonstrate how northerners and the New South elite viewed the region as colonial space. At the same time, many New South boosters, including the expositions’ organizers, viewed the South not as colony but as metropole.

In their size and scope the South’s international expositions transcended the local. They were in many ways reflections of an older southern dream of what historian Matthew Pratt Guterl calls an “American Mediterranean.” From the master class of the antebellum period to the hopes, dreams, and nightmares of postbellum planters, white southerners understood their region as not only a part of the American nation-state but a region intimately connected to the racially

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hierarchical societies of the Caribbean and Latin America. The Cotton States and Tennessee
Centennial were re-articulations of the South’s unique role in expanding American influence
south into the Gulf of Mexico. Rather than an outside force as Ring and Greeson argue,
modernity and empire were essential to the ways in which southerners understood their region
and nation. New South boosters, exposition organizers, and to a certain degree African American
elite and clergy, viewed the South’s world’s fairs as ways to present a progressive and racially
hierarchical South that could be exported to the United States’ future colonial holdings. With Jim
Crow modernity as the solution to the problem of the “backward South,” fair organizers set out
to advertise the region’s industrial and racial progress and to reconcile the nation through
empire.  

The fairs’ organizers went to great lengths to emphasize the “international” in their
expositions. Although open to northern capital, New South spokesmen saw foreign markets as an
opportunity to escape the South’s colonial relationship to northeastern industrialists. In addition,
anthropological villages and the U.S. Government’s Smithsonian exhibit confirmed a racial
hierarchy that placed white Americans above foreign peoples of color and suggested the need for
civilizing and missionary projects. At the same time, a growing controversy in Atlanta over the
Chinese Village makes clear the problematic presence of foreign “others” who did not fit neatly
into the region’s biracial social hierarchy. Lastly, African American conferences on Africa
suggested the ways in which the black elite embraced the civilizing mission of U.S. imperialism.
Rhetoric on “primitive” and “heathen” Africans and the need for technical schools in Africa
placed African Americans within and alongside U.S. expansionism.

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8 For the ways in which the Gulf of Mexico was conceptualized as an “American Mediterranean”
in the nineteenth century see Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern
The Atlanta and Nashville expositions aligned the South with the civilizationist rhetoric of the 1890s.\(^9\) By embracing the expansionist movement, New South boosters, like U.S. senator John Morgan, believed that the South could “throw off [its] colonial status.”\(^10\) During the Cotton States Exposition, William Yates Atkinson, Governor of Georgia wrote in *The North American Review* that the South “remains largely an unknown land to the average Northerner, its topography, flora and fauna, habits and customs, are almost as unfamiliar to him as the untraveled inhabitant of another continent.”\(^11\) At the expositions, by contrast, New South ideologues argued for the region as a launching point for U.S. commercial empire in ways that defied perceptions of the South as foreign space.

In advertising Jim Crow modernity, the South’s expositions gave the United States an ideological framework that extended to the nation’s potential empire. As early as the 1880s Alabama Senator John Tyler Morgan and Congressman Joseph Wheeler believed that southern racial codes provided a template for the incorporation of imperial subjects. The southern fairs took this framework and made it benign and consumable. They moved the rhetoric from the halls of politics and elite parlors to the everyday consumption of the masses. In the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, natives were incorporated into an American imperial project that was Jim Crow in nature. Imperial subjects, much like African Americans, were denied formal citizenship, and

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yet were expected to participate in the nation’s industrial and material progress while remaining a separate people.\textsuperscript{12}

Late nineteenth century southerners were suspicious of expansionist plans and rhetoric. Many New South advocates rejected the growing impulse to expand U.S. influence beyond its borders and some of the most vociferous critics of intervention in Hawaii and Cuba came from the South. Part of the anti-imperialist impulse can be attributed to partisan politics. Southern Democrats opposed the mostly Republican plans for commercial and political expansion. There was also a fear among white spokesmen that given the recent history of Reconstruction and supposed anarchy and chaos of “Negro rule” contact with nonwhites and their possible migration to the U.S. would lead to the “mongrelization” and degeneration of the republic. Southern representatives, such as rabid racist Ben Tillman, argued that southerners understood “the folly of attempting to bring civilization to the ‘darker’ races.” When the vote came for Philippine annexation, nineteen of twenty-eight southern senators voted against it. Despite this antipathy, a significant group of New South ideologues viewed a U.S. empire as the best way to reestablish the South’s economic independence.\textsuperscript{13}

The imperial impulse in the South stretches back to the 1850s. Following the Mexican-American War, southerners were at the forefront in proposing interventions in the Caribbean. Southern imperialists believed that the region’s geography and experience in creating Anglo-

\textsuperscript{12} On Morgan and Wheeler see Tennant S. McWilliams, \textit{The New South Faces the World: Foreign Affairs and the Southern Sense of Self, 1877-1950} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 9, 55; and Fry, “John Tyler Morgan.”

Saxon societies in tropical climates made it well suited to lead U.S. empire. Moreover, new Caribbean territories, many of which already had slave populations, would help restore the balance of power to the U.S. Senate. In the end, secession and the Civil War ended “southern dreams of a Caribbean empire.”

New South ideologues began the 1890s wary of expansionism but the economic downturn of 1893 caused a reconsideration of their positions. By the start of the Spanish-American War many New South boosters decided that the economic and political benefits of expansionism outweighed its potential drawbacks. At the same time, for the Atlanta and Nashville expositions’ organizers, whose goal was to improve the economic situation of their city and region, the international nature of the fairs was essential to promote greater economic ties between the South and Latin America, the Caribbean, and Pacific nations. The Cotton States and International Exposition looked outwardly far more than the Tennessee Centennial Exposition. Whereas Nashville sought to advertise its cultural sophistication, Atlanta was unabashed in its pursuit of economic and commercial interests. The purpose of the Atlanta fair was to foster and grow trade relations between the South and the republics of Latin America. By acquiring foreign markets, New South ideologues believed that the region would be relieved from the control of New York and Liverpool cotton merchants.

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17 Fry, “John Tyler Morgan’s Southern Expansionism,” 334.
Despite attempts to attract Latin American countries to their expositions, neither Atlanta nor Nashville was overly successful. In order to promote the exposition and to secure exhibits, the Cotton States executive sent former Confederate general I. W. Avery on a South American tour. The trip was a disappointment. While Avery sent positive reports back to the Atlanta Constitution, his personal letters reveal the difficulty in convincing Latin Americans to participate in the exposition. Part of the problem was that many Latin Americans assumed the exposition was a parochial affair. “I regret to say that it is very difficult to get these people to take much interest in the exposition,” wrote the diplomatic minister for the United States in Santiago, Chile to Avery. “From the use of the words ‘Cotton States’ there appears to have been an impression abroad that the Exposition was to be one of cotton, although we have done all that we could to correct this mistake in the press.”

Another problem was that South American countries were suspicious of the United States’ activities in the region. The Boston Journal reported that “[Avery] has encountered considerable opposition among certain business elements which saw no good in encouraging closer trade relations with the United States, which, they argued would benefit the United States at the loss of business interests of the South American countries.” Latin American republics were wary of entering into trade relations that they correctly assumed would be unbalanced and imperialist in nature. In Atlanta the foreign countries officially represented were Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, and Costa Rica. Costa Rica was the only country with a separate building, while Mexico and Venezuela were situated in the Transportation Building and Argentina in the

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Minerals and Forestry Building. In Nashville, Mexico had its own building curated not by Mexicans but by Frederick Starr of the University of Chicago’s Department of Anthropology and consisted mostly of pottery, fiber, cotton and woolen goods, and some “Aztec weapons.” The Tennessee Centennial also briefly had a Cuban Building, which overran its costs and was forced to close. Nashville, however, was able to attract a Pan-American delegation consisting of the presidents of Peru, Colombia, Mexico, and Chile.²⁰

Although the South was the world’s leading cotton producer, the organizers of the expositions quickly found that the region counted for very little in international relations. Both the Cotton States and the Tennessee Centennial hired Antonio Macchi, an impresario of the international exposition circuit, as European Commissioner. While Macchi received favorable responses from European countries, he was only able to secure exhibits from private collections. Many Europeans first response to Macchi was often “Atlanta? Where is that?” Likewise, Herman Justi, the Centennial’s official historian, admitted that Macchi had difficulty in securing exhibits as many Europeans had never heard of the city. In the end, both expositions’ foreign departments contained mostly private exhibits from Italy, Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Russia, France, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Austria, Hungary, Belgium, Canada, China, and Japan. Everything from porcelain to furniture was displayed and at one point in Nashville the Milanese orchestra gave free concerts.²¹


While links to Europe were important, the expositions’ goal was to increase trade with Latin America and the Pacific. In January 1895 the Atlanta Constitution reported that “[m]arkets are getting scarce and the enterprising nations of the world are filling every field, and, strange to say, South America, right at our very door, has been neglected. That it will no longer be so after the exposition remains certain.” As European nations “scrambled” for Africa, an opportunity appeared for the South to use its geographical advantage to extend U.S. interests in the Americas. While the expositions never officially called for territorially acquisition, their rhetoric reflects what Victoria de Grazia has labeled a U.S. “market empire.”

If the expositions were to encourage trade with Latin America, they were often undercut by their own ineptitude and southerners’ general distrust of outsiders. Costa Rica, the only country to have a standalone building at the Cotton States complained to Avery six days into the exposition that the building lacked electricity. More significant, however, was the failure of Cuban exhibits and celebrations at the expositions. Beginning in February 1895 the Cuban War for Independence became the news story of the year and the entire nation was caught up in the

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22 “The Exposition Up To Date,” Atlanta Constitution, January 27, 1895, p. 16.


drama unfolding on the island. It is unsurprising, then, that the organizers of the Atlanta and Nashville expositions thought to take advantage of the growing interest in Cuba.

The Cotton States and International Exposition and Tennessee Centennial Exposition’s public support for *cuba libre* was undermined by partisan politics and a general disinterest by everyday southerners. In Atlanta the exposition set aside a day to celebrate Cuban independence but cancelled it as it coincided with the arrival of President Grover Cleveland, who opposed intervention. Given that the fair had received government support, Cleveland worried that “official recognition by the exposition of the Cuban revolution might be misconstrued as having the sanction of the government.” Atlantans responded with anger over what they considered to be an “attempt of the National Administration to interfere with the management of their exposition.”

Although Atlanta’s citizens supported *cuba libre* the fair’s management did not want to upset the federal administration on which they depended. Two years later in Nashville, much of the support Atlantans had shown for Cuba was absent. Despite increasing calls for intervention and with a Republican in the White House backing imperialist policies, Nashvillians were disinterested in the Cuban cause.

With civil war escalating in Cuba, the Tennessee Centennial’s organizers assumed a Cuban Village would be one of the more popular features of the exposition. In the fair’s Programme of Music fairgoers were invited to witness “native machete fighters, dancing girls, cigar makers, bull fighters, cooks, musicians, etc.” and were asked to “help Cuba’s cause.” The opposite occurred. Herman Justi noted that the village lasted only two months due to “little

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interest” and that the buildings remained empty until September when the Wild West Show took them over. Historian Kristin Hoganson and others have argued that *cuba libre* and the following Spanish-American War was a turning point for the South and the nation’s reconciliation thirty years after the Civil War. As Hoganson notes, many southern men saw the Cuban independence movement as an opportunity to reassert their manhood. The failure of the Cuban exhibit and celebrations in Atlanta and Nashville should give us pause. Everyday southern fairgoers liberally supported the Streets of Cairo, the Dahomey, and Chinese Villages. The decision not to support the Cuban exhibit was a conscious one. While the South’s business and urban elite may have viewed the U.S. South and Cuba as a part of the “American Mediterranean,” many southerners were simply disinterested. The exhibit’s flop tempers assertions of a general enthusiasm for *cuba libre*. When given the option many southern fairgoers spent their money elsewhere.

Notwithstanding the failure of the Cuban exhibits, the expositions pushed for an expansion of the South’s influence in the region. Central to southern imperialists’ desire for a U.S. Empire was a canal across the Central American isthmus. Both the Atlanta and Nashville fairs promoted the proposed Nicaraguan canal by displaying models of the waterway and the Cotton States held a Nicaragua Canal Day to encourage interest in the project. In an editorial the Montgomery Advertiser suggested that a “Nicaragua Canal would make another

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28 Justi, *Official History*, 216. On the other hand, the Nashville Banner reported in May that the exhibit was a success but overran its costs. “Cuban Village Closed” Nashville Banner, May 31, 1897, p. 7.


30 Guterl, *American Mediterranean*.

Mediterranean of the Gulf of Mexico, and Alabama would be the France of the New World, not merely in manufacturing everything for the greater South, but in a marvelous diversification of its agricultural interests.”32 Charles Kindrick of the New Orleans Times-Picayune was taken aback by the Transportation Building’s model of the canal at the Cotton States. The model was thirty feet in length, eight feet wide, and stood two feet off the ground. It featured accurate representations of Nicaragua’s topography as well as running water. While Kindrick suggested it could be appreciated simply for its artful reproduction, its real importance was its ability to convince southerners of the need for a canal across the isthmus. “It will bring the markets of China and Japan closer to our doors,” argued Kindrick, “and will enable the manufacturers of cotton goods in the southern states to compete with the English mills.” The canal could also expand U.S. territory by populating “sparse” and “unoccupied” lands. Despite these advantages, Kindrick lamented that many southerners “opposed the construction of the canal on constitutional grounds” and concluded that they “ought to visit the Cotton States and International Exposition and study the model of the proposed waterway.”33 A Nicaraguan Canal was essential to southern economic interests. The canal was three hundred miles closer to southern ports than the proposed Panama Canal and would bring ships west of Cuba into the Gulf of Mexico. “By contrast,” notes historian Joseph Fry, “ships en route to Panama would take the Windward Passage east of Cuba and completely bypass the southern coast of the United States.”34 The model of the Nicaraguan Canal made real for parochial fairgoers the advantages of


34 Fry, “John Tyler Morgan’s Southern Expansionism,” 337.
southern expansionism. Control of the Central American isthmus would directly benefit the region and allow it to gain economic independence.

Related to the push for a Central American canal was the desire to have a strong military to maintain control of the waterway and protect the United States’ overseas markets. As a result, both the Atlanta and Nashville expositions were heavy in displays of American military might. At the fairs, the United States Government Exhibit consisted mostly of military displays. Moreover, a year before war with Spain, the Tennessee Centennial became the first world’s fair to organize and maintain a Military Department. Consisting of forty-eight acres within the exposition grounds, the Military Department set up a model camp in which real soldiers lived. The Kentucky State Troops, a battalion of the Sixth U.S. Infantry, a squadron of the Third U.S. Cavalry, and the Fifth U.S. Regiment of Infantry made the exposition home. In addition, National Guards from throughout the nation came and stayed at the camp. Beyond the actual presence of military encampments, five “sham battles” occurred during the exposition.35

The sham battles at the Tennessee Centennial were one of its most popular features with thousands of visitors coming to take in the spectacle [Figure 15: Sham Battle]. In August businesses closed at noon to allow everyone to see the battle.36 The battles recreated the horror and terror of war but made it safe for consumption. “It will be in sham, but yet real in appearance,” reported the Nashville Banner. “At least some of the men who will engage the battle have seen real fighting and know its terrors.”37 The Improved Order of Red Men, a white


36 “Details of the Battle” Nashville Banner, August 13, 1897, p. 1.

37 “Just Before the Battle,” Nashville Banner, August 14, 1897, p. 1.
middle class fraternal organization, acted the part of Native Americans by dressing in “redface” and playing the part of the “enemy.” The Improved Order understood itself as preserving America’s native heritage in the face of a vanishing native population. In the case of the Tennessee Centennial the Improved Order reenacted this vanishing at the hands of the U.S. military.38

Sensationalized re-creations such as sham battles allowed audiences to know vicariously the experience of the victims—with the full advantage that all could emerge from the performance unscathed. By re-creating battles in a real yet benign setting, fairgoers experienced the terrible events of war. The spectacle and implicit acknowledgement of control allowed the viewer to have an emotional and physical detachment from the events that plagued other people and not themselves. Recalling her time at the exposition, Margaret Thompson remembered the military encampments and battles as a significant aspect of the fair: “You see this was just before the Spanish American War.” The performance of disaster spectacle confirmed a utopia in which pain and suffering were mere illusions, tricks performed in the mechanical age. The military displays and marshal spirit of the Tennessee Centennial was a part of the “psychological preparation” of fairgoers for the adventurism of a nascent U.S. imperialism.39

The Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions were in many ways re-articulations of a southern dream of expansion and acquisition. In the immediate decades after


the Civil War, white elite southerners, while continuing to view their region through a global lens, put aside calls for the acquisition of Cuba and other racially hierarchical Latin American republics. However, after the much-publicized failures of importing Chinese, Italian, and Scandinavian laborers to solve the region’s “labor problem,” New South ideologues again looked to the “American Mediterranean” for a compliant and tractable labor force. The Atlanta and Nashville fairs positioned the South as essential to the new American expansionism sweeping the nation. In the view of the expositions, the U.S. South would once again be on the frontier of an American empire.

Recently historian Eric Love has questioned the role of racism in formulating U.S. empire. Rather than encouraging expansionism, Love argues that late nineteenth century racial science discouraged territorial acquisition. A belief in the United States as a white republic caused many to be suspicious of and resist the acquisition of Haiti, Hawaii, and Cuba. While Love’s critique of U.S. imperial historiography is useful, he overstates his case. Belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon “race” was implicit in late nineteenth century expansionism. That anti-imperialists would use the rhetoric of race to argue against expansionism suggests the ways in which racism was the lingua franca on both sides of the debate. The role that racism played in supporting imperial expansion is no more clear than in the world’s fairs’ anthropological exhibits and villages. As Robert Rydell has shown, the hierarchy of races established at the fairs by

anthropological and ethnological displays confirmed America’s moral duty to the ‘lowly’ people of the world. With a new authority grounded in universities, scientists and anthropologists promoted social struggle and imperial adventure as essential parts of the evolutionary process that accompanied progress.  

Rydell and the scholars that followed him have so laid bare the imperial underpinnings of anthropological displays and villages at world’s fairs that it is redundant to fully examine the ethnographical exhibits of the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions. In their replications of the World’s Columbian exposition, the Atlanta and Nashville fairs confirmed the imperial rhetoric surrounding such displays. Anthropologists William John McGee and William H. Holmes, essential to forming new methods of display that confirmed global racial hierarchies at the World’s Columbian, were also involved in the anthropological exhibits at the Atlanta and Nashville fairs.  

What is most salient to this chapter and dissertation, however, is the ways in which anthropological exhibits underpinned and undermined New South imperial culture.

The Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial’s Government Buildings featured exhibits from the Smithsonian Institution. For a region lacking in museums and libraries, the Smithsonian


42 Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 25, 39.

brought southern fairgoers the recent advances in anthropology and racial science. Its goal was to “illustrate the methods by which Science controls, classifies, and studies great accumulations of material objects, and uses these as a means for the discovery of truth.” In doing so the exhibit’s organizers hoped fairgoers would recognize “the value of museums as agencies for public enlightenment, and thus to encourage the formation of public museums in the cities of the South.”

With science and technology as the new site of truth and meaning, the Smithsonian presented a factually grounded hierarchy of the world’s peoples.

Although the exhibits of the Smithsonian were not displayed sequentially, they were to be studied, according to the official catalogue, in a sequence creating a teleological narrative of progress. It divided the world into four types of people: black, brown-red, yellow, and white. Each “type” was represented by a collection of mannequins “intended to illustrate the physical character and the ethnical costumes” of the races. For instance, an American Indian of the “Jivaro stock of Peru” was costumed in an “apron of feathers of tropical birds upon a foundation bark cloth, anklets, etc., of seeds, beetle wings, and teeth of monkey and puma.”

Frequently, contemporary artifacts were displayed alongside prehistoric finds. In doing so, the Smithsonian denied foreign peoples coevality with modern Americans. The material culture of contemporary Native Americans was displayed alongside European prehistoric pottery of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. In Nashville, fairgoers took in models of different races’ brains accompanied by a phrenological exhibit of a series of skulls “illustrating the diversity of form found in various

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44 The Exhibit of the Smithsonian Institution at the Cotton States Exposition (Washington, DC: Published for the Smithsonian Institution, 1895).


46 Official Catalogue of the Cotton States, 205.
races of man.”

In a region where social hierarchy was divided into a biracial system, the Smithsonian’s displays of foreign peoples as “primitive” confirmed the social order of the New South. At the Smithsonian exhibit white southerners were witness to their own superiority. The expositions’ displays of modernity and progress validated the New South program of industrialization and racial boundaries. The exhibits of “black types” confirmed the supposed benefits given to the region’s African Americans. No matter their present economic and social standing, the Smithsonian indicated that blacks in America were uplifted from a primitive state.

While the Smithsonian exhibit represented the seriousness of scientific inquiry, it was intimately connected to the pleasures and entertainment of the Midway. If the Smithsonian presented an ordered view of racial progress and development, the Midway’s villages presented fairgoers with the chaotic reality of foreign peoples and offered them a chance to take their new knowledge and apply it to living subjects. “The visitor who had examined the series of figures from the Smithsonian Institution, representing the various types of man” noted Walter Cooper in his official history of the Cotton States, “could see many of them in very live flesh and blood by taking a turn through the Midway.”

Both the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial’s Midways featured Chinese, Japanese, and German Villages alongside the ubiquitous Streets of Cairo. Atlanta featured a Dahomey Village but the West Africans did not make it to Nashville. Although the ethnological villages provided a more consumable and pleasurable version of the Smithsonian they often served to undermine the order of the imperial modern. Actors and “imported” natives frequently decided to not go along with the act. Like the Philippine village


48 *Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 89.
nine years later at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, Atlanta’s Chinese Village destabilized imperial order.  

Kee Owyang, a Chinese national who worked in the Chinese department of a Wall Street bank, ran the Chinese Village at the Cotton States. The Atlanta Constitution described him as a “prosperous business man with up-to-date principles and a thorough collegiate education” who dressed in the “American style” with “clothes of the very latest cut, and a derby hat of the most recent shape and fashion.”  

From the beginning, Kee Owyang did not fit the stereotype of a Chinese laborer familiar to southern fairgoers. Kee was a modern and Americanized immigrant who had found success in New York. By the opening of the fair, however, any notion that Chinese migrants might be sophisticated moderns was tempered by the arrival of two hundred and five Chinese, thirty-six of whom were “beauties” “imported directly from the Celestial Empire by way of Vancouver.”

The arrival of the Chinese caused a stir in Atlanta. Despite multiple schemes in the postwar period to bring Chinese labor to the South, the Chinese, as Matthew Guterl rightly points out, “were rarely much more than an abstract or theoretical proposition.” Twenty-five hundred men and boys crowded Union Depot to catch glimpse of the arriving villagers, many hoping to see the “Chinese beauties.” When the women emerged from the train a group of Atlantan men followed them, while the Chinese men and boys lined the station to walk out of the depot in an

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49 For example, Paul Kramer has demonstrated the ways in which the Philippine village and exhibit at the St. Louis world’s fair “unhinged” the presentation of empire. Kramer, “Making Concessions: Race and Empire Revisited at the Philippine Exposition, St. Louis, 1901-1905” Radical History Review (Winter 1999).

50 “Kee Owyang Here” Atlanta Constitution, March 6, 1895, p. 9.

51 “205 Chinese Arrive” Atlanta Constitution, September 15, 1895, p.14; Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 90.

52 Guterl, American Mediterranean, 167.
orderly manner. “The average Atlanta Chinese is almost an American in comparison with the Chinese as they appear fresh and rank from their native country,” reported the Constitution. “Many of the men, all of them with pigtails, looked like coolies, while others appeared to be Chinese of education.” After marching to the exposition, the Chinese were “locked in” the exposition grounds. Despite the enthusiasm of Atlanta’s white citizens, reports surfaced immediately that the Chinese beauties were brought to Atlanta to be sold.  

From the start Atlanta’s small Chinese community was upset over the arrival of the Chinese villagers. The Constitution reported that they were “excited, indignant, and suspicious” of the newcomers. The community hired a lawyer to give counsel and “watch the movement of the imported colony.” They claimed that the women brought as actresses, waiters, and “models of beauty” were to be sold after the show. Using the 1882 exclusion and deportation act, Atlanta’s Chinese argued that the villagers should be sent back to China immediately.  

In October Lum Ling, a local Atlanta laundry man, filed a writ against the managers of the show, arguing that at least nine of the Chinese beauties had been brought to the city as prostitutes in violation of anti-Chinese laws. Atlanta’s judiciary did not know what to make of the increasing tension between the city’s Chinese community and the show. On October 8, nine of the Chinese beauties along with Kee Owyang and a Leon Lam were arrested and brought before the court. They were released, however, after a government official believed the case to be the result of spurned advances. The Atlanta Constitution reported that motives of the case were “jealousy and revenge” after Ling and a few other men offered to marry the Chinese beauties and were refused they charged that the beauties had been “brought to this country for immoral purposes.” At the same time, Atlanta’s white community became angry with the village. A group of Atlantan males

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54 “Maids of China” Atlanta Constitution, September 20, 1895, p. 5.
were publicly embarrassed when they found out that the female actors they were flirting with in the Chinese theatre were actually young boys. In the end, the local judge ruled that the women came voluntarily and were allowed to stay at the exposition.\(^{55}\)

Things remained quiet through the end of October until tension erupted again in late-November when twenty women from the Village were sent away, presumably to San Francisco. The Constitution believed that they disappeared to avoid appearing in court but Kee told the paper that it was too cold in Atlanta and he had too many villagers on his payroll. Once again Lum Ling, now Atlanta’s Chinese de facto leader, signed an affidavit reasserting that the women were brought to Atlanta for immoral purposes. The Constitution now wondered if a U.S. attorney should become involved in the case as its legal questions were of “national importance” and the complications were tied directly to “the Chinese importation laws.” Despite the Constitution’s suggestion of federal involvement, the U.S. attorney’s office decided not to take action citing that the Kee and Lam’s contract “stipulated that the beauties could leave the exposition before the close of the year” and that “nothing in the movements of the beauties was found to be suspicious, or in anyway obnoxious to the statute.”\(^{56}\) By December most of the Chinese villagers had decamped to New Orleans believing an exposition was to be held there.\(^{57}\)

Like Atlanta the Tennessee Centennial also featured a Chinese Village and given the New Orleans Times Picayune’s assertion that the villagers were “professional exposition people” and that the Nashville village was run by Tom Yuen, President of the Chinese Merchants’

\(^{55}\) “Beauty in Bondage” Atlanta Constitution, October 9, 1895, p. 7; “Tough on Atlanta Chinamen” Atlanta Constitution, October 11, 1895, p. 5; “Back to the Midway” Atlanta Constitution, October 13, 1895, p. 17.


\(^{57}\) “Midway Mongolians” New Orleans Times Picayune, December 12, 1895, p. 3.
Exposition Company, it is likely that many of the villagers were the same entertainers. Unlike Atlanta, however, the Chinese Village avoided controversy [Figure 16: Chinese Village]. Indeed, the Centennial was more open to Chinese visitors who were of an “ethnological interest” to fairgoers. The Nashville *Banner* reported that Chinese villagers could often be found in the Woman’s Building “inspecting every nook and corner and jabbering and laughing, seeming unaware of the interest they themselves are exciting.” Such integration allowed Nashville fairgoers to observe and compare both races. “It is wondered what these men from a nation where women are but little better than slaves think as they view the Woman’s building with its rare exhibits of woman’s skill and genius, and contemplate the freedom their [American] brother gives the woman,” pondered the *Banner*.⁵⁸

Although the Chinese Villages’ presented an image of Chinese as unsophisticated coolie laborers, they also demonstrated China as a nation with a rich and cultured history. When dressed in costumes of “fine silk” and “resplendent colors” the villagers challenged southerners who had only seen Chinese in “ordinary everyday working costume.”⁵⁹ Through dragon parades and traditional Chinese theatre and music, the Chinese Village presented a sophisticated yet ancient culture.⁶⁰ At the same time, local Christians took the opportunity to convert Chinese villagers “away from Confucius to Christ.”⁶¹ Placing Chinese sophistication in the past, the Chinese Villages suggested the ways in which contemporary Chinese were an unprogressive and degenerate people. Reduced to the level of “coolies” and existing on the margins of southern

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⁵⁹ “A Little Boy From China” Nashville *Banner*, June 30, 1897, p. 1.


society, southern Chinese Americans were denied the sophisticated high culture of their ancestors.

The experience of the Chinese Village at the expositions demonstrates the unstable nature of Jim Crow modernity and empire in the late nineteenth century South. Beginning in the 1870s southern planters experimented with the use of coolie labor to replace black labor. However, by the time of the fairs, most of the original Chinese labor had migrated off the fields and into the South’s cities, becoming owners of laundry and grocer businesses. The story of the Chinese community’s reaction to the Chinese Village in Atlanta mirrors other attempts by southern Chinese Americans to navigate the biracial system of the South. Largely freed from manual labor but not fully accepted into southern society, Chinese Americans operated in an “in-between space.” They were constantly aware of the need to identify as white and disavow blackness at the same time as the white community grouped them with blacks but allowed them more maneuverability. This duality of identity created deep anxieties within the southern Chinese American community. When confronted by the Chinese Village, with its underpinnings of anthropological racialism, Atlanta Chinese rose to defend their space. Having carved a hard-won niche in the highly racialized environment of late nineteenth century Atlanta, the city’s Chinese were wary of newcomers who upset the precarious balance of race. Using the very laws meant to exclude their countrymen from entering the United States, they criticized the Chinese Village’s depiction of China as a racially degenerate country whose glory resided in the past. If Jim Crow empire was supposed to resolve the tensions of a multiracial society, the experience of the

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Chinese Village in Atlanta disrupted and challenged its ability to do so. Jim Crow, based on a biracial order, was undermined in the multiracial fluidity of the anthropological villages. In a very real sense, the Atlanta Chinese community defended its “in-betweeness.” On the Midway, there were indications that Jim Crow modernity did not translate smoothly to a Jim Crow empire.64

In the end, Atlanta’s Highest Board of Award concluded that the “international character of the Exposition is not its principal feature.”65 Despite their rhetoric and notwithstanding the global economic importance of southern cotton, the expositions’ in Atlanta and Nashville confirmed the region as insignificant in international relations. Nevertheless, the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial demonstrate that the South in the 1890s was not inward looking. New South ideologues understood the region through a global framework. Foreign markets and territory for a Central American canal were needed if the South was to reach its economic potential. Everyday southerners took great interest in the displays of the Smithsonian exhibits and the anthropological villages of the Midways were the most popular features of the fairs. Despite not becoming international spaces, the expositions in Atlanta and Nashville did

64 Alternatively, Theda Perdue argues plausibly that the Chinese Village’s “beauties” and Kee challenged the Chinese Exclusion Act. In this view, Kee operated a scheme by which some of the Chinese Villagers were able to integrate into Atlanta’s community, while others returned to China. The exclusion act also specifically targeted the migration of Chinese women. Again, Perdue, argues that the Chinese Village could have been used as clever subterfuge to get Chinese women into America. Later in his life Kee openly attacked U.S. immigration policies as a violation of treaties and international law. For Perdue, the Chinese “beauties” saga is representative of a terrified local Chinese community distancing itself from nativist Atlantans’ desire to see the barring of all Chinese from the city. See Theda Perdue, Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition, 109-110. For the role of exclusion acts in creating American identity as “white” see Erika Lee, At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Matthew Frye Jacobson, Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign People at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917 (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

65 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 75.
contribute to the rise of U.S. empire. In presenting a mostly peaceful and accommodating Jim Crow modernity, the expositions provided the blueprint for a Jim Crow empire.

The concern that the U.S. Constitution allowed for the incorporation of foreign territories and therefore foreign people of color into the United States as equals was debated throughout the imperial period. As Amy Kaplan has made clear, the Supreme Court’s 1901 ruling on the territorial jurisdiction of Puerto Rico reflected a deep-seated fear that U.S. aggression abroad endangered America at home. “Inverting the role of colonizer and colonized,” writes Kaplan, “the Court imagined a nightmare scenario that turned the acquisition of Puerto Rico and other territories into the foreign colonization of the United States, an act that could undo its sovereign government, dismember its body, enslave its citizens, and dissolve its familial bonds.”66 In what has become known as the Insular Cases, the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution did not follow the flag and that occupied foreign territory, such as Puerto Rico, was “foreign to the United States in a domestic sense.” While Puerto Rico could be considered within the domestic sphere of the U.S. “in terms of the rights and privileges conferred by the Constitution, the court excluded Puerto Rico from that same sphere.”67 The Supreme Court’s decision in the Insular Cases did not defy the logic of the late nineteenth century. For many Americans the South was foreign in a domestic sense. Its largely rural landscape, Lost Cause devotees, and large African American population made it incongruent with the rest of the nation. With the arrival of what C. Vann Woodward called “the Mississippi Plan,” increasing segregation laws, and the Court’s own ruling on Plessy v. Ferguson, the Jim Crow South had proven the way in which a people, in this

66 Kaplan, The Anarchy of Empire, 11.

case African Americans, could be considered domestic citizens at the same time being foreign in the rights and privileges conferred. Jim Crow modernity transitioned into Jim Crow empire.

Many northern Republicans viewed the Reconstruction South as a colonial space. The architects of Reconstruction borrowed liberally from European imperial administration and in doing so the South became, as Jennifer Greeson notes, a “training ground for U.S. administrative policies that would later be put into practice overseas.” Following Reconstruction the South remained a place for experiments in imperial rule. As Europe expanded its reach across the globe and the U.S. looked beyond its borders, the South’s racial troubles were viewed as a part of a new world imperial order. The color line became a transnational concern for American, British, and South African imperialists, and they looked to each other for the solution to the so called “race problem.” As Natalie Ring makes clear, “[f]oreign visitors traveled to the U.S. South, confident that what they found there would enable them to restructure the racial systems in South Africa and the British colonies.” And what better place to take in the South’s solution to the race problem than at a World’s Fair?

Viewed as a colonial space, the expositions’ participation of African Americans in separate Negro Buildings is significant. Late-nineteenth century empire was not a “color-coded school map with fixed, clearly bounded units,” notes historian Laura Ann Stoler. Instead it was

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69 Greeson, *Our South*, 236.

70 Ring, *Problem South*, 179.


72 Theda Perdue makes a similar point in *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition*, 137.
mobile and fluid, its polities were protean “rather than fixed taxonomies.” A few hundred acres in Atlanta or Nashville could be, if not equal, than a similar imperial space as Manila Bay in 1898: a synecdoche of empire. Northern visitors and New South boosters were witnesses to imperial space at the fairs. Beyond the much-analyzed anthropological villages, the Negro Buildings presented a working form of imperial social order.

From their inception the organizers of Atlanta and Nashville viewed the expositions as teaching the rest of the nation. Rhetoric surrounding both fairs contended that the South was a purer form of America than the corruptible North and West. Untouched by the “labor and socialist disturbances that an element of foreign immigrants had made more violent, as well as the congested condition of society and trade,” wrote Georgia Governor Atkinson, the South has “left intact an American civilization of the highest order and the purest character, with many broad acres of land, which the experience of the North has taught us to offer only to a select and desirable class of immigrants.” Southern racial codes and distrust of outsiders had protected the region from the corrupting influence of inferior foreigners went this logic. What better region, then, to lead the nation in control of foreign territories and inferior people.


75 For example the Brooklyn Eagle’s handbook to the Cotton States exposition boasted that Atlanta was “an American town, through and through. The signs on the shops are American, the policemen are Americans, and will give civil answers to civil questions, there are American firemen in the engine house, the American speech is heard on the streets and in the market places…and American morality prevails in both private and public life.” Hand Book to the Cotton States and International Exposition: Being a Faithful Account of What a Representative
By taking a transnational perspective on African American involvement at the fairs, it is clear that Jim Crow modernity presented solutions to the problems of colonial subjects. For the organizers of the expositions the Negro Buildings offered proof of the ways in which the white South corrected the mistakes of Reconstruction. Like colonial natives who were “left to battle for [themselves],” African Americans, according to Herman Justi, were ill prepared for the responsibilities of suffrage and office holding. For Justi, the Negro Building was instructive of what could be achieved when an ostensibly free population was denied political rights in order to concentrate on their industrial development. “Great nations have risen,” Justi claimed, “flourished, and extended their empire without consulting the masses—without popular elections.” The Negro Building was proof of what could be achieved when an “inferior” people were included in industrial and commercial progress but denied the fundamental rights of citizenship. “There is work for all,” concluded Justi, “there are offices for only a very few.”

Five years later the Platt Amendment allowing the U.S. to intervene unilaterally in Cuban affairs was a direct result of viewing Cuban identity as black. As Amy Kaplan notes, the “Cubans’ perceived racial identity as Negro was used as an argument about their incapacity for self-government and their need for supervision.”

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Justi, *Official History*, 193. In the case of Atlanta, Charles Kindrick in the *Times Picayune* made sure his readers understood that black progress was achieved only at the behest of whites: “His [African Americans] destinies are linked with the white people of the south, and he should accept the opportunity, leave off the agitations for social equality which do him harm, give us his ambition to sit in high political places, and take his station where he belongs in the ranks of development and industrial growth.” Kindrick, “The Negro Building at the Exposition” New Orleans *Times Picayune*, October 22, 1895, p. 12.
exclusionary programs centered on race. Fairgoers were witness to the wonders of the industrial and mechanical age within a racially hierarchical space.

Making connections between the South and the world, the expositions’ presentation of black progress was viewed in an international context. “While the Exposition was not created to teach the world better,” noted the Nashville Banner, “the enterprise does afford an opportunity for the Negro to teach the world a great lesson of themselves.” Likewise, the Atlanta Constitution reported that the “negro’s part in the exposition has attracted the attention of the whole civilized world, and one of the greatest results of the great show is the advancement which the negro is making in thought and life.” Walter Cooper wrote of the Negro Building: “It was a sociological study, and ethnological fact marking the progress of an important branch of the human race. It was in concrete the largest, and first announcement in comprehensive form, of the results of a gigantic experiment involving millions of human beings and forecasting the future, not only of these but many more millions of the same race on other continents.” The experiment and success of controlling and limiting black freedom in the Jim Crow period made the South an important region to study for the development of overseas colonies.

Central to the argument that the South was fertile training ground for empire was the success of black technical schools. At the Centennial’s Emancipation Day ceremonies Booker T. Washington placed the progress of African Americans in the South within a global framework. “The results come to the negro as to all races,” spoke Washington, “by beginning at the bottom and working gradually up toward the highest civilization and accomplishments.” Like

78 “Annent the Centennial” Nashville Banner, June 5, 1897.
80 Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 57.
Washington’s Tuskegee Institute, the Negro Buildings’ displayed commercial, agricultural, and industrial progress without openly demanding civil or social rights. The institutions of education represented in the buildings confirmed their role in “civilizing” the freed slaves. Hampton School, which was present at both fairs and the blueprint for African American technical schools, was modeled on its founder Samuel Chapman Armstrong’s experience in colonial Hawaii.  

Industrial education, like that presented by Negro Buildings, was viewed as essential to bringing civilization and Christianity to colonial citizens.

At the Cotton States’ Congress on Africa, white Methodist Bishop William Taylor argued that first task for missionary work in Africa was “industrial education which will develop and utilize indigenous resources and create self-support for all concerned.” The bourgeois displays of technological and scientific progress by the African American elite confirmed the success of the imperial project. Here the former primitives of slavery were transformed into modern citizens that did not disrupt the region’s racial and political balance. African American missionaries and settlers argued that plantation labor was necessary to bestow the blessings of civilization and industry on Africans. “The industrial, intellectual, moral and spiritual progress of the colored people in America is a prophecy,” wrote Professor E. L. Parks of the Negro exhibit, “both of

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84 James Campbell, Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 88-89. Campbell concludes that “it is difficult to find any evidence of genuine missionary activity by the AME church in Liberia.”
what they will become and will do for the redemption of their fatherland, and also of what the native African is capable of becoming.”

In the years following the expositions, Booker T. Washington and his technical school model became active participants in the African imperial project. Washington considered Africa to be “backwards” and “in need of civilization” and thought colonial powers could uplift Africans. African Americans in the New South were on the vanguard of this movement. The success of the Negro Building portended to the model’s success outside the United States.

The expositions also advertised the power of the plantation and by extension the judiciary to maintain the color line. The plantation economies of the United States’ colonial possessions mimicked the plantation South. A reporter for the Times Picayune noted the Cotton States’ “field of corn, where negroes were gathering fodder” as he left the fairgrounds. Just outside the fair he saw “two droves of men, dressed in black and white stripes, and chained together. They were Georgia convicts, who had been working at the exposition grounds.”

In Nashville, the Agriculture Building featured a colossal painting that pictured a cotton field worked by African

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87 In 1910 there were 350,000 Filipinos engaged in industrial work at Philippine primary schools. By 1924 that number had jumped to 900,000. Glenn Anthony May, “The Business of Education in the Colonial Philippines, 1909-30” in Colonial Crucible, 151, 152-153. See also Gaines, “Black Americans’ Racial Uplift Ideology as ‘Civilizing Mission,’” 439.

88 “Bright Women at the Atlanta Fair” New Orleans Times Picayune, September 27, 1895, p. 12.
Americans. Justi recalled that the picture was a must-see of the exposition and that the rows of real cotton “gave the air of reality to the scene…and caused many a visitor to ask immediately on entering the grounds, ‘Where is the picture of the cotton field that I hear so much about?’” Located outside the building was “a practical object-lesson in cotton growing.” The intention of the exhibit was to demonstrate the most modern means of growing and cultivating cotton. However, an unstated lesson was that while white farmers reaped the profits, African Americans conducted the labor. Like the late-nineteenth century’s plantation fiction, the expositions’ working cotton and tobacco fields allowed all Americans to become white southerners. If the nation was to solve the race problem at home and abroad, the exposition’s provided clear examples of how to do so: black labor, free or coerced, supported industrial progress. In the twentieth century the plantation model became essential to managing race in the industrial metropolises of the North and foreign territories.

In all these ways, the Negro Buildings and black participation at the expositions confirmed a southern racial order that uplifted people of color, while denying them the rights of citizenship. At the same time, although supporting the language of civilization, there was room to contest white narratives of progress. The Negro Buildings challenged an increasingly benign remembrance of slavery. The progress represented confirmed the depths from which southern African Americans had advanced. “The Negro, at the close of the war, was all that American slavery would make any people, viz.: beastialized and animalized; ignorant, poor, crude, rude; helpless, moneyless and thoughtless,” wrote Methodist minister and Gammon Theological

89 Justi, Official History, 361-362.

Seminary professor, John W. E. Bowen, during the Cotton States exposition. “American slavery was not a blessing; it was a curse. The good that came to the Negro (and there was good even in so baneful contact) came in spite of slavery.”

The Negro Buildings challenged and confirmed the southern imperial modern. On the one hand, they validated Reconstruction and Jim Crow’s redemptive narrative of uplift and philanthropy; on the other hand, they raised questions of why African Americans were so “primitive” in the first place.

Jim Crow modernity reflects what historian Paul Kramer has called the “politics of recognition.” The South’s expositions, like colonial spaces, invited subjects, in this case African Americans, to participate to the “extent that hegemonic authorities recognized [African Americans’] capacities for discipline, political rationality, and self-government.” Like the colonial Philippines studied by Kramer, Jim Crow modernity provided “a flexible ideological basis for a calibrated mixture of empowerment and disenfranchisement.”

Jim Crow modernity in its flexibility provided a basis for Jim Crow empire. The “success” of southern race relations, according to the expositions, could easily be applied to foreign people of color. As Peter Schmidt argues, “Reconstruction narratives of ‘uplift’ were revised both to justify Jim Crow at home and to persuade skeptical Americans that U.S. imperial destiny abroad meant the reconstruction of its newly acquired colonies, with special emphasis on limited suffrage rights and new education

91 J. W. E. Bowen, “The Comparative Status of the Negro at the Close of the War and of To-day” in *Africa and the American Negro*, 163.

92 Bowen, “Comparative Status of the Negro at the Close of the War and To-day,” 163-169.

93 It should be noted that Kramer views this as an argument against a simple exportation model of race relations. While Kramer is right that race and empire are historically and locally contingent, he does not recognize the fluidity of the Jim Crow system, which is also contingent on time and space. It is the very lack of rigidity within Jim Crow modernity that allows it to be so easily translated to imperial space. Paul Kramer, “Race, Empire, and Transnational History” in *Colonial Crucible*, 201; Kramer, *Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 18.
While never exactly duplicated and contingent on time and space, racial segregation became a key part of U.S. colonial practices after 1898. Jim Crow was no longer “regional and southern.” The expositions in Atlanta and Nashville contributed to the nationalization and internationalization of Jim Crow. Racial segregation and uplift at home became a part of a “global imperial strategy of rule.” As C. Vann Woodward noted sixty years ago: “Events in the Philippines soon indicated that the Mississippi Plan had become the American Way.”

In the 1880s and 1890s black attitudes towards imperialism varied from antagonistic to ambivalent to supportive. Prominent African Americans changed or held contradictory opinions on expansionism throughout their lives. At the expositions, many southern African American leaders aligned themselves with a civilizing discourse that supported the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxon civilization. The Negro Buildings’ confirmed advancement through accommodation. The displays of African American industry and achievement validated the rhetoric of technical education as the path to progress both at home and in future colonies. International conferences held by African American missionary and church organizations replicated white evangelists’ depictions of Africa as a heathen and primitive locale. In doing so, the Negro Buildings upheld

95 Schmidt, *Sitting in Darkness*, 110.
the potentiality of the Jim Crow modern in imperial space. African Americans, themselves, vindicated the rhetoric of imperial uplift.  

Late nineteenth century missionary activity was an integral aspect of America’s engagement with the outside world. Forming a new white nationalism based on Christian ethics and proselytizing, Protestantism shifted missionary work from the postwar South to the world. “The new, religiously inspired and highly racialized American nationalism on the home front,” writes historian Edward Blum, “supported boldness in extending America’s economic, political, and religious power over foreign peoples, and imperialism in turn further bolstered the sense that the United States was God’s chosen nation.” In this new milieu African American missionaries were viewed by both black and white clergy as essential to the civilizing and proselytizing of Africa.

Although some black missionaries, like Henry McNeal Turner, were emigrationists, most saw participation in missions as a way to demonstrate their progress as racial subjects and claim full American citizenship. Throughout its run the Cotton States hosted a variety of black missionary conferences. The first was held in September when the Colored Baptist Foreign


Mission held its annual conference in Atlanta. The conference that attracted the most notice, however, was Gammon Theological Seminary’s “Congress on Africa” held between December 13 and 15. Beginning in November the Constitution editorialized on the importance of the congress. The paper promised an unflinching view of Africa: “Natives of Africa will speak of their own land. Travelers will personally describe what they have seen. Missionaries from the Dark Continent will set forth clearly the religious life of the people.” The Constitution believed that it was up to the “American negro” to redeem the “Dark Continent” by bringing it American civilization. However, the paper also hoped that this portrait of Africa would discourage the “thousands of negroes in the south [that] have been sadly misled by false views on Africa” and believed the continent suitable for emigration. The congress reinforced the class bias of African American missions to Africa. The African American middle class could go to Africa to save it while rural and working class blacks should stay and labor in the South.

The Congress on Africa was considered the most important conference of the exposition by both white and black observers. Although technically held outside the fairgrounds, it was viewed as part of the Cotton States and the Constitution estimated that thousands attended both

102 “A Huge Assembly” Atlanta Constitution, September 26, 1895, p. 5.


104 Many African Americans also held this view. It was believed that beyond a historical connection, African Americans could more quickly acclimatize to the climate and diseases of Africa. See M. C. B. Mason, “The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Evangelization of Africa” in Africa and the American Negro, 145-148.


the congress and the fair.\textsuperscript{107} While the biracial congress was meant to promote the “evangelization of Africa,” it was framed by the current scramble for the continent’s natural wealth.\textsuperscript{108} Participants at the congress presented speeches not only on Christian missions but on “African exploration, native peoples, languages and religion, and the opportunity, means for the promotion, and progress of civilization [in Africa].”\textsuperscript{109} Speakers included ministers and bishops, foreign dignitaries, white and black missionaries, and African philologists and explorers, such as the celebrated Mary French-Sheldon. It also featured prominent black spokesmen such as Henry Turner, John W. E. Bowen, Alexander Crummell, and T. Thomas Fortune. More than any other aspect of the exposition, the Congress on Africa mobilized a language of civilization and uplift of foreign people.

One of the highlights of the exposition was Orishetukeh Faduma, an “African prince” of the Yoruba people of Sierra Leone and a graduate of Queens College and Yale University. Unlike the much-disparaged Africans at the Dahomey Village, Atlanta’s white press fawned over Faduma. He was representative of the progress that could be achieved in Africa, especially when considering, if the Dahomey Village was a reference, how far Faduma had come. Faduma supported the emigrationist cause. “The race, in order to be a race, must have individuality of its own. This it cannot have if it is overshadowed by the white man’s,” quoted the Constitution of Faduma’s speech. Reassuringly, Faduma did not believe that all African Americans were ready for Africa, rather for the moment just “hardy pioneers.” Faduma, while supporting missionary work in Africa, was also critical of European missions on his home continent. He argued that the


\textsuperscript{109} E.L. Parks, “The Stewart Missionary Foundation for Africa and the Purpose of the Congress” in Africa and the American Negro, 10.
goal was to Christianize Africa not Anglicize or Americanize it. Faduma denounced the ways missionaries had suppressed “Native modes of thought, and all those peculiarities of language and manner which ought to differentiate one race from another.” God created separate races for a purpose, reasoned Faduma, and American missionaries should not attempt to replicate American society in Africa.\textsuperscript{110}

The general tenor of the congress, however, was that Africa was a primitive and heathen land that needed to be saved. “The heathen African…eagerly yearn for that civilization which they believe will elevate them and make them potential for good,” claimed Henry McNeal Turner.\textsuperscript{111} First person testimony from converted Africans such as Faduma and Etna Holderness, presented a before-and-after image of what Christian civilization brought, while testimony from white missionaries confirmed the work of God in a supposedly godless land.\textsuperscript{112} Other speakers testified to the benefits brought to Africa by American and European civilization. For example J. C. Hartzell praised the benefits of European colonialism. Hartzell, a corresponding secretary for the Freedmen’s Aid and Southern Education Society, believed in the power of white society to transform African Americans. Likewise, H. K. Carroll, editor of the New York Independent, argued that “[w]hat the Christian faith, Christian education, and Christian example have done for the Negro in the United States, these influences can do for the Negro of Africa.”\textsuperscript{113}


\textsuperscript{112} On the power of before-and-after imager in the rhetoric of civilization see Laura Wexler, Tender Violence, 10.

American newspaper editor T. Thomas Fortune framed the recent history of Africa as a continent “rapidly subdued and its waste places made the habitation of civilized governments and its savage inhabitants brought into contact and under the control of civilization.” Altogether the congress, while open to the occasional dissenting voice, presented an image of Africa as a dangerous, primitive, and heathen place desperate for the civilization and religion of America.

Engagement with Africa at the congress, however, did encourage a proto-black nationalism. John H. Smyth, the ex-minister to Liberia, claimed that African Americans’ failure to embrace Africa was part of the reason Africans were considered “degraded beings.” Smyth called on blacks to embrace their African heritage: “you are descendants of African races and as consequence…you are a separate and distinct people from Caucasian races.” It was time for African Americans to gather “reliable data respecting our race in the fatherland, and thereby awaken in you an interest and sincere desire for the well being of Africa and her races, for our people, and for accurate information concerning the most ancient, and most mysterious of lands.” In doing so, African Americans’ would regain their “Negro manhood” and create a preference of their race “before all other races.” Likewise, in his opening address at the congress, W. P. Thirkield, president of the Gammon Theological Seminary, argued that Africa had been “cursed.” “In other centuries the curse was the stealing of Africans from Africa. Now, it is the game among European nations of ‘shut your eyes and grab’ in their efforts to steal Africa from the Africans.” Fortune, in the same paper he disparaged pre-colonial Africa, believed that Africans would eventually absorb their colonizers and create an African “civilization whose

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glory and whose splendor and whose strength shall eclipse all others.”117 The congress, while overarchingly supporting the civilizationist cause, opened possibilities for critiques of such logic. If African Americans were to rescue Africa questions needed to be raised regarding their relationship to their ancestral “homeland.” For some, at least, this included a proto-black nationalist perspective.

The multiple and divergent views on Africa and colonialism within the African American community was made evident at the Congress on Africa. While some blacks supported the work of Cecil Rhodes and King Leopold’s Congo, others believed that only African Americans could save and civilize Africa. The white missionaries, philologists, and explorers at the congress all took a negative but hopeful view of Africa. Confident in their own civilization’s remaking of Africans through slavery and freedom, they saw Africa as a continent ripe for Christianity and exploitation. Although some whites, such as J. W. Hamilton, Corresponding Secretary for the Freedmen’s Aid Society, were critical of colonization and believed in equality, most at the congress viewed it through the framework of European imperialism.118 African Americans’ embrace of the teleology of modern progress confirmed the power of Jim Crow modernity and empire to transform colonial subjects into modern citizens. As historian James Campbell has noted, African American missionaries believed that Christianity and “civilization” were “universal principals toward which all people gravitated.” In this view, “spreading the gospel and western civilization to Africa thus implied no violence toward African civilization but merely speeded Africa along the path it was preordained to follow.”119 The southern black elite became willing participants in the colonial project. Like the technical education they supported for the


119 Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 83.
uplift of rural blacks, they viewed Africans as needing the guiding hand of the “better class.” Jim Crow modernity and empire, then, was not simply imposed by whites on Africans. Many black elite accepted and bought into its program of modernization and exclusion. In doing so, they helped prepare the way for colonial enterprises.

In 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois predicted that the problem of the twentieth century would be “the problem of the color line.” In few things has anyone been so right. Beginning in 1898 the United States extended the color line across the globe. European nations’ embraced the line in their own imperial adventures. From the violence of colonial rule at the beginning of the twentieth century to the violence of liberation and civil rights in foreign and domestic space at mid-century, the color line ruled a global imperial society. The Cotton States and International Exposition and Tennessee Centennial Exposition played a small but significant part in cementing the power of the color line. At the fairs, the color line was present in the seriousness of the white cities’ Smithsonian exhibits, Negro Buildings, and conferences on Africa. It was present in the crass commercialism of the Midway Plaisance. The color line, however, was flexible. African American fairgoers attended all aspects of the fair and were treated to reduced discrimination. In many ways, the fluidity of the color line, which occurred at the behest of whites, only confirmed its power. “The point about segregation is not that it was a system of complete separation,” writes historian Mark Smith, “the point is that whites derived their authority by defining when and where sensory intimacy was permitted.” In few spaces but the liminal ones of the expositions was this point so definitively made clear. Northern and a few European fairgoers

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were witness to the power of Jim Crow modernity to transform and order a biracial society. The fairs made clear the possibilities for the exportation of Jim Crow modernity as Jim Crow empire.

The South’s calls for an informal empire based on the marketability of consumer goods and the exploitation of raw materials was consistent with United States’ imperialism. American corporations viewed themselves as a part of a civilizing mission of the world. Like the Negro Building’s representation of modern African American elites, these companies “produced a narrative of progress – a temporally fluid view of culture and place – within which all people were potential consumers and all nations potentially modern.”

By establishing trade with Latin American markets the effect on the South would be twofold. On the one hand, the South would be able to assert greater commercial autonomy and release itself from the shackles of northern merchants. On the other hand, its participation in a growing market empire placed it on the side of the metropole and act as civilizer bringing primitive and heathen people U.S. commercial goods.

At the fairs the southern African American elite embraced this civilizing discourse. Buying into the progressive narrative of the late nineteenth century they welcomed technical education both at home and abroad. In the expositions’ conferences on Africa, the black elite presented a worldview that confirmed Africa as the “Dark Continent.” Although white participants mostly took a negative view of the current state of Africa, African American spokesmen, while certainly employing the language of civilization, opened doors to critiques of both the U.S. slave system and the colonization of Africa. Never a homogenous group, the African American elite at the expositions held a variety of views that were both compatible and incompatible with Jim Crow modernity and empire. In the years following the expositions, accommodation rhetoric declined and the proto-black nationalism articulated by a few gained

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salience. In the end, however, most observers left the Cotton States exposition believing that African Americans as a people supported the colonizing and civilizing of Africa.

The Jim Crow South did not simply transmit a biracial social order. As Natalie Ring, Jennifer Greeson, and others have shown, the South was not isolated but intimately connected within circuits of empire. Historian Clare Corbould has recently written, “‘Race’ was not something exported out of the United States to the colonial periphery; rather, race was made by empire just as empire was made by race.”\footnote{Clare Corbould, “Race and Imperial Identities: Introduction” in Colonial Crucible, 193.} The South was never an isolated region. It always connected to transnational trends. New South ideologues believed that their version of a Jim Crowed modernity could be useful in the expansion of United States empire. At the same time, their biracial social order was informed by other colonizers’ experience with race. The late nineteenth century was characterized by the circular travels of ideas on science, culture, and race. These “Atlantic crossings,” of which world’s fairs were central components, made up a common language of Euro-American empire and superiority.\footnote{For the “Atlantic crossings” of ideas see Daniel T. Rogers, Atlantic Crossing: Social Politics in a Progressive Age (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998). For the way in which race was a contingent category in the imperial milieu see Paul Kramer, The Blood of Government. For a reevaluation of U.S. empire see Gretchen Murphy, Shadowing the White Man’s Burden: U.S. Imperialism and the Problem of the Color Line (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 6-7.}

The Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial were just one small part of increasing web of imperial ideas centered around the social hierarchy of race and modern industrial progress. Far from being isolated, Atlanta, Nashville, and other New South cities were embedded in the matrix of late nineteenth and early twentieth century empire: an empire in which colony affected metropole as much as metropole affected empire. They are also indicative of the fractured nature of U.S. empire. The Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial challenge the notion of a fully
formed and homogenous United States. Southerners asked different questions of empire, just as empire asked different questions of southerners.
Chapter 5. “The Legions in Blue and Gray”: Sectional Reconciliation at the Expositions

“There is a shallow idea, which neither Hill nor Grady ever entertained, that the men who could wring victory from the jaws of death are somehow incapable of winning triumphs in the peaceful contest for industrial supremacy. It is a short-sighted man who rejects the light of the past.” - The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated

June 24, 1897 began with rain and the weather did not let up throughout the day. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder on the muddy streets of Nashville, ten thousand Confederate veterans felt the dampness sink into their bodies. Thirty years earlier these men had experienced far worse but now their bodies were old and frail. Despite the rain, they stood erect waiting for the signal to march through Nashville to the great exposition just outside the city’s limits.

Nashville, home to the United Confederate Veterans, was the New South city most connected to its past. If Sherman had erased Atlanta’s past, Nashville celebrated it alongside its New South future. The gathering of fifty thousand veterans and their supporters from June 22 to 24 was evidence of the way in which the old continued to reside in the new. Although performances of Civil War memory at the Nashville and Atlanta expositions were celebrations of the South’s past, they aimed to reconcile the nation.¹

This chapter examines the performances of reconciliation at the Atlanta and Nashville

expositions. These performances created a powerful cultural narrative that combined nationalism with sectionalism to win northern capital to the South. Inviting northerners to witness the South’s progress, the expositions based reconciliation on a developing Jim Crow modernity. The celebration of the Lost Cause through Civil War reunions was central to the formation of southern modernity in the late nineteenth century. At a time of nascent imperialism these performances helped reunite the sections by rewriting the war as a patriotic disagreement over states’ rights and its soldiers as exemplars of modern manliness. In doing so, the expositions demonstrated the South’s progress while maintaining a distinctiveness rooted in the “Lost Cause.”

Scholarship on the Lost Cause and Civil War reunions has tended to cast these celebrations of the past as an “antimodern” reaction to the New South plan of modernization. In this view the Lost Cause was an antimodern tonic to the dislocations of late nineteenth century capitalism, or as one historian has put it: “a strong bulwark against modernity.” This, however, creates a false dialectic between New South exponents and a backwards-looking Lost Cause mythology. On closer examination, nostalgia for a golden age was hardly unique to the southern experience of modernity. Nostalgia is a disease of the modern condition. From the survivors of the French Revolution to the cultural architects of the German nation-state, in the nineteenth century nostalgia played a key role in the “invention of tradition” and creation of “imagined

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2 In a recent essay Karen Cox has argued that the Lost Cause was an “antimodern” cultural articulation. William Blair in his recent book challenges historians to move beyond the conception of the Lost Cause as the product of “backward-looking sentimentalists.” Cox, “Confederate Defeat and Cultural Expressions of Memory, 1877-1940” in Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat in the Modern Era, Jenny Macleod, ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 176; Blair, Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 3.
communities.”³ Nostalgia, then, is not a response to modernity—as though it exists outside the modern—but is an essential component of the modern self.⁴ Consequently, southerners’ celebration of the Old South and the Lost Cause were not so much reflections of their antimodernism but rather their embrace of modernity. As historian Gaines Foster has put it: “The Lost Cause did not signal the South’s retreat from the future [rather] it eased the region’s passage through a particularly difficult period of social change. Many of the values it championed helped people adjust to a new order, to that extent, it supported the emergence of the New South.”⁵

The myth of the Lost Cause celebrated the past, provided a balm to New South


⁵ Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 6. Here it is useful to point to Alon Confino quoting Marshall Berman: “To be modern is to be ‘both revolutionary and conservative….We might even say that to be fully modern is to be anti-modern…it has been impossible to grasp and embrace the modern world’s potentialities without loathing and fighting against some of its most palpable realities.” Confino, *Nation As a Local Metaphor*, 122; Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

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industrialization, and gave a moral template for the future that was embraced by the entire nation. In the words of Mrs. Plane, President of the Atlanta chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy, “the immortal past…gleams upon us with the rainbow promise of prosperity in the future.” By emphasizing the manliness of the combatants, Civil War memory at the South’s expositions prepared Americans for the supposed glory and honor that comes from war. Looking at the anthropological exhibits of “primitive” peoples, white fairgoers were sure to view the military prowess of the past and present as proof of their evolutionary progress and superiority. In doing so, the nation furthered the process of reconciliation, while embracing a southern view of racial order that ultimately cut African Americans out of full U.S. citizenship.

Like other dislocating events, the Civil War provoked a contestation over its memory. Defeated Confederates, victorious northerners, and recently freed slaves attempted to make sense of the war, while trying to understand the political, social, and economic ramifications wrought by four years of fighting. During the initial decade after Appomattox, most white southerners, while tentatively accepting defeat, were unwilling to accept that their cause had been wrong. These southerners deemphasized the role slavery played in precipitating the war. Instead they argued that the South fought a “lost cause” over the foundational ideals of the United States. Centered on a group Virginians who were reluctant secessionists with mostly undistinguished war records, this interpretation found its best expression in the group’s Southern Historical Society (SHS). In the pages of its Southern Review and in meetings of the SHS an interpretation

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7 Blight, “A Quarrel Forgotten or a Revolution Remembered?: Reunion and Race in the Memory of the Civil War, 1875-1913” in Blight, Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 145.
of the war emerged that celebrated Confederate leaders and generals as heroic men who had fought over constitutional principals. The SHS, while open to arguing over the causes of the war, was the first to erase the role of racial slavery in precipitating the war. In doing so, they laid the groundwork for a future reconciliation between whites that ignored the contributions of blacks to the war effort and minimized the effects of emancipation on postwar society.⁸

Beyond the activities of the SHS, Confederate memorials sprang up across the South in the first decade after the war. These memorials were far from the triumphant commemorations of the late nineteenth century. They were placed in graveyards and were meant to honor the dead and vindicate their cause, while placing a “distance between the Confederacy and the daily lives of southerners.” The commemorations contributed to a religious-quality in Civil War memory. The Lost Cause became a civil religion for many southerners by combining ritual, mythology, and theology with institutional, educational, and intellectual elements. Like all religious manifestations, it had both organizational and interpretational power in the lives of its followers. Confronted with defeat and the challenges of Reconstruction, white southerners turned to the mythology of the Lost Cause to assert a regional identity and make sense of the changing world around them.⁹

As memory of the war faded and as a new generation of southerners gained prominence, the mythology of the Lost Cause shifted with the contours of the day. Beginning in the 1880s, industrialization, the emergence of town-culture, and integration into a national economy

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⁸ Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 24, 49-62. Beyond the SHS this interpretation of slavery and the coming of the Civil War was lent scholarly legitimacy by James Ford Rhodes in his multivolume history of the Civil War and Reconstruction, History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the Final Restoration of Home Rule in the South in 1877, 7 vols. (New York, 1893-1906).

transformed traditional elements of southern life. Faced with the anxieties and dislocations of industrial-capitalism white southerners, like all people confronted with modernity, looked for sites of stability and social order. The Lost Cause reworked for the demands of the last decades of the century became a source of solidity and calm for white southerners.  

The celebration of the Lost Cause that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s was less about the heritage of defeat and mourning of the dead than it was a celebration of the Confederacy. By the turn-of-the-century the Lost Cause became the story of “a glorious, organic civilization destroyed by an avaricious ‘industrial society’ determined to wipe out its cultural foes.”  

Formed in 1889, the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) became the central organization of this new celebration of the southern past and invented tradition. The UCV was primarily responsible for the creation and maintenance of an acceptable history of the war for southerners. Like previous memorial groups they emphasized the legality of secession, argued that the South was defeated not by military prowess but by overwhelming numbers, and maintained the heroic stature of Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee. The UCV also placed a new emphasis on Lee’s postwar career, welcomed Jefferson Davis to the Confederate pantheon, and put more emphasis on the soldiers and women of the Confederacy. By including the rank-and-file along with women, the UCV reflected the social anxieties of the late nineteenth century. Celebrating the Confederate soldier along with the women of the home front, the Lost Cause incorporated the

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10 Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 87-90. David Blight succinctly captures the difference between the two periods of Civil War memory. The first period was characterized by an “inner” memory. Men who had fought in the war immediately sought to reinterpret their role. The inner memory of the Civil War remained well organized until at least the First World War. The second period beginning in the 1880s was characterized by a “national” memory. It avoided a “defensive tone and self-pity”; it was more about a mythic Old South in which the South was an exotic, premodern, preindustrial “model of grace.” Blight, “‘For Something Beyond the Battlefield’: Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for the Memory of the Civil War” in *Beyond the Battlefield*, 102-103.

two groups likely to participate in radical politics into a conservative social order. “The Confederate celebration served two interrelated social functions,” writes Gaines Foster. “It helped fade the scars of defeat while providing a ritual model of an ordered, deferential, conservative society. The Confederate tradition thereby helped the southern social order weather a period of social stress with a minimum of disruption and, more important, only a modicum of change.”

Although the Lost Cause grew out of the intransigence of defeated southerners, it became a broader mythology that allowed for the reconciliation of North and South. Historian David Blight has argued that three visions of the Civil War emerged after the conflict. The “reconciliationist vision” took root in the process of dealing with the dead and sought to reunite the sections over the “bloody chasm” of war. The “white supremacist vision” also came to prominence in the years following the conflict. This vision refused to allow space for those the war had emancipated. Using terror and violence the white supremacist vision united with the reconciliationist vision to form a powerful memory-bloc in the South. Lastly, Blight argues for a third vision of the war: the “emancipationist vision.” This vision, rooted in black remembrance of the Civil War, included white allies in both the North and South. Emancipationist memory viewed the war as a “reinvention of the republic and the liberation of blacks to citizenship and Constitutional equality.” In the turbulent decades leading to the twentieth century the emancipationist vision was discarded to facilitate a reunion of white Americans. As Blight succinctly puts it: “race was so deeply at the root of the war’s causes and consequences, and so

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12 Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 116-122, 144. For the way in which the Lost Cause had a political function, most notably a tool of southern elites to “fend off challenges to the rule of former Confederates” see Blair, *Cities of the Dead*, 3. This was also the period in which slavery and race were written out of the memory of the war. For Union veterans the war became about preserving the nation, for Confederate veterans it was about standing up for America’s founding ideals. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 189.
powerful a source of division in American social psychology, that it served as the antithesis of a culture of reconciliation.” Sentimentality for an organic civilization rooted in racial slavery combined with late nineteenth century racial science to create a nostalgia that reinvigorated white supremacy and provided the mythic basis of Jim Crow modernity.13

This nostalgia, however, was not prominent in southerners alone. At the turn-of-the-century, the celebration of the Lost Cause and a romantic image of the Old South combined with reunions of veterans of both sides to reunite the nation. Reconciliation between North and South occurred almost immediately at war’s end. Even after Congress wrestled control away from President Johnson’s lenient policy toward Confederates and began Radical Reconstruction, Americans found opportunities to reunite. In the decade after the war the United States lurched between two paths. One path led to a “rapid reunion, lenient reconstruction, and resistance to revolutions in race relations.” The other proposed a regeneration of the nation in which the South would be “remade in the North’s image and harshly punished, the freedpeople enfranchised as citizens, and the Constitution rewritten.” Political Reconstruction was essentially a series of compromises between these two paths. Ultimately, however, the financial panic of 1873, President Grant’s mismanagement of Reconstruction, southern white intransigence, the contested presidential election of 1876, and Americans’ belief that political rights not economic ones were the solution to social problems allowed the South to solidify its power and re-enter the Union as an equal partner in 1877. In that year a confrontation-weary America washed its hands of the South and its now entrenched racial problems. Over the following decades, white southerners used a variety of legal and extra-legal measures to remove the civil and political rights of African

Americans. In the words of David Blight, African Americans became the “sacrificial offerings on the altar of reunion.”

With Reconstruction officially over the nation merged economically and culturally. The Lost Cause and the mythology of the Old South migrated north to become a foundational cultural myth of American society. In the 1880s and 1890s minstrel shows, sentimental literature, and romantic images flooded the nation. The machine age and the realities of industrial labor, notes Blight, “produced a huge audience for a literature of escape into a pre-Civil War, exotic South, that, all but ‘lost,’ was now the object of enormous nostalgia.” Minstrel shows played on northern fears of southern black migration to the urban North, presenting African Americans as locked in a rural and southern context in which their comic ineptitude prevented them from challenging the paternalistic goodwill of their white masters. Sentimental literature and dialect stories, such as the Uncle Remus novellas of Joel Chandler Harris, played into the escapism of dime novels that mythologized the West or exotic lands. In these romantic stories, northerners

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saw a golden age that addressed their anxieties over the present, particularly gendered ones. The Old South became home to strong patriarchal males who ruled their plantations with an effective and strong hand, while southern women became the definition of proper gender etiquette. As historian Nina Silber has noted, northerners’ “image of the South conformed to their image of the idealized feminine sphere; in northern eyes, the South became a region of refined domestic comfort, and the union of North and South restored the sense of domestic harmony that northern society no longer possessed.”\(^{18}\) Lastly, the image of the Old South and the Lost Cause, summarized in the term “Dixie,” became a powerful marketing tool. Dixie branded products flooded the consumer marketplace to such a degree that American society became “invested literally as well as figuratively in the Lost Cause.”\(^{19}\) By the start of the Cotton States and International Exposition northerners and southerners had developed a common image of the South’s recent past. Public entertainment and the culture industry contributed to the expansion of the Lost Cause and Old South mythology as not a southern cultural form but an American one.

The most salient way North and South came together at the turn-of-the-century, however, was through Civil War reunions. Although in the initial decades following the war there was resistance to allowing Confederate veterans too much leeway in public demonstrations, by the late 1880s not only were Confederate veterans staging reunions but were doing so with former Union soldiers. Recovering from the horrors of war, veterans of both sides felt little desire to come together and celebrate it. However, as memories faded and as the Lost Cause took an increasingly celebratory tone, veterans took on a more prominent role in Civil War memory. Membership in the largest Union veteran association, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), exploded from sixty thousand members in 1880 to four hundred thousand members in 1890.


\(^{19}\) Cox, “Confederate Defeat,” 177-178.
Likewise, former Confederates coalesced around the United Confederate Veterans. While each organization held separate reunions, they increasingly celebrated together. At these joint reunions a paradoxical language emerged in which the Confederacy and the Union fought for equally righteous goals: the Union, to preserve the nation, the Confederacy, to preserve America’s founding ideals.20

The fraternalism of the former soldiers crystallized around a language of “manliness, valor, sacrifice, and a mutual sense of honor.”21 This language assuaged the fears of a society undergoing a crisis of masculinity. Kristin Hoganson, in her work on the ways in which gender helped provoke the Spanish-American war, has concluded that the late-nineteenth century’s “psychic crisis was, in many respects, a crisis of manhood.”22 The Civil War veteran came to symbolize the manly ideal of the 1890s. Even more so for the Confederate veteran, whose lack of a federal pension made him seem more independent than Union soldiers. Beyond the stoicism of Confederate veterans, all white southern men were viewed as especially virile in their defense of the region’s racial hierarchy and their protection of white womanhood. Even though most northerners condemned lynching, they saw in the actions of white southerners a passion to protect the “weaker sex.” Fearful of a southern black contagion, northerners looked to the Confederate veteran and his sons as the answer to the late-nineteenth century’s “Negro question.”23

20 Blight, Race and Reunion, 171.

21 Blight, Race and Reunion, 199.


23 Silber, Romance of Reunion, 165-176.
The Lost Cause in the 1880s and 1890s served as a salve for the New South plan of modernization and industrialization. It was not, however, an antimodern cultural articulation. Modernity’s success is dependent on its ability to incorporate its negation. The memory of the Civil War and Old South were given meaning because they were a part of the present as much as the past. “No enduring social memory can be entirely static,” writes historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage. “Each time a tradition is articulated, it must be given a meaning appropriate to the historical context in which it is invoked. For a historical memory to retain its capacity to speak to and mobilize its intended audience, it must address contemporary concerns about the past.”

When northerners and southerners came together at the South’s international expositions they constructed a memory of the past that was well suited to their present.

At the Atlanta and Nashville expositions the modern subject was formulated through ruptures of the past in the present. Through their architecture, exhibits, and displays the expositions formed an “adamantine” link with the past creating a teleological History that began in the ancient world and culminated in the perfectibility of a near southern future. Central to this history was the memory of the Civil War. The expositions reflected the changes in Civil War memory by erasing the emancipatory vision of the war in favor of reconciliation between whites.


25 Reporting from the Tennessee Centennial the New Haven Register noted: “The Tennessee Centennial Exposition is an adamantine link between the past and the present, and everything connected with it appears to carry out the idea. There are many elements presented at Nashville that were wanting at Chicago. The great Columbian Fair certainly marked the progress of the world, but the starting point was not visible and there was nothing to indicate either time or distance. At Nashville everything is marked so plainly that the story becomes indelibly impressed upon the mind.” “The Tennessee Centennial. Great Exposition Formally Opened at Nashville.” New Haven Register, May 1, 1897, p. 8.
Northerners and southerners reunited in the belief that the war had been a manly contestation between two equally right sides. The Atlanta and Nashville fairs were essential components of this new imagined community. Meant to attract both northern capital and northerners to the South, the expositions were modern spaces intimately connected with the past. The expositions were reunion rituals writ large.

Like the Classical and Romanesque architectural motifs of the fairs, the Civil War linked the South to a mythical ancient past. In a celebration of Confederate women, Mrs. Goodlett, President of the State Division of the Daughters of the Confederacy in Tennessee, connected the “Southern mother” with “the Roman matron” who “girded [her son’s] sword on the stripling boy and sent him forth to battle for Freedom’s sake.” Comparing southern chivalry and fortitude in battle with the Greek soldiers of Thermopylae, Goodlett maintained a Greco-Roman analogy of southern history. Connections to a mythical white past were essential to southerners’ claims of a linear path to a southern Jim Crow future.

However, it was the recent and much more real history of the region that shone most brightly at the expositions. For northern and southern writers who visited the fairs the Civil War was never far from their minds. “The city of the siege is a thing of the past, but its heroic memories will endure forever,” wrote Wallace Putnam Reed of Atlanta. “In its place stands the metropolis of the New South, and side by side the blue and gray are working out their destiny, with simple faith and loyal hearts.” Walter Cooper, the Cotton States exposition’s official chronicler, suggested that the fair’s scenes “of the peaceful triumph of industry” and “pageant of

26 “Daughters at the Capitol” Nashville Banner, June 22, 1897, p. 8.

peace” were given more significance when compared to the “awful panorama of war.” For many northern observers the destruction and “injustices” inflicted upon the South were necessary object lessons to prove how far the South had progressed since the war. It was the South’s material and moral progress as evidenced by the expositions that helped make reunion possible in the late nineteenth century. The New York delegation to the Atlanta fair went so far as to ask: “If such an exposition could have been possible in 1860, our terrible Civil War might have been avoided—who knows?”

In the expositions’ celebration of industry and commerce, northerners and southerners came together. In a speech on “Connecticut Day” at the Cotton States the Governor of Connecticut noted that “[t]o-day we are witnesses of an unusual spectacle. Georgia and Connecticut, New England and the New South, are here in harmonious and cordial relations, working unitedly [sic] and enthusiastically in and for an industrial enterprise, which, for business importance and patriotic significance, rivals any enterprise of a similar character ever undertaken in our country.” Impressed by the industry and modernity of the expositions many northerners were confident that the “springing up of factories of innumerable varieties, and an addition and a

28 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated, 93.

29 The delegation further reflected: “It was the increasing purposes of the ages, the healing balm of old wounds, the final solution to social, sectional and racial problems, if the sentiments uttered are honestly and practically developed and carried out. It was the substantial proof of Grady’s stirring sentiments—the working out of a great idea that had come to pervade the hearts and minds of the conservative men of all sections.” New York at the Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, GA (Albany, 1896), 149; Margaret Severance, Official Guide to Atlanta including Information of the Cotton States and International Exposition (Atlanta, 1895), 69; L.W.B., “Atlanta’s Magic City” Chicago Inter Ocean, September 29, 1895, p. 24; “Atlanta Since the War” Atlanta Constitution, September 21, 1895, p. 2; Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated, 93; Nathaniel Stephenson, The Tennessee Centennial Exposition, First Published in the Cincinnati Commercial-Tribune, April 9, 1897 (Nashville, 1897), 19-22.

30 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated, 116-117.
general stimulus to industrial energies by northern capital, brain and brawn” would “naturally”
cause the “sectional and other feeling, engendered by a Civil War, [to] give way.”
Mayor Swift of Chicago even suggested that industrial expositions might have been able to steer America
away from Civil War. “Ignorance is often if not usually the parent of misunderstanding and of
strife,” spoke Swift. “[I]f the people of the Northern and Southern sections of our common
country had interchanged visits and mingled together before 1861 as much as they have latterly
done, they could never have taken up arms against each other.” For New South boosters and
northern capitalists the reunited future would be based on economic and industrial integration.

With the expositions’ celebration of commerce, New South ideologues aligned the region
with northern values and predicted that the South would emerge as a powerful player in the
expansion of American overseas markets. Many observers exchanged the tensions of the Civil
War for a new form of international industrial and commercial competition. George Brown,
Solicitor-General of the Blue Ridge Circuit, gave a speech on behalf of Georgia at the Cotton
States in which he celebrated “the Spartan courage of the Southern soldier, as half-clad and half-
fed he marched without a murmur into the very jaws of death.” Such soldierly stoicism, Brown
suggested, was now the “sacred and priceless inheritance” of all Americans and would gird the
United States as it “engaged with all the nations of the earth in the friendly rivalry of peaceful
pursuits.”

In their festivals of progress, New South expositions attached themselves to a linear

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31 New York at the Cotton States, 150.

32 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated, 124; “The Bay State at
Nashville Tennessee’s Centennial Show” Springfield Republican, October 1, 1897, p. 6; Hand
Book to the Cotton States and International Exposition: Being a Faithful Account of What a
Representative of the Brooklyn Eagle Saw When He Visited the Fair (Atlanta, 1895), 5.
Microfilm Reel 126, No. 3. Smithsonian National Museum of American History Library,
Washington, D.C.

33 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated, 99.
narrative of material progress. This history did not erase the past but enclosed it within the present and mobilized it for future generations. The southern past would come to guide the entire country as it embarked on economic and foreign expansion. The space of the expositions became sites of reconciliation that were modern and southern, modern in their view of the future and southern in their implementation.

There were many other signs of sectional unity at the expositions. The arrival of the Liberty Bell elicited a strong outpouring of national patriotism by southerners at both expositions. In Atlanta a large parade met the bell and followed it through the streets of the city to the exposition where it was placed in the Pennsylvania Building and guarded by four Philadelphia policemen. “It had drawn the first great crowd of the Expositions,” recalled the official history, “but, what was of much more importance and of far higher significance, it had called forth expressions which did much to unify and perpetuate the sentiments of fraternity and patriotism in remote and once antagonistic sections of the country.” The Liberty Bell, a symbol of national patriotism yet rooted in the mythology and history of a northern city, was the focus of reunion rituals performed at both expositions. A New York dignitary at the Atlanta exposition for “New York Day” commented: “Georgia and New York belong to the aristocracy of America. They were numbered among the original Thirteen.” The Atlanta and Nashville fairs stressed their state’s pivotal roles in the making of the nation, while northern visitors from the original colonies glorified their shared revolutionary history.34

While the South’s presentation of industrial-modernity pleased most observers, others were disappointed that the expositions did not confirm the stereotypes of southern life common in Plantation Romances and dialect stories. Maude Andrews warned the readers of Leslie’s

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Weekly} that they may be disappointed if they came south for the expositions. “There are Southern types,” reported Andrews, “and the negro, of course, is here, but the old South of romance and inertia is dead.” Although disheartened, Andrews conceded that southerners, while still “distinctive,” were now “full-fledged” Americans, which was “a great thing for the South and for Atlanta.” A month later in Harper’s Weekly, Andrews expressed a similar sentiment: “Atlanta bears no resemblance to the ante bellum South: it is far ahead of the quaintness of those times, and the poverty which came afterward. It has no residences which suggest the nooks and corners described in the dialect stories.”35 Others worried that New South industry corrupted the purity of southerners. F. Hopkinson Smith, acknowledging the irrevocable march of progress, lamented in the pages of Scribner’s Magazine that the New South was destroying “the most restful, the most wholesome, the most simple [life]—found nowhere now but in our small Southern cities—a life which once extinguished will never be revived.”36 The fairs organizers were also willing to trade in southern stereotypes to attract visitors. Director-General of the Tennessee Centennial, Major Lewis, in a promotional interview with a northern newspaper was both comic and stereotyped, noting that “We did act a little bad along about ‘61” but now the reason for the exposition was “Patriotism; pure patriotism.” At the same time, Lewis contended that Centennial was to be “a typical Southern exposition with cotton and corn, blue grass and wild flowers, the mule and the ‘nigger’ on their native heath.”37 Despite Lewis’ assurances, northerners looking for an escape to the Old South tended to be disappointed by the South’s


apparent modernity. However, it was the peculiar nature of the South’s Jim Crow modernity, as indicated by Lewis, which made clear the ways in which the old continued to reside in the new.

Despite the rhetoric of sectional harmony there was one topic that still could lead to tension between the regions. Although praising the “magnanimous spirit” of the North at the Centennial, the Nashville *Banner* spoke out against those northerners “whose imaginary love for the negro has endangered such detestation and malignity toward his former master, that they would gladly see a holocaust of the South.”\(^{38}\) If North and South were to be reunited it would be on the South’s terms of a Jim Crow modernity.

At the Atlanta exposition the Democratic Governor of Georgia, William Atkinson, declared that nothing was “more instructive than in the marvelous progress shown in every line by this emancipated people in their own building.”\(^{39}\) The exposition’s official history suggested that the Negro Building demonstrated the ways African Americans had achieved material and moral progress, while crediting southern whites for their success.\(^{40}\) White commentary on the Tennessee Centennial’s Negro Building struck a similar balance between black progress and white paternalism. “The white race of the South has generously and wisely aided the Negro race to solve the problem of self-help,” proclaimed a pamphlet for the Centennial, “and it is pleasant to note that many Negro leaders have met the advances of their former masters in a gratifying spirit of thankfulness and have utilized the advantages afforded them with surprising

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\(^{40}\) *Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated*, 57.
intelligence.”41 As noted in Chapter Two, the fairs’ organizers viewed the Negro Exhibits as illustrative of a developing Jim Crow modernity through which African Americans became a modern and progressive people, while remaining indebted to a southern white paternalism. In this way, blacks would progress on white terms becoming modern but remaining locked in the region’s racial hierarchy.

At the expositions, northerners flocked to the Negro Building making it, along with the Woman’s Building, the most popular official space of the fairs. “It is the feature of the fair that seems to struck them [northerners] more than any other,” reported the Atlanta Constitution. “[A]ll have been impressed with the direct friendship exhibited between the two races.”42 John Farrell, President of the New York Editorial Association, congratulated Atlanta for permitting African Americans to “erect a building for the exclusive exhibits of the products of negro labor and skill, thus enabling your colored people to show what advances they have made in the arts of civilization.” Farrell was sure that the exposition’s success “will add another link to the chain of friendship between the two sections.”43 On Illinois Day, Chicagoans were willing to look past the social ills of the South, particularly lynching, in favor of reunion: “She is not yet perfect; wrongs both great and small are still committed upon her soil, wrongs done in violation of law and wrongs done in the name of law.”44 Although blacks may have “lagged” behind, the fact that they were progressing materially and morally was solid evidence of the South’s progress as a whole and reason enough for northerners to re-embrace the region. By bringing northerners to


44 *Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated*, 123.
the South to witness the “peaceful” relations between the races, the Atlanta and Nashville expositions were essential spaces in which a Jim Crow modernity was acted out and exported to the rest of the nation as an act of reconciliation.\footnote{Nina Silber argues that in the 1890s the South’s “backwardness” came to be the vanguard of race control. Silber, \textit{Romance of Reunion}, 141.}

The Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial created a teleology that stretched from ancient Greece and Rome through the antebellum period, Civil War, and Reconstruction before arriving at the New South. However, despite New South ideologues’ attempts to place the South on the vanguard of progress and Time, the reality of modern southern life meant a constant reoccurrence of the past in the present. Literary critic Dana Seitler notes that the “disorienting experience of modern time—gave rise to a paradox: modernity sought a break with the past, but that break necessitated the past’s return.” Walter Benjamin insisted in his analysis of modernity that rather than time unfolding along a teleological line, modernity created a “montage of disparate times, an imbrication of shifting and contestatory temporalities.” Following Benjamin, Seitler concludes that “the necessary recurrence of the past [is] at the root of modern identity.” Modern identity, then, was formulated through ruptures of the past in the present. The Enlightenment project of a rational selfhood, divorced from the past, only existed in rhetoric.\footnote{Dana Seitler, \textit{Atavistic Tendencies: The Culture of Science in American Modernity} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1, 206.}

For New South boosters the past, while not erasable, was of little consequence in the march of southern progress. Industrial modernity served to reunite the sections. Nevertheless, history was an essential component of New South identity. The past could not be escaped. Atlanta’s fairground was a sacred site of Civil War memory. Both Atlanta and Nashville undergirded their modernity with the maintenance of a Greco-Roman analogy of the southern past and present. The Negro Building maintained an emancipationist vision of the Civil War,
while at the same time confirming for white southerners a racial hierarchy. The expositions mobilized the past for future generations. This was made most clear in the meetings of Union and Confederate soldiers at the Atlanta and Nashville fairs. Faced with a masculinity that was viewed as regressive and effeminate, late nineteenth century Americans looked to the past for a strong articulation of manhood. In doing so, the Civil War soldier became an exemplar of modern manliness and prepared the way for American imperial forays overseas.

The goal of the expositions was to demonstrate the progress made by the South since the Civil War, to “bring the two sections of the union into greater harmony,” to attract northern investment and immigration, and to connect the region to the burgeoning economies of Latin America. Sectional harmony, however, could be achieved only if the antagonisms of the Civil War were laid to rest and the combatants of both sides celebrated for their manly virtue. Civil War reunions at the expositions became central parts of the South’s push for national reconciliation.

Both the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions were important sites of reunion in the 1890s. The Atlanta fair tied its “Blue-Gray Day” to the reunion of soldiers for the national commemoration of the battlefield of Chickamauga, while Nashville played host to the decade’s largest gathering of veterans when it hosted the United Confederate Veterans’ Annual Meeting. In each instance the rhetoric of manliness was connected not only to the past but to the future. In the imperial milieu of the exposition spaces, the manliness of Civil War veteran was celebrated. As America looked beyond its borders and as New South boosters situated the region as an important node for American expansion in Latin America and the Caribbean, the manly

Civil War soldier became a significant symbol of the growing militaristic spirit of the late 1890s.48

The celebration of a war that tore the nation apart was not an antithetical enterprise to the expositions’ goals of commercial and industrial reunion. Always concerned with the bottom-line, expositions viewed Civil War reunions as important events necessary to attract visitors. By the late 1880s reunion was big business, drawing huge crowds and their disposable income. Towns and cities vied to attract a meeting of the UCV or GAR. Sectional reconciliation, while coalescing around the ideas of “manliness, valor, sacrifice, and a mutual sense of honor,” was also good for business and investment and, as David Blight argues, was “staged in part as a means of cementing commercial ties between Northern money and Southern economic development.”49 With this in mind, the Nashville and Atlanta expositions welcomed to their cities veterans and supporters of both sides of the war.

In the late nineteenth century manliness and civilization were intimately linked. Modernity was understood in terms of the body, particularly the way in which the white male body symbolized the epitome of racial development.50 Southern expositions connected to this bodily turn by offering a “blueprint of progress” to their visitors.51 The fairs’ display of

48 Silber, Romance of Reunion, 171-172. For the way in which southern concern over manliness and the destruction of the family were articulated in extremist political groups such as the Ku Klux Klan see Nancy MacLean, Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xii.

49 Blight, Race and Reunion, 199, 172.


“primitive” peoples alongside evidence of American manufacturing, commercial, and moral superiority created a cultural narrative in which white male, and to some extent female, fairgoers viewed themselves as the embodiment of progress. The displays of soldierly manliness personified by the Civil War soldier became an essential component to a argument over the evolutionary superiority of white males and their moral right to extend “civilization” across the globe. Looking at anthropological exhibits, white fairgoers were sure to view the military prowess of the past and present as proof of their evolutionary progress and superiority. In doing so, the nation furthered the process of reconciliation, while embracing a southern view of racial order.

Following the establishment of Chickamauga as a National Park on September 21, 1895 between twenty thousand and forty thousand Civil War veterans made their way south from Tennessee to Atlanta for the exposition’s Blue-Gray Day.52 Enthusiasm was so great that the two railroads operating between Chattanooga and Atlanta sent thirty additional trains to carry the crowds to the exposition.53 The day featured a march through Atlanta of both Confederate and Union veterans followed by speeches in the exposition’s auditorium and general socializing between the veteran soldiers. The New York commission recalled that the Union and Confederate veterans “fraternized like long-parted friends and discussed the stirring scenes of thirty years ago with many jests at the discomfitures each had experienced at the hands of the other, and with pitying and sorrowful recollections of the comrades who fell on the field of battle or died in the hospitals, the ill-fated victims of disease, exposure and privation.”54 The local chapter of the United Confederate Veterans each wore a white badge with the words

54 New York at the Cotton States, 259.
“Confederate Veteran” in order for visitors and veterans to identify them and ask questions about the exposition and city. In the end, there were veteran representatives from every state in the country and they took pleasure in meeting with each other and identifying products form their state or visiting their state’s building. “Today’s meeting,” concluded the Constitution, “will be of infinite good in bring together in close bonds of friendship the men who fought against each other a few years ago.”\textsuperscript{55}

The speeches given at the exposition’s Auditorium considered the ways in which the two sections came together at the fair. Governor of Ohio, William McKinley, preparing for a Republican presidential run, reflected the now common interpretation of the war: “The bitterness and resentment belong to the past, and its glories are the common heritage of us all. What was won in that war belongs just as securely to those who lost as to those who triumphed.” The official history of the exposition noted that there was a “general desire” by the veterans of Sherman’s army “to return to the scene of its hard-fought battles of 1864…to meet the soldiers who fought against them.” The day was filled with comradely and reconciliationist symbolism. Union General John Schofield, Commander of the Army of the Ohio during the Atlanta campaign shared the stage with prominent Confederate General James Longstreet, while Atlanta Constitution editor, William Hemphill, pinned a Confederate veteran’s badge on General Lucius Fairchild, ex-Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic.\textsuperscript{56} The Constitution was confident that the reunion signified “the return of peaceful relations between the sections” and that the “meeting will be of infinite good in bringing together in close bonds of friendship the men who fought against each other a few years ago.”\textsuperscript{57} Reflecting on the reunion, the official

\textsuperscript{55} “Under One Flag” Atlanta Constitution, September 21, 1895, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{56} Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated, 111-113.

\textsuperscript{57} “Under One Flag” Atlanta Constitution, September 21, 1895, p. 1.
history of New York’s participation at the exposition recalled: “It was a scene that caused every liberty-loving and patriotic heart to throb faster, and recognize in such a reunion the cementing of the ties that shall bind the people of the freest and greatest country the world has ever known in fraternal fellowship and indissoluble unity.” On September 21, 1895, North and South, Union and Confederate put aside old differences to celebrate a future of commercial and economic development.

While some celebrated the coming together of the sections, others reflected on the way in which the Civil War was responsible for creating new men. Union General William Jackson Palmer at the commemoration of Chickamauga cast the war as a “sectional challenge to American manhood.” Welcoming the veterans to Atlanta, Evan P. Howell, then editor of the Constitution, celebrated the Civil War soldier as the embodiment of conservative virtue, while castigating “the men who remained at home and sent substitutes into the war.” In the eyes of some, the manliness of the Confederate soldier allowed for the reconciliation of the late nineteenth century. Captain W. D. Ellis, speaking for the Confederate veterans, dismissed the causes of the war, amounting the conflict to an “inevitable destiny.” The war did, however, make clear that the Confederates “fought it out like brave men; we settled it forever, and with a magnanimity equal to our courage we shook hands across the bloody chasm.” Southern soldiers’ manliness allowed them to not only accept defeat but to extend their hand in friendship to their former enemy. Taken together, the Cotton States exposition’s Blue-Gray Day became a celebration of an American manhood forged during the Civil War and was now a necessary

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58 New York at the Cotton States, 254, 259.
59 “Blue and Gray Day” Atlanta Constitution, September 20, 1895.
61 Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated, 113.
component of a growing imperial sentiment undergirded by an evolutionary understanding of nations and people.

In Nashville the United Confederate Veterans elicited a similar response. During the UCV’s annual meeting Nashville’s population increased by fifty thousand of which twenty thousand were thought to be Confederate veterans. Nashville’s citizens took great pride in hosting the thousands of “old Confederates” who came to “celebrate their five years struggle for the ‘Lost Cause’; to commemorate the death of their heroes in mighty battles; to talk of brothers and comrades who fell in the fire of the enemy, and to pay tribute to Tennessee in her celebration of her one hundredth anniversary as a State.”62 The UCV meeting, while technically separate from the Tennessee Centennial, was intimately linked with the celebration just outside the city limits. Although most of the events and speeches were held in the Gospel Tabernacle, future home of the Grand Ole Opry and now Ryman Auditorium, almost all the speakers referenced the fair.

On the second day of the reunion, the Centennial opened its gates to UCV members. On June 24th the veterans gathered in Nashville to march through the city. Comprising of thirty-one units, including all the state divisions of the UCV, executives, soldiers of high rank, and with the Daughters of the Confederacy and Sons of Confederate Veterans making up the last two units, the parade wound its way through Nashville to the exposition’s Auditorium. The sponsors and maids of honor of each state rode in open carriages at the head, with the rear brought up by the Major General and staff carrying the state flag. The Daughters of the Confederacy also rode along in open carriages. “Every division as it passed was received with cheers,” remembered Herman Justi, “and when these companies came along which had the members dressed in the genuine old uniforms of Confederate gray, many affecting scenes were witnessed. The tattered

62 “Modern Newspaper Enterprise” Confederate Veteran (May 1897), 237.
flags waved over the shattered remnants of the once mighty host, and it was a gala day that will scarcely ever fade from the memory of any participant in the great march, or of any who saw it pass.” The weather, however, did not cooperate and a heavy rain fell throughout the parade. Despite the weather, the soldiers and fairgoers were not disheartened and gathered in the Auditorium for a final “jubilee.” Wearing their “old gray uniforms” they sat and listened to “Dixie” and the “Bonnie Blue Flag,” intermittently interrupting the speakers with cheering. At night a display of fireworks was given with portraits in fire of prominent Confederates that were met with the “old rebel yell” that “went up in all its pristine strength.” Lastly, the exposition management wanting to show its support of Confederate memory gave one-third of the day’s gate receipts to the Confederate Memorial Institute.63

The speeches during the reunion emphasized both the manliness of the soldiers and the ways in which their valor and orderliness stood in contrast to the disorder of late nineteenth century capitalism. “The order of the occasion was perfect,” the Confederate Veteran quoted a Rev. Dr. Hoss as saying. “Drunkenness was very rare and the police had little work to do. It was easy to see that these multitudes of gray-haired men represented the very flower of American citizenship.” Likewise, Bishop Fitzgerald speaking for Nashville’s mayor made clear the Lost Cause was alive and well at the exposition. “The fame of the Confederate soldier is safe,” spoke Fitzgerald. “He has won his place, and he will keep it….nothing that was best and noblest was lost. Honor was not lost: high ideals of manhood were not lost.”64 Judge John C. Ferriss, representing Davidson County maintained the manliness and dignity of the Confederate soldier: “We never sacrificed our manhood then, nor never will; we returned to our desolate homes

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64 “The Reunion” Confederate Veteran (July 1897), 340, 341. Almost every speaker at the reunion celebrated American manhood as represented by the Confederate veterans present.
without a murmur and began life anew. In celebrating the manhood forged through war thirty years earlier, the men of the UCV challenged those who had not fought to demonstrate their manliness. In the crisis of masculinity, where industrialization, commercial culture, and suffrage threatened America’s faith in the republic of yeoman farmers, such challenges were taken seriously by men born after the war and now mostly in charge of the region and nation.

In the imperial milieu of the 1890s, the future was as much in focus as the past. “They cheered two flags, the stars and stripes and the stars and bars,” noted the *Official History*, “…they were ready now to fight under the stars and stripes with the same devotion and courage they displayed when fighting under the stars and bars.” Indeed, some speakers at the UCV reunion looked beyond the South for an opportunity to prove their loyalty. Judge Ferriss noted that “after thirty-four years of peace, we stand together as one great nation, the blue and gray working side by side for the good of our great country, and all of us as a man are in sympathy with our little neighbor, Cuba, ‘the Gem of the Ocean.’” A year prior to the war with Spain, reunions of veterans were important points in which American manliness and military might were celebrated and propagandized. Throughout both fairs the United States military made

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66 In General Gordon’s outgoing speech as President of the UCV he challenged his listeners “To cherish such memories and recall such a past, whether crowned with success or consecrated in defeat, is to idealize principle and strengthen character, intensify love of country and convert defeat and disaster into pillars of support for future manhood and noble womanhood.” “Gen. Jno. B. Gordon Re-Elected” Nashville *Banner*, June 23, 1897, p. 2.

67 As Steven Hahn has noted these threats were taken seriously and the response to them was often articulated in political action. Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).


impressive displays of both weaponry and soldiers accompanied by mock battles and military encampments. Combined with the celebration of past glories the southern soldier became the quintessential modern soldier.\(^{70}\)

The economic depression of 1893 had a significant impact on the ways in which Americans viewed the world at the end of the century. While modernity predicted endless progress, the reality of the decade suggested that social and economic regression was as much a possibility as progression. The masses of unemployed men made many question what it meant to be manly and how masculine responsibility, tied to providing for one’s family, could be articulated at a time when employment was scarce. At the same time, those men fortunate enough to maintain their social and economic standing became concerned that they were losing their manly vitality through their opulence. Lastly, the closing of the frontier meant, for many observers, that real men could no longer be made through the West.\(^{71}\)

In this psychological milieu, the Civil War soldier came to be seen as an embodiment of a masculinity that was fading. “The epitome of honor and the model of manly character in the post-Civil War period was the veteran,” writes Hoganson. “The respect accorded to veterans led

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\(^{70}\) Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 176, 169.

some observers to conclude that the greatest legacy of the war had been manhood itself.” In the expositions’ celebration of material superiority and imperial desire, the Civil War soldier became the quintessential role model for the extension of American influence across the hemisphere. The Confederate soldier more so than the Union one came to be associated with the future rather than the past. Former soldiers abounded in the expositions’ executives, they embraced the New South mantra and in doing so confirmed a popular conception that the Union veteran indulged in the past, while the Confederate veteran staked his claim to the coming times. “Even if they celebrated a man’s earlier accomplishments,” writes historian Nina Silber, “many Americans objected to the image of the veteran who wallowed in the past and did not contribute toward the future. In this context, many non-GAR men were drawn to a southern model of manhood, one that was personified in Confederate soldiers and veterans and in many of the present leaders of the southern states.” In the militaristic build-up to 1898, the manly soldiering of the Confederate soldier became the patriotic all-American. In the expositions’ commemoration of the Confederate veteran, the fairs connected to a growing narrative in which an imperial manliness was rooted in the South. The reconciliation of the nation, then, was dependent on the ways in which northern men were able to adopt a southern sense of manliness. The Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions provided northerners with the opportunity to witness first-hand the object lesson of southern manhood.

Civil War and commercial reconciliation was largely the purview of men at the expositions. Women, however, also took on a significant role in the maintenance of Confederate memory by curating historical objects and Civil War relics. While the Civil War reunions were


discrete events, lasting only a day or two, both the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions maintained permanent exhibits of Civil War memory. Throughout the fairgrounds visitors reflected on martial objects of the past. As collected memory, historical objects fixed time as static, producing a sense of stability in a “period of rapid and unpredictable changes.” Combined with the narrative of the Lost Cause, southern historical objects and images, in their erasure of regional differences, created in the minds of southerners’ an imagined community. Significantly, this invented tradition was exported out of the South to the nation. The expositions were one part of a matrix of Dixie themed products, advertising, and stories that were gobbled up by turn-of-the-century Americans. Through the day’s popular culture the Lost Cause and the Old South strengthened the bonds between North and South. Lost Cause and Civil War relics were “representation[s] of the past embedded in the context of social action.” They indicated a process by which Americans’ southernized the nation, “making it an everyday mental property and creating a visual image of it in their minds.” Southern expositions were one of the main catalysts for the transformation of American national memory.

At the Cotton States exposition the fairground itself was a site of Civil War memory. Built on a former battlefield, Piedmont Park retained the scars of the great conflict and impressed northerners who visited. “The war made it historic ground years ago,” reported the Chicago Inter Ocean, “for here in the terraces overhanging the Plaza were the Confederate rifle pits for the defense of the old Atlanta.” Memory of the fairground as battleground was an important object lesson for southern progress and commercial modernity. The paper continued: “The darkness

74 Confino, Nation As a Local Metaphor, 156.

75 On the Dixie-fication of America see Cox, Dreaming of Dixie.

76 Confino, Nation As a Local Metaphor, 100. For Alon Confino the same was true in late nineteenth century Germany.
hung over Atlanta for several years, but from the ashes of that old Confederate city has a sprung a new city, that knows no sectionalism, but is distinctively American as Chicago.”

Standing on sacred ground fairgoers experienced the past, present, and future through the built-environment of the expositions.

Other than the fairground itself, there were few other spaces of Civil War remembrance at the Cotton States. Atlanta did not set apart official space for the celebration of the Confederacy and Lost Cause. Memory of the Civil War was an afterthought. Exposition organizers originally declined the request by the Daughters of the Confederacy to put together an exhibit of Confederate relics and it was only in September, at the start of the fair, that the DOC was able to procure a small space to erect a structure to house exhibits provided by the organization and the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Perhaps as the first exposition after Chicago and given the tenuous economic climate, the fair’s organizers did not want to risk appearing partisan and stirring sectional rivalries by having an explicit celebration of the Confederacy. Mrs. Joseph Smith, President of the Woman’s Board for the fair claimed that the few relics gathered were a celebration of those “whose valor and devotion, though to a lost cause, will never die.” At the same time, she was willing to concede that they were an example of the “common glory of this now united county [that] will forever illumine the pages of its history.”

While women at the expositions played a much more public role through the Woman’s Building, their part in maintaining Confederate memory, especially at the Cotton States exposition, was essential.

Southern white women had much to gain by supporting southern white men. Their superiority over black women in the antebellum period was maintained by slavery. With

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78 “Relics in Atlanta Exposition” Confederate Veteran (September 1895), 282; Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated, 97.
emancipation the basis for their position in the social hierarchy was weakened. As a result, southern white women’s memorialization of the Civil War was almost immediately “dedicated to the reconstruction of southern white men.” Forming Ladies Memorial Associations, southern women took it upon themselves to maintain the memory and virtue of southern manliness before and during the war. As LeeAnn Whites argues in her study of gender in the New South, “[southern men] turned to their women and children to validate them, to create out of their own continued subordination the basis for their reconstruction as honorable men, even in the face of their defeat in relation northern men and the southern freedpeople.” It is unsurprising, then, that in Atlanta southern women took up the task of presenting historical collection of Civil War artifacts. At both fairs, the Ladies Memorial Association and the United Daughters of the Confederacy worked with their male counterparts to perpetuate the “noble” and “manly qualities” of Confederate veterans. While Atlanta’s civic leaders were tentative in their celebration of the Confederacy, the region’s women closed the gap to secure their position as essential members of the region’s elite.

The Tennessee Centennial Exposition was the first World’s Fair to have a separate history building. The building was an exact replica of the Erechtheum, the Parthenon’s neighbor on the Acropolis. In charge of the History Department was G. P. Thruston, a Union Army general who remained in the South following the war. Described as a “college-bred man, a man of means, a lover of art, a collector of antiquities, a student of history,” he was well equipped to head the department. Working alongside curator Robert T. Quarles, Corresponding Secretary of the Tennessee Historical Society, the two men filled the building with objects relating to the


80 Whites, *Gender Matters*, 90.
history of the United States. Glass cases arranged systematically told the history of America from the colonial period to the present day with an emphasis on the role of Tennessee. Everything from portraits of significant Americans and Tennesseans to maps and letters to guns and swords were displayed. Among the displays of weaponry could be found Daniel Boone’s flintlock musket and the pistol used by Andrew Jackson in his 1806 duel with the attorney Charles Dickinson. The building also contained objects from all of the United States’ wars, archeological collections from the American West, including Indian relics, and antiquities from Mexico, Central and South America, and Asia. The building featured a subversive element with two portraits of abolitionists William Wilberforce and the Earl of Shaftesbury provided by Fisk University. The exposition also continued to deny the coevality of contemporary Native Americans by featuring “[m]odern Indian trappings and objects, implements, pipes, and dress” in the History Building. While no one seemed to expect the building to do well, it proved to be one of the more popular features of the exposition and “visitors were constantly surprised at its extent, value, and attractiveness.” This, no doubt, had to do with its most significant feature, a large-scale exhibit of Confederate history.81

The Confederate exhibit was arranged by the Confederate Memorial Association and was located in the north-wing of the building. It featured contributions from the United Confederate Veterans, Daughters of the Confederacy, and Sons of Confederate Veterans. Justi claimed that it was “probably the most valuable and important collection of relics and mementoes of the late war that has been placed upon exhibition in the South.” The exhibit was comprehensive and featured cases full of “all the paraphernalia of war,” while the walls were covered with portrait and flags. It also contained some objects that were simply bizarre such as the hoof of the horse.

shot out from under General Forrest during Colonel Straight’s raid through northern Alabama. Miss Hager, an “intelligent custodian,” was frequently present and offered information to the curious visitor. Despite its celebration of the Confederacy, the exhibit had a soothing affect on old animosities. “Many an old Confederate lingered lovingly over the cases, and many an eye was full and heart was sore at the sight of the old familiar trappings and torn banners and sad mementoes,” wrote Justi. “Visitors from the North could plainly see how near and dear to the hearts of the South were these old relics. Yet there was a bright side to this exhibit, too. The days of peace had come, and comrades in arms long separated were exchanging cheery and fraternal greetings. To most of them the war was but an historic memory.” Visitors could also visit an exhibit of the Grand Army of the Republic in the building’s south-wing. While smaller, the exhibit featured a prominent badge of the Order accompanied by portraits of Grant, Sherman, Thomas, and President McKinley. There was also a collection of muskets and bayonets and a case filled with memorials of the “Federal side.”

Whereas Civil War reunions presented a living memory of the sectional conflict, the Centennial’s History Building contained them in an ordered environment. Divorced from their living or past owners these objects were open to all as a common heritage. Whether northern or southern, to the visitor the historical relics of the war were inert cultural artifacts whose meanings were open to interpretation. Literally enclosed, they memorialized the war, its causes, and aftereffects. The emancipationist vision of the war, while present in the Fisk portraits, was condemned to the past and the realm of sentimentality and nostalgia, allowing for reconciliation between the nation’s whites.

82 A complete list of relics at the exposition can be found in the pages of the Confederate Veteran (August 1897), 561-564.

83 Justi, Official History, 133-134, 137.
There were two other places of Civil War memory at the Centennial. Both were located outside the main exposition space in the ephemeral world of Vanity Fair and were connected to the growing commercialization of the war. Next to the Moorish Palace were the supposed childhood cabins of Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. Lincoln and Davis were born in the same county of Kentucky and entrepreneur A. W. Dennett of New York had recently purchased the Lincoln homestead. Coordinating with the owner of the Davis’ cabin, Dennett had the homes meticulously deconstructed and reconstructed on the exposition grounds. The *Official Catalogue* was sure that no fairgoer would want to “miss seeing where the two men lived in their childhood, who afterwards became the opposing heads of the opposing nations struggling for supremacy.”

Many fairgoers, however, took the cabins to be humbug and avoided them.

Unlike the Lincoln and Davis cabins, the cyclorama depicting the battle of Gettysburg was immensely popular. Illustrating the third day of the battle and General Pickett’s disastrous charge, the work required sixteen month’s labor by thirteen artists using seven tons of paint. The cyclorama presented voyeuristic opportunity for the men and women who did not live through the horrendous battle to experience it in vivid color. The *Official Catalogue* called it an “awful grandeur” that “has a fascination for the beholder that is almost terrible,” while Justi recalled that the “effect of the painting on the spectator is thrilling.” Contemplating the “thousands of heroes” who “lie in bloody heaps scattered over the open field through which they had charged,” visitors experienced the horror of conflict. At the same time, there was a celebratory nature to the entertainment and fairgoers were encouraged to “see this wonderful battle scene.” Lacking their own great conflict, late nineteenth century Americans looked to the past to view depictions of the

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85 Justi writes, “The genuineness of the cabins was well attested, but like a great many other really good things, the element of doubt was strong enough to impair their drawing powers.” Justi, *Official History*, 210.
ideal soldier and heroic death that they thought was lacking in their own society. Few, however, were concerned with the old soldiers whose “weird fascination” with the painting “chained [them] to the spot.”

Oriented towards the future, New South expositions were also saturated in the past. In the temporal disjunctures created by industrial-capitalism, moderns found meaning in the manufactured stability of a mythic past. As exhibited by the Atlanta and Nashville fairs, this past included both ancient and recent history. Despite analogies to a Greco-Roman tradition, it was the region’s memory of the Civil War and battles over Reconstruction that ultimately shaped the representation of the past at the expositions. The celebrations of the Confederacy found on the fairgrounds were both sacred and mundane and reflected the ways in which the Lost Cause had, by the 1890s, become a part of national mythology. If in the initial decades after the war, the terror of the conflict and the changes wrought created both psychological and social unease, by the end of the century, death and glory were celebrated together within the spaces of low culture.

Perhaps there is no better evidence of the ways in which Civil War memory became integrated in national culture than the way in which at the Tennessee Centennial the Confederacy became entertainment. While helping to make the Lost Cause a national narrative, the expositions remade the mythology of the Civil War a political shibboleth. Confederate sentiment now safely contained in glass boxes, paraded as ageing veterans, and located on the fair’s midway, reunited North and South by making the Lost Cause a cultural artifact as opposed to a political rallying point. Although the Lost Cause carried political significance to the First World War, the seeds of its ebb in American political life were sown at the South’s international expositions.

The Cotton States and International Exposition and Tennessee Centennial Exposition were sites in which “collected memory” was transformed into “collective memory.” The collected memories of the fairs—the relics and the reunions—were given social and cultural meaning that helped to formulate a collective memory specific to the late nineteenth century South. This particular collective memory was rooted in the South’s ongoing process of modernization in which temporal and spatial dislocations required a social memory of stability. Loss was an essential structure of feeling in the formation of the South’s modernity.

Apprehensions over displacement rely, according to historian Peter Fritzsche, “on common structures of temporality that [have] the effect of connecting purely to individual misfortunes to larger social processes, thus inviting narration, reflection, and mutual recognition.” The memory of the Civil War and mythology of the Lost Cause contributed to the “memory-nation” of the nineteenth century, which “relied on national historical narratives to provide continuity through identity.” What is most striking about the history of the memory of the Civil War is the way in which the southern narrative of the war became the more celebrated. With northern press attention and tens of thousands of northern visitors, the Atlanta and Nashville fairs were central sites in this transformation of national memory. Fundamental to this new memory was the


88 “Collective memory” has become a fraught typology in the historiography. However, at its basis, and how I perceive it, is its connection to the more traditional and perhaps more useful term of “myth.” Collective memory cannot be divorced from the society in which it is based and its accompanying catalog of signs and symbols. The social action of memory, then, creates a common sense regardless of the personal memories of the participants of the historical event that is remembered. On collective memory see Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, “Collective Memory – What Is It?” *History and Memory* 8:1 (Spring-Summer 1996): 30-50; Confino, *Nation As a Local Metaphor*; and Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory,” 179-197.


90 Olick and Robbins, “Social Memory Studies,” 121.
South’s reformulation as a modern space in the eyes of northerners. By the end of the Spanish-American war and with the beginning of mass immigration and the start of African American movement out of the South, northerners were more likely to accept the South’s Jim Crow modernity as their own.

Central to the North’s adoption of a Jim Crow modernity was the Lost Cause. This myth, combined with nostalgia for the equally mythic Old South, celebrated the past, provided a balm to industrialization, and acted as a moral template for the future that was embraced not only by the South but by the entire nation. The expositions presented a future nation reunited through industrial and commercial modernity, while at the same time asserting a southern identity located in the southern past. Civil War reunions and celebrations of the Confederacy ensured a site of stability and meaning while the region went through the wrenching process of modernization. Moreover, this mythology and its immense popularity served as a social framework as northerners began to confront southern African American migration to the nation’s industrial cities and simultaneously debated the future of the country’s new colonial subjects and immigrants. In the words of the future president William McKinley at the Cotton States and International Exposition: “We will have no fighting any more, except we fight for a higher and better citizenship and a grander civilization for our common country.”\textsuperscript{91} The reunited nation at the exposition was a Jim Crow nation, whose “fight” for better citizens and civilization was distinctly white and male. African Americans and women, while not completely excluded, were assigned inferior positions and supporting roles in this southern and national future. It would take another fifty years, two world wars, and a grassroots civil and political awakening for Jim Crow modernity to begin its slow and ongoing decline.

\textsuperscript{91} Cotton States Exposition and South, Illustrated, 113.
“From the turbid Mississippi to the Atlantic, and from the Ohio to the Gulf, an industrial evolution, more mighty in its significance, more powerful in its influence than any the world has ever known, is being wrought.” – Frank Presbrey, *The Empire of the South*, 1898.

As the South and nation entered the twentieth century New South boosters continued to turn to international expositions to convince the nation the region was not the United State’s benighted backwater. Ten years after the Tennessee Centennial Exposition southerners gathered one more time to celebrate the New South and invite the world to witness the region’s progress. The Jamestown Ter-Centennial Exposition held on the shores of Hampton Roads, a thirty-minute streetcar ride from Norfolk, Virginia, was the last great southern exposition. In between Nashville’s fair and Norfolk’s, the United States played host to the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, the 1901-1902 South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition in Charleston, South Carolina, and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri. Each of these fairs did little to change the scope of the nineteenth century exposition established in Chicago and only the Louisiana Purchase Exposition matched the World’s Columbian in terms of scale. At each of these fairs, progress, modernity, and industrial development were celebrated alongside showings of civic and national pride complemented by comparative object lessons rooted in anthropological artifacts and ethnological villages.

After the Nashville exposition the next opportunity to advertise the South’s embrace of modernity was at the Inter-State and West Indian Exposition. Over the winter of 1901-1902 southerners assembled in Charleston to celebrate the New South and promote trade with Latin
America and the Caribbean. Coming on the heels of Buffalo’s Pan-American Exposition, the Charleston fair featured many of the same exhibits and amusements as the northern exposition and aligned well with the previous expositions in Atlanta and Nashville. Taking place in a port city in long economic decline, the Inter-State hoped to return Charleston to its past glory as an important entrepôt of international trade and commerce. Coming five years after the Tennessee Centennial it provides only a partial view of how Jim Crow modernity transformed the South in the years after the expositions. For a more complete picture of the promises of the New South embodied in the Atlanta and Nashville fairs we need to go another five years into the future to Norfolk in 1907.\footnote{On the Inter-State and West Indian exposition see Judy L. Larson, “Three Southern World’s Fairs: Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, 1895, Tennessee Centennial, Nashville, 1897, South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition, Charleston, 1901/2: Creating Regional Self-Portraits Through Expositions,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Emory University, 1998; and Bruce G. Harvey, “World’s Fairs in a Southern Accent: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, 1895-1902,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1998.}

If the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions suggested that the New South dream of the future was imminent, the Jamestown Tercentennial on Hampton Roads indicated that the South had a long ways to go. The Tercentennial captures each of the themes of this dissertation and demonstrates the ways in which some southern dreams of the future were fulfilled while others turned to nightmares. New South industrial progress, female and African American participation, Civil War memory, and imperial designs once again came together in a southern city’s great exposition.

The Jamestown Ter-centennial Exposition commemorated the founding of Jamestown in 1607. “[T]he prime purpose of the Ter-Centennial was to illustrate history, to inculcate

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Frank Presbrey, “Finis,”\textit{ The Empire of the South: Its Resources, Industries, and Resorts.} [or]\textit{ The Southland: An Exposition of the Present Resources and Development of the South} (Washington, DC, 1898), [no page numbers].
patriotism and to show the value of education,” wrote exposition President Henry St. George Tucker.\(^2\) The Tercentennial’s explicit emphasis on history and memory put it at odds with most nineteenth century international expositions. While some world’s fairs like the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition, the Tennessee Centennial, and the 1904 St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition were commemorative events, they all maintained the importance, if not primacy, of industry, invention, and economic growth. For the Tercentennial organizers, industry took a decidedly second place. “It was ever the design to produce a great historical and educational exposition in direct contradistinction to a commercial enterprise,” wrote Tucker. The fair was never intended to match the “industrial fairs of the past.”\(^3\) The Jamestown Tercentennial gathered the nation in Virginia to celebrate the United States’ colonial founding. At the same time and despite its organizers pretenses, the fair was a celebration of the New South and its industrial corollary. As much as history was a key component of the exposition, the fair could not ignore industry and commerce. The fair’s official catalogue made clear that the exposition was an “effort to show the progress made in art and science; in commerce and manufacture; in transportation and trade” and that the Tercentennial was representative of “Progress standing tiptoe upon the threshold of the future.”\(^4\) Like its counterparts and against its organizers’ desires industry stood out as much as the commemoration of a national historical event.

Planning for the Tercentennial began early. In 1900 the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities—a society made up mostly of women, who held all the officer


\(^3\) Tucker, “Introduction,” 1.

positions—initiated the idea of celebrating the tercentennial.⁵ A committee was established and by the end of the year the idea had gained support from members of both the Virginia State House and the United States Congress.⁶ By 1901, Norfolk, Williamsburg, and to lesser extent, Richmond, put together proposals for hosting the exposition. Recognizing that Richmond would have the largest pull, the Joint Jamestown Exposition Committee was established in Norfolk and united Tidewater cities against the state capital to vie for the fair. Despite a last ditch effort by Richmond, a bill chartering the Jamestown Exposition Committee was passed in the Virginia House in March 1902. The committee was required to raise one million dollars and to select a suitable site on Hampton Roads by 1904. General Fitzhugh Lee, nephew of Robert E. Lee, was elected President of the newly established exposition company and set out to secure federal funding.⁷

From the beginning the exposition company faced financial travails related to raising enough capital through stock subscriptions to meet Virginia’s demand of having one million dollars on hand by 1904. The goal was reached but by 1905 the exposition company still lacked a federal appropriation. Having given large appropriations for expositions in St. Louis and Portland, Oregon, Congress was growing weary of supporting every city’s request for an international exposition.⁸ And despite having President Theodore Roosevelt’s support, the House Committee on expositions refused to support the fair.⁹ There was, however, support for the fair

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⁵ *Blue Book,* 26.


⁸ *Blue Book,* 49.

⁹ *Blue Book,* 62.
from the U.S. Navy. The central feature of the exposition company’s proposal was a great naval display on Hampton Roads. After some prodding Congress did approve a Bill to fund a naval, marine, and military celebration at the Tercentennial. Although the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars approved was much less than the five million the company had asked for.\footnote{Taylor, “Jamestown Tercentennial,” 184.}

In 1905 General Lee died of massive stroke on his return from a fundraising trip in New England. Henry St. George Tucker, Dean of Law at Columbian now George Washington University and President of the American Bar Association, took over the presidency and went to work full force for the exposition company. Construction began in 1906 on the Hampton Roads site but the company suffered from a chronic lack of capital and construction was frequently delayed. Although receiving a federal appropriation in June of 1906, the exposition remained short of money due to the federal grant being earmarked towards government buildings and two massive piers that were to extend out into Hampton Roads with only a small amount available to the exposition. By Christmas 1906, Tucker was keeping the exposition afloat with his own funds.\footnote{Taylor, “Jamestown Tercentennial,” 186-188.}

Construction on the exposition did not begin in full force until the winter months of 1907. Labor shortages, a hard winter, and mismanagement by the exposition company meant that on opening day, April 26, 1907, the fairgrounds were in shambles. The great piers, the key architectural feature of the exposition, were completed only in September 1907. The exposition’s two largest buildings, the Manufacturers-Liberal Arts and the Machinery-Transportation, were finished in July.\footnote{Taylor, “Jamestown Tercentennial,” 189-190, 200.} Although the exposition company secured the participation of twenty-two states with appropriations totaling over a million dollars, the non-state buildings remained empty.
for much of the exposition. Disorganization and poor planning led to more exhibit space than was needed, while the failure to construct a proper fireproof building led many private donors to cancel or withdraw their exhibits.\(^\text{13}\) By June the national press was calling the fair the “Jamestown Imposition.”\(^\text{14}\) One northern newspaper reported in July that the grounds looked “like a back woods settlement suddenly sprouted with hideous, temporary barracks that are called hotels.” The exposition space was described as chaotic: “There are no street pavements here, and about the only real sidewalks you find are in about the plaza.” Fairgoers left the exposition encased in mud. “Mud is the feature of this exposition,” reported the paper, “[it] sticks alike to your shoes [and] clothing.”\(^\text{15}\) The fair ended ingloriously when in December the U.S. District Court placed the exposition company into receivership and any hopes of restarting the fair in the spring of 1908 to recoup the two million five hundred thousand dollars still owing were dashed.\(^\text{16}\)

If the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions had at times struggled with the bottom line, the Jamestown Tercentennial was a complete financial disaster. While Atlanta and Nashville proved the ways the South was a modern industrial space, the Tercentennial confirmed to outsiders that the South struggled to become modern. The New South vision of earlier fairs was lost in the chaos and disorder of the Jamestown exposition. The first mistake of the exposition company was to buy rather than lease the fairgrounds and build permanent buildings.

\(^{13}\) Taylor, “Jamestown Tercentennial,” 190-192; Blue Book, 514.

\(^{14}\) Taylor, 198.

\(^{15}\) W. S. Couch, “Show is Best at Long Range,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, July 9, 1907, p. 3.

with the idea to sell the grounds and buildings as development after the exposition closed.\textsuperscript{17} While not illogical, the decision was financially onerous and made it difficult for the exposition to pay its debts with gate receipts. Procrastination combined with mismanagement by the exposition company led to very public failures that confirmed southern stereotypes of laziness and unruliness. The Cleveland \textit{Plain Dealer} reported back from the exposition that the fair stood “for the old Dixie of brave, unpractical men and braver, beautiful women, of a happy, patriarchal plantation life moving to the music of tinkling banjoes from the negro quarters, of a poetic idealism that recklessly hurled itself to gallant destruction against the hard, stern steel of the north.” According to the \textit{Plain Dealer}, the Jamestown Tercentennial’s organizers were similar to their mythic Old South antecedents, unfit for the demands of the age and destined to failure. “They simply have failed to catch the knack of it, that is all,” the paper condescendingly concluded\textsuperscript{18}. The New South vision of earlier fairs turned into a nightmare in which a southern city invited the nation to witness its modernity and instead presented disorder and failure, confirming the region as backward and benighted.

The Jamestown Tercentennial included a Negro Building to induce gate receipts as well as maintain the white South’s position as foremost experts on African Americans. The Negro Exhibit was once again led by prominent blacks who believed that accommodation to Jim Crow was necessary to demonstrate the race’s progress. However, the Tercentennial’s Negro Building was far more contentious than Atlanta and Nashville’s. The building reflected the split between African American intellectuals and leaders now firmly divided between W. E. B. Du Bois’ Niagara Movement and Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee machine. Already Charleston’s Inter-State and West Indian Exposition’s building had exposed fault lines within the southern black

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Blue Book}, 38.
\textsuperscript{18} Couch, “Long Range,” p. 3.
leadership. The Negro Building at the Inter-State suggested that African Americans’ conceptual place in the South’s future was fading. Although the building’s Chief was Booker T. Washington, at the height of his national powers, it was given a place away from the main exposition buildings. Located in a grove of live oaks the building was not a part of the future-oriented exposition but instead in the “Nature” section of the fair. According to the fairgrounds, blacks had regressed since the Tennessee Centennial. Likewise, a statue of African American laborers replaced Atlanta’s statue of a muscular African American with broken chains. Although the statuary had the support of Washington and the Negro Building executive it was met with protests from Charleston’s black community. One member of the Negro Board suggested that the protesters “wanted Mr. Lopez [the sculptor] to represent the Negro habited in a top hat and frock coat.” And concluded “[that] the work of the artist represents the race as the artisan and the tiller of Southern soil. This is what the Negro is.” In Charleston the Negro Building’s dream of the future was becoming increasingly contentious within the southern black community.

The Tercentennial’s building was not a celebrated affair. Whereas the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial went out of their way to advertise the building as a showcase for the South’s race relations, Jamestown’s executive made certain that everyone understood that the federal government was “responsible for the conduct of the Negro Exhibit.” For southern whites the building, like its predecessors, was indicative of the dramatic changes within the African American population due to its interaction with white southerners. “No one interested in the study of ethnology and the evolution of a race from a state of semi-barbarism to useful citizenship could visit the Negro exhibit without being profoundly impressed,” remembered the


21 Blue Book, 508.
Tercentennial’s official history. Likewise, the exposition featured living objects lesson of where blacks had progressed from. “An Old Time Negro Cabin” proved to be one of the fair’s more popular amusements and made clear to fairgoers that “[l]ife among large numbers of the Negro inhabitants of the South is very simple and primitive.”

The differences between Norfolk and the Atlanta and Nashville expositions lay in the success of Jim Crow modernity. By 1907 southern whites had solidified their economic, political, and social control of the region. Federal support of segregation combined with northern disinterest in the plight of blacks left the region’s race relations to southern whites. Unlike the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial, the Tercentennial was a fully segregated affair: blacks reported poor treatment, were barred from many exhibits, and had to bring their own cutlery and glasses if dining from the exposition’s restaurants. Moreover, the Virginia legislature passed Jim Crow laws segregating streetcars and public waiting rooms in the weeks prior to the opening of the exposition. Jim Crow became a curiosity to northerners visiting the exposition who sent back approving reports of segregation. As African Americans began a slow trickle but eventual torrent northward and as northerners grasped the racial implications of mass European migration, the Tercentennial again proved southern expositions as an important advertisement for the power of Jim Crow to reform and control modernity’s racial and ethnic dislocations. “A negro is

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22 Blue Book, 675.

23 Scenes at the Jamestown Exposition: With Historic Site in Old Virginia (New York, 1907).

respected in the South,” reported the Trenton, New Jersey Evening Times from the Tercentennial, “if he knows and keeps his place. He must not mix up with a white man.”

Historian Walter Weare correctly concludes that “Jamestown sounded the last hurrah for the high symbolism of separate spheres and mutual progress.” The Tercentennial’s Negro Building was sixty thousand square feet and designed in the colonial style by Tuskegee-trained architect, professor, and Booker T. Washington son-in-law, William S. Pittman. The Negro Development and Exposition Company (NDEC) led by Giles B. Jackson organized the building. Jackson was a “fiercely loyal” former slave of the exposition’s first President, General Fitzhugh Lee, and was appointed by Lee to his position as head of the NDEC.

Chairman of the Negro Executive Committee was Thomas J. Calloway, who was in charge along with W. E. B. Du Bois of the Negro exhibit that won a gold medal at the 1901 Paris Universelle Exposition. For the black commissioners the building continued the task of demonstrating the progress of African Americans since emancipation. Booker T. Washington at the fair’s Negro

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25 Charles A. Leigh, “Trip to the Exposition Good as the Show Itself,” Trenton Evening Times, July 1, 1907, p. 2.


28 Blue Book, 675.

29 Wilson, Negro Building, 128.


Day celebration wished “that every member of my race could come here and witness these
evidences of progress.” Washington was satisfied by the display of “clean, orderly, sober, [and]
industrious” African Americans. Lastly, for members of the southern black elite the Jamestown
Tercentennial was a poignant reminder of where and how far they had come. Washington
thought that it was “especially fitting…that since here [Jamestown] we entered slavery that on
the same spot we should show results of improvement in both slavery and in freedom.”

Likewise, a much-celebrated tableau by Parisian-trained African American sculptress, Meta
Warrick, traced the progress of African Americans from “primitive” Africa to modern
civilization. The Jamestown Tercentennial’s Negro Building, then, like the buildings before it,
laid claimed to a modern civilization and universal progress that blacks were often denied.

However, unlike the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial, African American leaders
and intellectuals, North and South, were divided on whether to support the Jamestown Negro
Building and the fair’s Jim Crow modernity. Whereas W. E. B. Du Bois had initially supported
Booker T. Washington’s “Atlanta Compromise” speech in 1895, in 1907 he led a boycott along
with Dr. Nathan Mossell and Atlanta University of the Tercentennial. In addition to a broad
southern campaign against the Negro Building, black Bostonians protested the seventy-five
thousand dollar appropriation for the Massachusetts state exhibit. With the realities of Jim


33 Blue Book, 677. For an excellent analysis of Warrick’s tableaux at Jamestown see W. Fitzhugh
Brundage, “Meta Warrick’s 1907 ‘Negro Tableaux’ and (Re)Presenting African American

34 On Du Bois initial support for the “Atlanta Compromise” see Robert J. Norrell, Up From
boycott see Weare, “New Negroes,” 120; Hornsby-Gutting, Black Manhood, 150; and Wilson,
Negro Building, 133.

35 Wilson, Negro Building, 133.
Crow fully sunk in, many southern African Americans rejected the accommodationist vision presented by the Negro Buildings. “It was one thing to acknowledge Jim Crow in theory as a backdrop for separate development,” notes Weare, “but it was another thing to suffer in practice its daily insults as the ironic price to stage a production to improve race relations.”

If the Tennessee Centennial Exposition’s Negro Building opened in the subdued world of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, the Jamestown Negro Building, opening a year after the 1906 Atlanta and Brownsville race riots, made clear that not only were African Americans excluded from the white South’s vision of progress they were violently made to stay on their side of an increasingly stringent colorline. In addition, divisions within national black leadership had erupted. The publication of Du Bois’ *Souls of Black Folk* in 1903 and the founding of the Niagara Movement in 1905, offered African Americans a real alternative to Washington’s Tuskegee machine and the accommodationist rhetoric of the Negro Buildings.

The Jim Crow modernity of the Atlanta and Nashville fairs was a two—if lop—sided, affair. Southern whites behind the expositions suggested that I. Garland Penn’s “better class” of blacks might be able to join the South in its march towards industrial-modernity albeit in a “separate but equal” sense. For the black elite, clergy, and bourgeois entrepreneurs behind the buildings this seemed like a fair deal. Adopting the ideology of accommodationism they believed in themselves as better than their fellow African Americans who labored in the South’s cities and on the plantations of the rural hinterland. They were willing to accept, and maybe even support Jim Crow, if it meant they were able to share in the fruits of modernity. At the same time, a growing cadre of African Americans in New York, Chicago, and elsewhere were transforming the definition of the New Negro. This new black identity was more confident in itself and

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challenged white proscriptions for black America. Ultimately, the black side of Jim Crow modernity faded in the face of a new coalition of black artists, activists, and politicians, in the urban North and South.\footnote{For a black alternative to Jim Crow modernity and the ways in the African Americans in the urban spaces of the North transformed the definition of New Negro see Davarian Baldwin, 


If the Negro Building was present yet contentious, the Jamestown Tercentennial lacked a Woman’s Building even though local women spearheaded the celebration. In 1907 southern women no longer had a separate space to define domesticity. Instead they were confined to designing and organizing historical exhibits. With no Woman’s Building to rally behind, the local division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy organized the construction of an exact replica of Beauvoir, the home of Confederate President Jefferson Davis. This “fine southern plantation home” served as the fair’s Woman’s Building. It demonstrated southern domesticity and cooking “under the direction of a southern gentlewoman.”\footnote{Blue Book, 388.} Southern women, then, continued to operate independently through the realm of Confederate memory. The lack of definitive Woman’s Building was likely the result of an ongoing shift in feminist politics away from nineteenth century definitions of womanhood to a more strident feminist perspective.\footnote{On creating independence through public celebration of Confederate memory see LeeAnn Whites, *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 7-8, 96; and Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003). For the transformation in “feminist” politics see Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); and Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).} The first decade of the twentieth century saw a waning of women’s clubs in the South as a more contentious feminist politics emerged. With many barriers broken in the 1890s—women could
ride bicycles, attend coeducational colleges—the New Woman looked for integration rather than segregation.\textsuperscript{41} At the same time, Beauvoir demonstrates the ways in which southern women continued to reconcile progress with tradition, making the transformations of the New South palatable.\textsuperscript{42} Whether it was the conservative nature of the Tercentennial, changes to definitions of womanhood, or the patriotic nature of the exposition directing feminine attention to historical memory, southern women lacked a significant voice at the Jamestown fair.

Although the New South vision of the exposition was muddied by the inability of Norfolk’s leading citizens to put on an effective fair, it was clear at the Tercentennial that the South was now the long hoped for launching point of a U.S. empire in the Caribbean and Latin America. The Charleston Inter-State and West Indian exposition had re-emphasized the connections between the South and the “American Mediterranean.”\textsuperscript{43} However, the Jamestown Tercentennial provided the nation’s greatest showing of military force in peacetime. Between the Tennessee Centennial and the Jamestown Tercentennial, the United States became a colonial power. The 1898 Spanish-American War led the U.S. to imperial holdings in the Caribbean and South Pacific. Although the 1899-1902 Philippine-American War had tried Americans’ patience with overseas holdings, the United States, led by Theodore Roosevelt, was not reluctant to flex

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\textsuperscript{42} Joan Marie Johnson, \textit{Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Religion, and Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1890-1930} (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 205.

\textsuperscript{43} Matthew Pratt Guterl, \textit{American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).
\end{footnotesize}
its new world status and military might. The Tercentennial was a manifestation of Roosevelt’s “speak softly and carry a big stick” foreign policy.\textsuperscript{44}

From the beginning the Tercentennial was intimately connected with empire. Its first President, General Fitzhugh Lee, had made a name for himself not only as a Confederate General but as a Major General in the Spanish-American War and later served as the Military Governor in Havana, Cuba.\textsuperscript{45} Like previous southern expositions the Jamestown fair made displays of the commercial possibilities available in Latin America. The Washington, DC based International Bureau of American Republics put together an exhibit, while Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti made official exhibitions. The fair also hosted the Ambassador or Minister of every American republic.\textsuperscript{46} The Tercentennial, then, highlighted the connections between the South and the world. Its greatest connection to U.S. empire, however, was its display of military might and colonized peoples.

Like the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the Jamestown Tercentennial featured a “Philippine Reservation.” The anthropological amusement was to show “life as it is among the civilized and Christianized Filipinos and also the rude life in huts of the less civilized natives at work fashioning implements of war or domestic life.” The fair’s guide promised that “[r]epresentatives of the War Department have been at work in the islands getting the material and people…and the promise is made that it will be a better opportunity for studying the Filipinos than did the exhibit at St. Louis.”\textsuperscript{47} Like its previous counterpart it offered Americans a

\textsuperscript{44} On Roosevelt’s “Big Stick” foreign policy see Karl Berman, \textit{Under the Big Stick: Nicaragua and the United States Since 1848} (Boston: South End Press, 1986), 137-138.

\textsuperscript{45} Taylor, “Jamestown Tercentennial,” 179.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Blue Book}, 419-424.

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Laird and Lee’s Guide to Historic Virginia and the Jamestown Centennial} (Chicago, 1907), 129.
chance to witness newly acquired colonial people, while confirming the important role the U.S. played in bringing them civilization. The fair also included a Puerto Rico display, again put together by the War Department. The exhibit made clear the “methods of American instruction” with comparisons between the “old Spanish and the native peon school” and the “new or modern school erected and maintained by Americans.” Samples of work conducted by “natives” in these new technical schools were also exhibited. Here the Negro Building’s promises of translating the technical school model to empire proved effective. In Puerto Rico and elsewhere, colonial inhabitants were transformed into co-participants in the reconstruction of their territory, while denied the rights of citizenship.

The Jamestown Tercentennial was advertised as “a military, naval, marine and historic exhibition.” Displays of military uniforms from the Philippines and Alaska demonstrated the “wide territorial influence of our nation” in the world. The most sensational event, however, was the huge naval gathering for the length of the exposition. The flotilla of fifty war vessels carrying six to eight hundred men created a floating city on the waters of Hampton Roads. Foreign ships from England, Germany, France, Japan, Italy, Brazil, Chile, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, and Argentina joined thirty-six American warships on the bay. Not to be out done, just outside the fairgrounds the U.S. Infantry, Cavalry, and Artillery made camp and drilled daily on

48 Blue Book, 420-421.


50 Scenes at the Jamestown Exposition: With Historic Sites in Old Virginia (New York, 1907).

51 Laird and Lee’s, 131-132; “Jamestown Exposition—The Colonial City by the Sea” Charlotte Daily Observer, August 20, 1907, p. 11.
the exposition’s plaza, “Lee’s Parade.” The army and navy displays were the defining spectacles of the exposition and confirmed the U.S. as an international power. James Hutton, writing in *The Billboard*, concluded that the Jamestown exposition was ultimately an “Army and Navy Review of a gigantic nature.” Unlike Atlanta and Nashville, which could only intimate empire, the Jamestown Tercentennial opened to an imperial nation. The exposition confirmed America’s new position as a global military power. With the nation reconciled through the Spanish-American War, the U.S. South became the nation’s launching point for a new military empire that spanned the “American Mediterranean.” Indeed, the one definitive result of the Jamestown Tercentennial was that the U.S. Navy purchased the exposition grounds and the current naval base in Norfolk established. The base played a key role in America’s military efforts in the World Wars and continues as one of the country’s key navy yards.

At the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions, Civil War memory and a celebration of the manly Confederate soldier tied directly into a nation looking to expand its borders through empire. For the Jamestown Tercentennial, an exposition with history as it *raison d’être*, memory of the Civil War and the Colonial Period were intimately a part of the festival. Northern obsession with the Old South, the myth of the Lost Cause, and Civil War had not

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52 “Jamestown Exposition—The Colonial City by the Sea” Charlotte *Daily Observer*, August 20, 1907, p. 11.


lessened in the decade between the Tennessee Centennial and the Tercentennial. If the South’s expositions of the 1890s had contributed to the nation’s reconciliation, the Norfolk exposition opened to a nation that celebrated its recent history of civil strife conjointly.\textsuperscript{57}

Like the Nashville fair, the Norfolk exposition’s History Building was filled with Confederate relics provided by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This, combined with the replica of Beauvoir, placed Confederate pride and memory at the heart of the exposition.\textsuperscript{58}

Whereas the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial were tentative in openly celebrating their Confederate heritage, the Jamestown Tercentennial named its central plaza after the great Confederate General Robert E. Lee.\textsuperscript{59} Confederate monuments as well as a replica of Fortress Monroe, where Jefferson Davis was imprisoned, added to Jamestown’s celebration of Confederate heritage. Beyond the exposition fairgrounds, northern fairgoers were encouraged to tour the fair’s surrounding Civil War history. Guides provided instruction on where to go and what to see.\textsuperscript{60}

Historical tourism to the South rose in the first years of the twentieth century. The fair’s combination of nostalgia for the Old South alongside evidence of progress and innovation became a standard theme for southern companies selling the region and its products. One of the exposition’s main sponsors, the Norfolk & Western Railroad, used similar images of the state’s Colonial and Confederate heritage to attract northerners to Virginia in the opening decades of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{61}

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\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Blue Book}, 387-388; \textit{Scenes at the Jamestown Exposition}
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Laird and Lee’s}, 114.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Scenes at the Jamestown Exposition}.
\textsuperscript{61} Cox, \textit{Dreaming of Dixie}, 134-135.
\end{flushleft}
At the same time, the fair celebrated reconciliation. Robert E. Lee’s nephew, before his untimely death, was the ultimate symbol of reconciliation. Having served both the Confederacy and nation and now leading a national celebration of the United States’ founding in the South, Fitzhugh Lee was reconciliation embodied. The fair itself could be interpreted as an act of reconciliation. Just one hundred miles from the former Confederate capital was a national celebration of a key moment in the nation’s history. At the Jamestown Tercentennial, Colonial history combined with Confederate and Old South memory to buttress a new national history that included the South’s culture and divergence from the nation. The Tidewater communities of Hampton Roads invited Americans to participate in the memory of both the Confederacy and the nation. The reconciliation dreamed of in the 1890s had arrived.

The Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition was both a reflection and a refraction of the hopes and dreams of the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions. It reflected New South desires for a society based on the old in which industrial capital flooded the South, opened foreign markets, and where a race hierarchy included blacks in the region’s progress and yet separated them within that society. It reflected, in many ways, a taming of the New South spirit of the 1880s and 1890s. For some southerners the pace of change was too much and the fair was a reassertion of an older South. “The keynote of American life is progress—an excellent and most powerful characteristic,” wrote Miss Hinton of the Tercentennial’s North Carolina exhibit, “yet harm and ultimate ruin will surely follow in its trail unless safeguarded by conservatism. No study engenders and promotes the cultivation of this check to vandalism as does History.”62 The fair reflected a society where women fulfilled traditional roles and protected the region from the

dislocating effects of modernity. The clear imperial designs of the exposition and its unproblematic celebration of Confederate memory, achieved the goals of Atlanta and Nashville. Although tempered, the Tercentennial fulfilled many of the dreams of the future presented by the Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial expositions.

For many, however, the refraction of their dreams in the exposition was disturbing. The New South vision of an ordered and prosperous South came unhinged in Jamestown’s financial disaster. The disorder of the fair confirmed northern stereotypes. Southern progressive women were all but cut out from participating. For the southern African American elite and middle class, their dreams of inclusion in the region’s progress albeit on the white South’s terms appeared a dubious assertion. It was more and more clear that no matter how much they accommodated southern whites, they would be viewed as inferior in southern society. For some, then, the Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition still represented the New South dream of the future; for others, it had become a nightmare.

Although a prominent Atlanta citizen could brag in 1907 that since the closing of Atlanta’s Cotton States exposition the city’s “population has increased thirty-five per cent; her banking capital has increased sixty per cent; her personal property has been multiplied by many millions, and the city has become more than ever before the toast and the emblem of southern enterprise and of southern prosperity.”63 The perspective of many Americans was that the South continued to lag behind the nation. The Cotton States and Tennessee Centennial invited northerners to come and witness a South in transformation and to catch a glimpse of its future. Northern investment was the lynchpin for the economic revolution that they believed was imminent in the region. While many northern visitors to the fairs were impressed by the

63 Quoted in Blue Book, 57.
expositions’ displays of industrial and cultural modernity, late nineteenth century racial science combined with observations of poor and rural southerners to convince northerners that not only was the South economically and socially lagging but that its people may be evolutionarily stunted. The economically mobile southern middle class and elite looked with dismay at their cities’ African American and poor white neighborhoods and the undeveloped rural hinterland. As much as they tried they could not release the South from its contradiction of a growing industrial economy hindered by the social and economic ills associated with stagnation.64

The New York delegation to the Cotton States exposition recognized the disconnect between the fair and region’s dream of the future and the reality of a benighted South. Taking the language of anthropology, the delegation concluded that the “most interesting subjects for observation and study” were southerners themselves, white and black. According to the New Yorkers, African American and white southerners wandered “the ground in mute and open-mouthed amazement.” The delegation hoped that Atlanta’s exposition would “loosen the bonds of lethargy which have compressed [rural southerners’] faculties, and awaken new ideas and ambition in their dormant brains.” The New Yorkers concluded that the Georgia “cracker” was “by no means extinct.” Poor rural whites were not only “behind the times,” they were evolutionarily stunted: “Morally he is sound, but his intellectual faculties are rusty from lack of contact with the vitalizing and sharpening forces of modern civilization.” Perhaps, most devastating for the fair’s New South boosters, the New Yorkers detected even in the more “advanced,” cracker origins. While conceding that the better class of southerners had modern

accruements and some had even gone to Europe, they were all “unmistakably of ‘cracker’
origins, and their antecedents are disclosed in various mannerisms and peculiarities that are
plainly apparent despite the gloss of artifice and varnish of gentility that has been applied to the
surface of their manners and modes of speech.”\textsuperscript{65} As much as New South ideologues attempted
to demonstrate a modern South, outsiders were given the impression that the region lagged
behind.

The South has and in many ways continues to be viewed as the backward underside of
American modernity. Whether in the public health campaigns of the 1920s, the modernization
work of the New Deal’s Tennessee Valley Authority, or the institutional and violent racism laid
bare by the televised nature of the Civil Rights Movement, the South appears to stand a part from
the rest of the nation. However, as the southerners who gathered at the Cotton States and
Tennessee Centennial exposition demonstrated, the South did not see itself as antithetical to the
nation’s modernity. Southerners accepted and articulated modernity on their own terms, often in
troubling ways. While southerners in the rural areas of the region reflected older and more
traditional values, the same was true for the rural areas of the North. Of course these supposedly
backward and premodern rural citizens frequently travelled to the modern spaces of city and
town to conduct business and socialize without much problem. The South, then, stood not so
much outside of American modernity in the late nineteenth century but within and alongside it.

The South’s Jim Crow modernity was a reflection of the region coming to terms with the
dislocations brought on by the massive transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries experienced across the globe. It was a modernity intimately connected with both the
local and global, the nation and empire. It was a modernity that placed race and the struggles of

\textsuperscript{65} New York at the Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, GA (Albany, 1896), 275-278.
African Americans at its center. In some ways it resolved these tensions, in other ways it exacerbated them. With the migration of blacks out of the South, Jim Crow modernity was seen in the increasing ghettoization of African Americans in the North’s cities. Blacks, for their part, abandoned their side of the equation and challenged Jim Crow modernity’s hold on the nation. And it is the struggle against Jim Crow’s national implications that has its origins in the South’s “solution” to the problem of modernity.\textsuperscript{66} It makes the South and its articulation of modernity a central component of American modernity. The South’s dream of the future in the exposition spaces of Atlanta and Nashville would, in the end, have national implications.

Figures

Figure I: World's Columbian Exposition's “White City.”

Figure II: The Cotton States and International Exposition

Figure IV: Tennessee Centennial at Night

Herman Justi, *Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition* (Knoxville, 1898), 83.
Figure V: The Parthenon

Figure VI: The New South—The Triumph of Free Labor

Figure VII: Cotton States Negro Building

Figure VIII: Chains Broken Statue

“Negro Building (Interior).” Fred L. Howe 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition Photographs Collection. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.
Figure IX: DC Exhibit

“Negro Building (Interior).” Fred L. Howe 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition Photographs Collection. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.
Figure X: Centennial Negro Building

Figure XI: Dahomey Village

Figure XII: Cotton States Woman’s Building

The Official Catalogue of the Cotton States and International Exposition Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. September 18 to December 31, 1895 (Atlanta, 1895).
Figure XIII: Centennial Woman’s Building

Figure XIV: Unaccompanied Women

Figure XV: Sham Battle

Figure XVI: Chinese Village

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