FAIR TREATMENT?
AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRESENCE AT INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITIONS
IN THE SOUTH, 1884 – 1902

BY

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES
December 2010
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to my friends, family, and coworkers for their support, encouragement, and patience as I worked on my thesis. A special thank you to the Interlibrary Loan Department of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library for their invaluable assistance in my research. And finally, thanks to Dr. Parent, Dr. Simonelli, and Dr. Hayes for their helpful advice throughout the process.
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ABSTRACT

The South hosted four major international expositions between 1884 and 1902 in New Orleans, Atlanta, Nashville, and Charleston. African Americans were granted a surprisingly high level of recognition at these fairs given their status as second-class citizens, and the rise of Jim Crow, disfranchisement, and racial violence during this time period. This study examines the details of African-American presence and representation at each of these fairs and how the changing state of race relations in the South at the turn of the century influenced interactions between blacks and whites at the expositions.
INTRODUCTION

“Expositions are the timekeepers of progress. They record the world’s advancement.”
-William McKinley, President of the United States, 1901

Only two days after speaking these words, President McKinley was assassinated by anarchist Leon Czolgosz at the Pan-American Exposition of 1901 in Buffalo, NY. Moments after the shots rang out, James B. Parker, a Southern black man standing in line to shake McKinley’s hand, knocked Czolgosz down and prevented him from firing again. This incident, highlighting the social turmoil of the turn of the century, is only one of many notable occurrences in American history that can be connected to international expositions at the end of the nineteenth century. World’s fairs held an unprecedented place in the American imagination during this time period. Nearly twenty international expositions were held in the United States between 1876 and World War I, drawing approximately 100 million attendees. The list of incidents with cultural and historical importance connected to these fairs includes such widely varied events as the introduction of the Pledge of Allegiance in American public schools, the invention of the Ferris Wheel, and Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Compromise speech.

The South was a leading region in the American fair movement, hosting seven significant expositions between 1881 and 1907. Four were large enough to be considered world’s fairs: New Orleans’ World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in 1884-1885, Atlanta’s Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895, Nashville’s Tennessee Centennial Exposition in 1897, and Charleston’s South Carolina

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Interstate and West Indian Exposition in 1901-1902. They all shared the similar purpose of trying to revive, both physically and spiritually, the host city and the entire region. After several successful regional expositions, New South leaders turned to these international expositions to show the potential of the Southern economy and highlight the region’s postwar achievements. Much of the South was slow to recover from the devastation of the Civil War, and some places had not significantly improved more than twenty years after its conclusion. The Old South port cities of New Orleans and Charleston clearly suffered under these post-war conditions. Combined with the economic depression of the 1890s, even cities that physically recovered quickly, like Atlanta and Nashville, were struggling economically. Expositions provided a popular way to draw new investment to the area in efforts to alleviate the effects of the economic slowdown. In the midst of these efforts, the fairs also offered an important showcase for the New South to demonstrate a favorable outlook to Northerners who often viewed Southern “natives” through an imperialistic lens. Additionally, the fairs offered opportunities to compensate for poor showings by Southern states at the major Northern expositions in Philadelphia (1876) and Chicago (1893). The four Southern world’s fairs were vehicles to change both the image and reality of the South as a region.

One key image that New South leaders hoped to display was a newfound, and almost entirely false, sense of racial harmony. White exposition organizers granted African Americans extraordinarily prominent roles at these Southern fairs as part of an

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6 Ibid., 109.

effort to demonstrate that the South was moving away from the racial violence that characterized Reconstruction and into a new era of peaceful race relations. The notable presence of African Americans at the expositions gave the illusion that blacks were making progress and that the South’s racial problems had been solved. In reality, however, the increasing segregation of the races, as demonstrated at the fairs, was actually an indication of worsening race relations and escalating white supremacy. Over the course of the fairs in New Orleans, Atlanta, Nashville, and Charleston, a span of just under twenty years, relations between black and white Southerners took a horrifying turn for the worse. This analysis will show that these international expositions serve as microcosms to examine race in Southern society because they demonstrate a drastic increase in segregation, discrimination, and black protest, even as they cleverly promoted racial harmony and black progress. The details of African-American presence and representation at each of the four Southern expositions reveal not only how the interactions between the races played out at the fairgrounds, but also how the changing state of race relations in the South during this time period influenced those interactions. In contrast with other explorations of world’s fairs in the South that have touched on issues of race, this paper will offer an in depth analysis of African-American presence at each fair to provide a new perspective on how blacks and whites interacted at the expositions and in greater society during this period of enormous change.

Southern white exposition organizers showed a relative willingness to include African-American participants that stands out in sharp contrast to the reluctance of
organizers in other parts of the country. The Southern organizers, however, had ulterior motives, because the fairs served as platforms to showcase New South solutions to the so-called Negro Problem. Exposition history scholar Robert W. Rydell explains, “Negro Departments were instruments of social control that would keep blacks in check by defining their progress as self-improvement along industrial lines and by persuading blacks that builders of the New South would take their best interests to heart.” Other key aspects of Southern racial ideology were expressed in the fact that Negro Departments and exhibits were developed, organized, and funded by whites, demonstrating the new forms of paternalism and white philanthropy that would characterize the New South.

Fair organizers also had strong economic incentives to include exhibits of black progress. Southern economic growth depended on the role of blacks in developing the economy because the industrial and agricultural promise of the region was based on a cheap obedient labor force primarily provided by the African-American population. In fact, New South’s goals of industrialization were intricately linked with the maintenance of white supremacy. Historian Brian Kelly argues that white supremacy was “an essential element in the more fundamental process of Southern integration into the Gilded

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12 Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 74.
Age, capitalist America.” Industrial expositions demonstrated this reality by displaying elements of white supremacy while showing that Southern African Americans filled the labor needs of Northern investors as a large group of industrial and agricultural workers who were cooperative and content with their roles in menial labor. This portrayal of peaceful race relations in the workforce was vital to soliciting domestic and foreign investment, perhaps the most important goal of the expositions. On a smaller scale, the ability to draw a black audience to the fairs with the displays of the Negro Department would also increase the overall potential for a profitable event, thus benefiting the exposition companies and vendors.

Many blacks rejected the exhibits as inherently too restrictive because of the undertones of accommodation and the physical separation of black exhibits from other displays. Others, however, thought the need to exhibit and attract positive attention and economic opportunities to the race overshadowed the negative aspects of segregation. Thus, Negro Departments at Southern expositions also show the ongoing struggle in African American history between protest and accommodation, largely highlighting an era in which accommodation ruled.

Accommodation and the Advent of Jim Crow

Many African Americans embraced accommodation as a way to deal with the difficulties of a time period at the end of the nineteenth century that is commonly referred to as the nadir of American race relations. Despite this designation, there was actually a

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significant amount of change in black status in the South during this era. As noted
Southern historian C. Vann Woodward explained, “The transition from slavery to caste as
a system of controlling race relations went forward gradually and tediously. Slavery had
been vastly more than a labor system, and the gap that its removal left in manners, mores,
and ritual of behavior could not be filled overnight.” With the absence of interference
from the federal government after the end of Reconstruction, decisions regarding the civil
and political rights of African Americans were left in the hands of Southern white men.
These men were in no way united in their opinions about the next steps to be taken.16 As
a result, race relations continued to be unstable and changeable as blacks and whites tried
to negotiate their positions in a system that had no clear rules. This lack of structure
often made whites uncomfortable, or worse, violent.17

Despite the uneasiness of the white population, blacks retained some political
power after Redemption. In fact, in 1879, three prominent conservative Southern
Democrats: Lucius Lamar, Senator from Mississippi, Wade Hampton, Governor of South
Carolina, and Alexander Stephens, former Vice President of the Confederate States of
America, publically agreed that “the disfranchisement of the Negro was not only
impossible, but undesired.”18 This leniency can be attributed to an “old leadership” of
upper class whites from Black Belt regions who were more casual about their daily
interactions with blacks. As New South politicians and leaders began to replace the old
guard, the racial code became more severe.19 African-American representatives,
however, continued to be elected to Congress from the South through the 1880s via

19 Ibid., 210.
gerrymandered districts that concentrated the black population.20 These token political successes, however, did little to mask issues like the deeply troubling rise in lynching and a growing dedication of New South leaders to white supremacy, both of which increased through the decade of the 1880s. In 1887, Henry W. Grady, the acknowledged leader of the New South movement, clarified these sentiments during a speech in Dallas, Texas, when he proclaimed, “The supremacy of the white race of the South, must be maintained forever, and the domination of the negro race resisted at all points and at all hazards – because the white race is the superior race.”21 The increasing rhetoric of white supremacy during this time period can be attributed in part to white fear of rising African-American populations in the urban centers of the New South. In 1880, only 8.1 percent of the Southern black population lived in urban areas, but by 1910, the proportion had more than doubled to 18.8 percent.22

Because approximately ninety percent of the black population in the United States resided in the South prior to World War I, the “Negro Problem” of how to assert and enforce white supremacy was almost exclusively a Southern problem, “the all absorbing topic of the day.”23 In the minds of many Southern whites, it was the New Negro, one who had grown up without the structure of slavery and the respect for old customs and racial etiquette, who necessitated finding a solution to the race problem. In an effort to seek comfort in light of this troubling development, Southerners created a counterpoint in the myth of the Old South and the Old Negro. The Old Negro was humble, loyal, and

20 Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 38.
22 Doyle, New Men, New Cities, New South, 12.
most of all, happily inferior. In short, white Southerners of the 1880s wanted all the advantages. They embraced the New South, but longed for the Old Negro.

The solution to this dilemma was found in a new system of race relations: Jim Crow, named for an old minstrel performance. Jim Crow was a structure of discrimination that emphasized the segregation of blacks from white society and reinforced their status as second-class citizens. Over the decades after the 1880s, Jim Crow would increasingly infiltrate every aspect of life in the South. The new system was held in place with a complex structure of enforcement, relying on old customs, racial etiquette, and the ever present threat of violence, along with new statutes, law enforcement, and courts rulings. In contrast with racial discrimination that also ran rampant in the North, the Jim Crow system in the South was specifically designed to return blacks as closely as possible to their prewar enslaved status.

Whites saw Jim Crow as the ideal modern and sophisticated solution to the race problem because it created great divisions between the races, in contrast with the antebellum method of controlling black behavior through close contact with white households. As with most modern innovations, Jim Crow practices began in earnest in cities, where contact between the races increased the most. The growth in the urban African-American population resulted in competition between the races for employment, close living quarters in quickly changing neighborhoods, and frequent social contact in communal areas such as public transportation. Cities were also home to the growing black middle class. Middle class blacks clouded the perceived association between class

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24 Ibid., 185.
27 Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 145.
and race because many whites had difficulty seeing blacks as anything other than impoverished and uneducated. The neat dress and proper deportment of the black middle class belied any indication of their inherent racial inferiority. As a result, segregation helped make racial identity and inferiority visible again by using spatial relations rather than personal involvement to categorize people.29

In 1881, the first Jim Crow statute in the South was passed by the Tennessee legislature, requiring that all railroad companies provide separate cars for black and white passengers riding in first class accommodations.30 It would be another six years, however, before other states would follow suit, eventually requiring complete segregation of the races on trains across the South. The door was opened wide for this type of Jim Crow law, among many others that would follow, when in 1883, the Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional, thereby permitting racial discrimination by individuals. Similarly, according to acclaimed black historian Rayford Logan, the succession of presidents from 1877 to 1901 “facilitated the consolidation of white supremacy in the South” by doing “virtually nothing to protect” African-American rights.31 As blacks, particularly those with money, tested the new rules and regulations of segregation, whites responded with even more laws and more “Whites Only” signs.32 Still, some areas of the South, particularly the older seaboard states, resisted Jim Crow laws through the 1880s and 1890s. Although discrimination was practiced in these communities, authorities saw little need for statutes to enforce the customs. Charleston,

30 Packard, American Nightmare, 72.
32 Hale, “‘For Colored’ and ‘For White,’” 162.
for example, resisted the Jim Crow railway car law until 1898. When finally complete, however, the Jim Crow system had extended to reach every part of Southern life. Even aspects that had once been the subject of white derision at the absurd possibilities of such a system, such as the Jim Crow Bible in the courtroom, soon came to be true. Jim Crow was stronger, more intricate, and more rigidly enforced than either the antebellum slave codes, or the Black Codes that had immediately followed the war.

By the 1890s, many blacks adopted an accommodationist viewpoint as the most sensible way to deal with the ever-increasing limitations of living in the Jim Crow South. African Americans turned to self-help and racial solidarity, best exemplified in the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, to get them through these difficult times. They hoped that by proving their economic worth and moral responsibility they would be rewarded with their full civil rights in time. Ironically, it was the middle class blacks who best demonstrated these qualities that most inspired Jim Crow legislation in the first place. White leaders found accommodationist ideas easy to support because they required that whites shoulder no responsibility for the black condition. Although Washington’s accommodationist ideas never had the unanimous support of his race, his philosophy made an indelible mark on his times, which is clearly demonstrated at the Southern expositions.

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34 Ibid., 51.
Race and World’s Fairs

As the South codified Jim Crow, it also began reaching out to the rest of the nation and the world to demonstrate its progress through expositions. The world’s fairs of the South between 1884 and 1902 are the perfect venues to examine how these large-scale changes in the racial landscape played out in the lives of New South leaders and everyday people.

All modern world’s fairs were inspired by events in 1851 in London, when the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, commonly referred to as the Crystal Palace Exhibition, opened. Organizers created the Crystal Palace with the stated object of forwarding the “progress of industrial civilization.” In short, it was a venue for showing off. The exhibition was such a success that world’s fairs multiplied across the globe, each one a cultural touchstone for its masses of visitors, just as the original had been. Before the advent of mass entertainment, attending fairs was a typical experience that could be shared across generations, classes, and races. Visitors from far-flung places gathered and wondered at the incredible progress on display. Although the first international expositions were narrowly focused on industrial trade, by the late 1860s, fairs also served as public relations machines for the host country and participating nations, moving away from exclusively industrial goals. Finally, by the end of the nineteenth century, world’s fairs combined trade, education, and entertainment to become powerful cultural influences that both reflected and helped shape a modern outlook on life.39

Aside from a failed attempt to replicate the success of the Crystal Palace in New York in 1853, at first international expositions were exclusively European phenomenons, not catching on in the United States until the late date of 1876 with the Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition. After Philadelphia, Americans quickly realized the potential of the fairs and held eighteen more of them across the country in the next forty years, a time during which the entire rest of the world held thirty-two expositions. World’s fairs in United States wielded a profound influence over how Americans viewed themselves and the world through a unique combination of amusement, scientific and technological innovation, arts and architecture, and commerce. America’s three foremost authorities on world’s fairs propose that “The study of world’s fairs not only afford insights into America’s cultural authorities but also opens windows on the lives and values of ordinary Americans who traveled to fairs in stunning numbers.” Fairs helped all members of society feel like they were a part of something, reaffirming a collective American identity through reinforced values, leadership, and structure in the face of social unrest and class conflict.

American fairs in the late nineteenth century served a variety of purposes for their organizers. In the years following the Compromise of 1877, which reunified the nation politically after the Civil War, expositions meshed the cultural with the political in an effort to reconstitute the American nation and reunify its people. As white leaders sought approval for their visions of the future, they turned to fairs to spread their ideas. Because expositions were capable of “reducing complex sets of economic, scientific, and

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42 Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 2-4.
cultural interactions to one vast display,” they provided the perfect venue for the elite to reach out to the masses with new ideas. In addition, American fair organizers of this era retained a focus on promoting trade, similar to the original Crystal Palace Exhibition. Expositions were venues to promote economic development and the new culture of mass consumption. In order to encourage consumption, world’s fairs constructed sanitized views of the world where the consumer dominated. Though the expositions themselves were ephemeral, their ideological impact on the people and nation of the United States is undeniable.

A significant part of the influence of world’s fairs in America is connected to their presentation of ideas about race. Fair organizers often made conscious decisions to shape how Americans thought about race as a concept and its relation to economics, politics, science, and entertainment. American fair organizers hoped to convince white fairgoers to see progress in racial terms, with the move towards civilization based on a continuum of supposedly innate racial characteristics. The upper class whites who served as organizers also insisted on white superiority as a way to unite the Anglo-Saxon race across class lines. As expositions supported the advancement of the American industrial economy, they also promoted a not-so-subtle racism by equating the leadership of the white elite with national progress.

In addition to the racism often inherent in the leadership and design of the expositions, fairs served as venues to provide authoritative scientific information about race to the general population, much of which gave credence to the prevailing racist

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thoughts of the era. The scientific approach demonstrated at the fairs by the Smithsonian Institution and the Bureau of American Ethnology drew from the popular theory of Social Darwinism. The exhibits emphasized an evolutionary hierarchy of racial types, with the darkest skin tones at the bottom of the scale, and the lightest at the top. This type of display invited viewers to make comparisons of the abilities of different ethnic groups to achieve a civilized state of being.\(^{47}\) Though these exhibits were popular around the world, they held particular significance in America which had tenuous relationships with its darker-skinned populations, including African Americans and Native Americans. The scientific proof of their underdevelopment provided by the ethnology exhibits justified their low status in American society.\(^{48}\) Likewise, Social Darwinism was used to support conservative thought in opposing social reform, because any reform movement dealing with race, like granting blacks their civil rights, was considered to be against the natural order of things.\(^{49}\) The science of race displayed at the fairs went beyond confirming American social structure to validate the personal viewpoints of many white Americans who believed that the intelligence and character of African Americans were innate racial characteristics that could not be changed.

Attempts to promulgate theories about white supremacy were not limited to the scientific exhibits at fairs, however. As expositions developed more venues for entertainment, racial elements infiltrated these aspects of the fair as well. In fact, the same information found in the ethnology exhibits could be found on the midway being offered as entertainment. The only discernable difference was that the ethnological villages found on the midway were run by showmen, although the content was often

\(^{47}\) Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 5.
endorsed by prominent anthropologists. The phenomenon of the ethnological village began with the 1889 Paris Exposition where fair organizers situated a colonial village of non-whites at the base of the Eiffel Tower. The villages made their debut in America on the midway at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago where visitors paid to observe various native groups going about what was advertised as being their daily business. The Fon people of Dahomey were perhaps the widest traveled group appearing in ethnological villages. They participated in numerous American expositions, affirming the ideas of many white Americans that African Americans were much closer to savage than civilized.

In addition to ethnological villages, another uniquely American attraction also brought issues of race to the midway. The extremely popular Old Plantation concession made appearances at a variety of expositions in the North and South. The Old Plantation typically appeared as a slight variation on the minstrel show, glorifying the myth of the Old South with African Americans acting the part of the “happy darkey” through dancing and singing. Although the attraction was managed by whites and clearly gave credit to white stereotypes of the simple but carefree plantation slave, many blacks patronized and enjoyed the shows. Black audience members were likely pleased that the concession employed actual African-American actors, rather than white men in black face. The lower class black audience who laughed at the exaggerations of their own cultures formed a common bond with the black players who refashioned some of the white

minstrel material to fit their audience.\textsuperscript{52} Many members of the black middle class, however, were clearly displeased with this portrayal of African American life that contrasted so strongly with the progress they were attempting to display in their own exhibits. Just like the ethnological villages that displayed Africans in colonial settings, the Old Plantation conferred colonial status on African Americans.\textsuperscript{53} Overall, the midway attractions at American fairs emphasized cultural differences by showing off African Americans and other so-called primitive peoples as objects of spectacle.\textsuperscript{54}

While American fairs all had racial undertones, each individual fair also has a story to tell of how race relations played out during the exposition and how those interactions related to the reality of the world outside of the fairs. The following chapters will examine the specifics of African-American presence and representation at the four world’s fairs that took place in the South between 1884 and 1902 by examining the exhibits, administration, attractions, and special events of each fair, as well as the changing climate of race relations in the South and its influence on the expositions.

\textsuperscript{53} Rydell, \textit{All the World's a Fair}, 88.
President Chester A. Arthur officially opened the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans on December 16, 1884, via telegraph from the White House to the stage of the Music Hall in the Main Building. This demonstration of technological innovation was far from the only exhibition of progress at the fair. Even the Main Building exemplified the theme; at the time, it was the largest exhibit hall ever built, with a total of thirty-three acres under its roof. Perhaps the most striking exhibit of progress, however, was up in the gallery at the north end of the Government Building where just over 34,000 square feet were set aside to display the work of African Americans in the Colored People’s Department of the Exposition.\(^5^5\) Surprisingly, the exhibit did not mark the only involvement of African Americans in the New Orleans Exposition. Blacks and whites mingled on the grounds and black speakers addressed mixed audiences on several occasions. The abundant African-American involvement in the Exposition reflects both the time period before Jim Crow laws and disfranchisement became the norm and the unique historical place of blacks in New Orleans society.

Several smaller fairs in the early 1880s paved the way for the world’s fair in New Orleans. From October through December 1881, Atlanta hosted the International Cotton Exposition, the first ever Southern exposition. The Exposition was held on nineteen acres in Oglethorp Park. The exhibits, hailing from thirty-three states and seven countries, focused almost exclusively on cotton cultivation and textile manufacturing. Despite its small financial loss, the fair was deemed a success with approximately

290,000 visitors and numerous sales of agricultural machines.\textsuperscript{56} Atlanta’s success inspired planners in Louisville, who were organizing the Southern Exposition, focusing on the variety of southern industry and agriculture. The Southern Exposition was primarily a regional event, but it attracted nearly one million attendees in its initial three month run in 1883. The Exposition continued as an annual event through 1887.\textsuperscript{57} These fairs demonstrate that leaders of the New South recognized the ability of expositions to provide for economic expansion. They did not acknowledge in any tangible form, however, the role that African Americans would have in the new economic and social structure of the South.

The World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition was initially organized by the National Cotton Planters Association in conjunction with the federal government and the city of New Orleans to celebrate the centennial of the first shipment of cotton from the United States to Europe in 1784. In reality, the fair celebrated the reemergence of New Orleans, the nation’s ninth largest city, and the largest city in the South in 1880, and the entire region of the South, in the pursuit of industry and capital after the Civil War.\textsuperscript{58} The\textit{New York Times} described, “For the first time in their history the Southern States are coming into their proper relations, industrially and commercially as well as politically, with the rest of the country and the rest of the world.”\textsuperscript{59} The fair also aimed to

promote the use of the port of New Orleans for agricultural and industrial exports, and in the pursuit of increased Latin American trade.\textsuperscript{60}

Major Edward Austin Burke, editor of the \textit{New Orleans Times-Democrat} and the treasurer of the state of Louisiana, was an early supporter of the exposition, and was eventually named to the top administrative post of director-general. Though Burke is better known as a notorious Bourbon politician and a “preeminent embezzler of state funds,” during his tenure managing the exposition he was recognized as one of the most powerful and celebrated men in the state.\textsuperscript{61} Under Burke’s tutelage the vision for the Cotton Centennial grew from a regional agricultural fair to an exposition that was international in scope and a much larger than any exposition the South had ever seen.\textsuperscript{62}

The final site in Upper City Park (now called Audubon Park) contained fifteen buildings spread across 249 acres. Seventeen foreign countries participated.

When all of the planning was complete, the exposition opened in December 1884 to critical reviews. Unfinished exhibits, horrible weather conditions, and long travel distances from other major cities kept the crowds at bay. When the fair closed on June 1, 1885, the expo had seen a total attendance of 1,158,840; a disappointment compared to the forecasted four million, and lost $470,000.\textsuperscript{63} Despite these difficulties, the final reviews were far more complimentary. \textit{The Century Magazine} proposed that the exposition “can well claim rank with the two greatest world’s fairs ever held.”\textsuperscript{64} Herbert

\textsuperscript{60} Rydell, Findling, and Pelle, \textit{Fair America}, 26.
\textsuperscript{64} Smalley, “The New Orleans Exposition,” 7.
S. Fairall, the Exposition Commissioner for Iowa, in his detailed history of the Exposition, declared that the fair “far surpassed any international exposition the earth had ever known; and within its grounds and buildings was the material to eventually make it what it proved to be – the crowning achievement of the age – mind’s greatest conquest over matter.”  

One way in which the New Orleans Exposition was truly the crowning achievement of its age was in its remarkable inclusion of African Americans. The status granted to blacks at the Exposition was largely a reflection of African-American status in New Orleans at the time, which resulted from a mixing of the unique historical position of blacks in the city and the flexible nature of race relations in the 1880s. Prior to 1900, blacks outnumbered whites in Louisiana by a small margin. Although the bulk of the African-American population lived in the “black belt” of alluvial plains along the Mississippi River, a little more than a quarter of New Orleans’ population was African American in 1880. The vast majority of rural and urban blacks lived in poverty.

The descendents of freeborn mulattoes in New Orleans were a notable exception to the overall depressed economic status of the black population. Race classification in Louisiana, and particularly New Orleans, resulted from a mix of inflexible Anglo-American theories about race and color and more fluid Latin American ideas. During colonial times, a prominent free mixed ancestry population developed in Louisiana.

through intermarriage and immigration from the Caribbean. Before coming under American rule in the early nineteenth century, these free people of color maintained a separate status between blacks and whites, and developed substantial wealth and social standing. Even after American settlers in the region tried to enforce their ways of thinking, free mulattoes, also known as “Creoles of Color,” continued to enjoy far more independence than other free blacks across the South. New Orleans, with its multiracial and polyglot population, fostered the development of this community, and in 1860, there were 10,689 free people of color in the city.

After the war, the descendants of the free mulattoes retained their status as the black elite in New Orleans. Many spoke French as their primary language, and they generally attended the Catholic Church. The Creoles of Color maintained a social separation not only from whites, but also from the African-American population. Their prized separate status began to erode quickly once Jim Crow laws took effect, as the statutes applied equally to them and the rest of the black population. The city’s history of accommodating a racially and linguistically diverse population, however, helped establish an overall feeling of racial harmony and minimized clashes between the races through the 1880s, including during the Cotton Centennial Exposition.

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Dorothy Rose Eagleson characterized the 1880s for African Americans in New Orleans as a transitional decade “between the hopes and freedom of the Reconstruction era and the repression that began in the 1890s.”\textsuperscript{72} The most conspicuous aspect of this transitional era was the complete lack of a reliable system governing interactions between the races, by law or by custom. In the absence of a system designed to eliminate their political rights, blacks participated in Louisiana politics through the 1880s and 1890s. One of the main reasons that black political participation remained a factor after Democrats regained power with the redemption in 1877 was the continuing strength of the Louisiana Republican party through the 1890s. In fact, the number of black registered voters in the state outnumbered whites until 1890. African-American voters, however, frequently encountered difficulties in having their votes counted, indicating the absence of full political equality. Despite this blatant discrimination, blacks were permitted to exercise other civil rights during the 1880s, including serving on juries and bidding on state work contracts.\textsuperscript{73}

Even the most liberal whites, however, like New Orleans native George Washington Cable, who wrote about the importance of granting blacks equal political rights, also asserted that “Social equality is a fool’s dream” and explained that he wanted as little of it as possible.\textsuperscript{74} As a result of this desire to keep the races socially separate, segregation was widespread in the 1880s, even though Louisiana did not pass its first Jim Crow law requiring the separation of the races until 1890. Segregation by custom was primarily seen in places of entertainment or education including hotels, restaurants,

\textsuperscript{73} Dethloff and Jones, “Race Relations in Louisiana,” in Vincent, The African American Experience in Louisiana, 504-506.
\textsuperscript{74} George W. Cable The Silent South (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1885), 52.
theaters, schools, and libraries. In transportation, there was no coherent system indicating whether the races were separate or not. The details often varied depending on whether one rode in a railcar or a streetcar, and sometimes there were even variations from one rail line to the next. Segregation was also the norm in religious worship. While most protestant churches split into black and white congregations earlier, nearly 75,000 African-American Catholics in Louisiana continued to attend mass with whites through the 1880s, while sitting in segregated seats and waiting until all the white worshippers had been administered to before receiving the sacraments.  

Despite the second-class citizenship of African Americans created by the customs of segregation, blacks and whites did still interact on a social level during this time period, particularly in New Orleans. Sports brought the races together as they competed against each other in baseball, boxing, and horse racing. Blacks and whites mingled as they escaped from the city to the shores of Lake Pontchartrain, sharing picnic grounds, beaches, and bathhouses. Behind closed doors, blacks and whites were also brought together by their moral excesses. Gambling and drinking in some saloons was an interracial endeavor, as were a number of brothels where black and white prostitutes worked together to serve customers of all colors. There were even exceptions to the general segregation found in religious services. One of the most prominent white Episcopal churches in New Orleans had a colored clergyman who assisted with the

services during this time period. The ways in which blacks and whites came together in leisure activities at the fair mirrored the social interaction between the races that was seen across the city during this time period.

Race relations in Louisiana rapidly deteriorated in the 1890s. As growing factionalism among Democrats allowed for the black vote to become more significant, more whites reacted with white supremacy doctrines. The first Jim Crow law, requiring separate accommodations for blacks and whites on railroad cars, was passed in 1890. An anti-miscegenation law that had failed to pass in 1880 and 1888 was finally approved by the state legislature in 1894. The final blow to black rights in Louisiana was struck with the 1898 Constitutional Convention which effectively disfranchised African-American voters by requiring education and property qualifications. Henry C. Dethloff and Robert R. Jones have summarized the following regarding this period in African-American history:

The period of flux and change was no golden era for the Negro in Louisiana; he enjoyed neither social nor political equality with whites, and he was subject to violence, discrimination, economic coercion, and political trickery. Nevertheless, he possessed greater political, social, and civil rights before 1898 than at any other time thereafter until the 1950s.

The recognition and acceptance of their race that African Americans encountered at the Cotton Centennial Exposition reflects this time period before the rigid restrictions of Jim Crow were fully implemented.

At the opening ceremonies of the Exposition, Louisiana Governor S. D. McEnery introduced the Colored People’s Department to the gathered crowd, stating, “The nation

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81 Ibid., 503
is interested in the progress morally and intellectually of the colored people. An opportunity will be afforded to ascertain their attainments in the arts, sciences, and industries. They have a special exhibit, and if the representations made are correct, they have advanced rapidly in intelligence and wealth.”82 While the Exposition was in the planning stages, Director General Burke developed the idea of giving African Americans an opportunity to exhibit their progress since emancipation, and the managers announced that $50,000 would be appropriated towards such an exhibit in May 1884.83 The directors appointed African American Blanche K. Bruce, former U.S. Senator from Mississippi and current registrar of the treasury, as commissioner-in-chief of the Department of Colored Exhibits. J.J. Spelman assisted Bruce by handling day to day operations of the department as superintendent. In addition, black honorary state commissioners were appointed from forty-four states and territories.84 In the process of organizing the exhibit, Bruce met with African-American leaders from several states to determine the work to be done. At one meeting in New York City, former Louisiana Governor P. B. S. Pinchback expressed concern that the African-American community might not be able to present a creditable exhibit, and he would be opposed to making an attempt if this was the case. Attendees from several other states assured Pinchback that their states would be able to provide sufficient materials in the areas of the arts, mechanics, agricultural products, and manufactured fabrics, among others, to create a respectable showing.85

Similarly, press reactions to the creation of a separate colored exhibit were mixed, although mostly positive. The New York Globe, an African-American newspaper, endorsed the exhibit, proclaiming, “there should be no delay in preparing a showing that will worthily indicate the progress of the race.”86 The Washington Bee, another African-American publication, initially supported efforts by blacks to be well-represented at the exposition, stating in May 1884, “there is nothing which tends to break down caste prejudice more than to show our material advancement to the world in this way.”87 A few months later, however, the Cleveland Leader, a white newspaper, criticized Blanche K. Bruce’s acceptance of the commissioner position as an acknowledgement of discrimination against blacks because their exhibits would be segregated from the general exhibits. The Bee reprinted the Leader’s comments and added their own criticism of Bruce as a black leader since he was not wise enough to ignore “all facetious movements designed to ‘rope’ the colored people into an endorsement of invidious distinction.”88 The opinions represented by these newspapers generally reflect popular African-American thought on the topic. Many blacks were happy to be represented at all, while those with more activist agendas were opposed to the segregated nature of the exhibit, demonstrating a division in public opinion that would remain through the Southern expositions of the next twenty years.

Although the exposition opened to the public on December 16, 1884, with all exhibits open though many were partially incomplete at the time, the Colored Exhibits did not hold their official opening ceremonies until February 23, 1885. The activities of the day began with the Excelsior Band, an African-American marching band

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accompanied by a rifle drill team, marching through the exposition grounds and buildings. Shortly thereafter, a group of about 600 students from African-American schools in the city, including Straight University, Southern University, Leland University, and the Fisk School, processed through the Government Building to the Colored Exhibits in the north gallery, where a large crowd of dignitaries and observers had already gathered. In the absence of Commissioner Bruce, Superintendent Spelman gave a brief address presenting the exhibit to the Exposition’s Board of Management. Spelman thanked the Exposition managers for the opportunity to exhibit the progress of the race, and then stated, “This is the first time that we have participated in a World’s Fair, and it seems appropriate that the opening of a new era in our existence should have its commencement in our own Southern clime, where the greater part of us are identified with the development and progress of its great natural resources.”\(^89\) In so commenting, Spelman acknowledged the connection between the African-American population and the growth of the Southern economy that would inspire exposition organizers to continue to endorse black exhibits through the turn of the century.

After F. C. Morehead, commissioner general of the Exposition, declared the exhibit officially open, the ceremonies moved to the Music Hall of the Main Building, where a crowd of nearly 6,000 was in attendance. The *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, published by Director General Burke, opined that the crowd “presented a very fine appearance, and were themselves marked examples of the progress that their race has made since emancipation in intelligence and in circumstances.”\(^90\) The proceedings consisted of several notable speeches and musical selections. Professor A. M. Green

\(^90\) “Installation of the Colored Department,” *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, February 24, 1885.
urged his fellow African Americans to be encouraged by the evidence of the capacity and industry of their race on view in the exhibit. He concluded his remarks to a rousing ovation as he declared, “Before another centennial of our national independence, and before another cotton centennial exposition shall have by lapse of time rolled on, we shall know no North, no South, no East, no West, no white, no black.”

Green’s statements hoping for a post-racial America were not the only radical sentiments expressed on this important occasion. Black attorney David A. Straker followed Green with similar opinions, hailing “the new era in the South, commenced here at this Exposition” that he hoped would lead to a time when “black and white may dwell together in love, peace and unity, under equal laws, exact justice and common privileges, so that the antagonism of race, the hatred of creeds and parties, the prejudice of caste and the denial of equal rights may disappear from among us forever.” These men did not realize that the opportunity for a black man to deliver such a message on an international stage before an integrated audience without risking his life would not occur again within their lifetimes. Likewise, their hopes for the transformation of race relations in America would be thwarted for generations.

Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, a leader in the AME Church, spoke last and turned his comments to a more political sphere, praising the Exposition managers for eschewing the mandate of the Supreme Court’s recent 1883 decision in the Civil Rights Cases which sanctioned racial discrimination by individuals. Turner, known for his radical opinions including advocating for blacks to return to Africa, seemed genuinely shocked and

92 Ibid.
surprised that the Exposition would allow blacks to exhibit. He exclaimed to a response of enthusiastic applause,

Director General Burke and the gentlemen connected with this Exposition have rebuked the Supreme Court for its decision, and have said: “Come and join us; we will treat you right.” And they have kept their word. I have not been snubbed since coming here. I cannot believe that I am in New Orleans. I am inclined to think it is all a dream. All honor, I say to Director General Burke. All honor to the managers of this Exposition. All honor to New Orleans. All honor to the South for the consideration they have shown for the colored race, for their answer to the abominable proclamation of the Supreme Court.93

While his speech clearly indicates that in light of the Supreme Court ruling, the survival of blacks in American was the issue of top priority, the combined impression of Turner, Straker and Green indicate that survival alone was not an adequate goal. At the New Orleans Exposition, the two sides of African-American thought, survival and resistance, accommodation and protest, were not yet split. Instead, without the rigid structure of Jim Crow in opposition, they were intricately linked.94

The more than 16,000 exhibits by African Americans at the Cotton Centennial Exposition were also used as a platform to reflect demands for political, economic, and social changes. Though their widely varied subjects, exhibitors demonstrated that blacks could achieve anything if given the opportunity.95 With over 34,000 square feet of exhibit space in the north gallery of the Government Building (see fig. 1), the Colored People’s Department organized its exhibits by state, reflecting an enormous level of participation from across the country. There were exhibits from every state except Maine and Oregon, and every territory except Dakota and Arizona. One guidebook to the exposition encouraged all visitors to see the exhibit, “for a most creditable display will be

94 Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 80-81.
95 Ibid., 81.
found.‖ The assortment of exhibits on display included education exhibits showing students’ proficiency at literary pursuits and mathematics, mechanical exhibits including working models of a locomotive and a steamboat, master artwork by celebrated African-American painter Henry O. Tanner, mining equipment and minerals unearthed by African Americans, dental instruments, and agricultural implements. Alabama’s exhibit was the largest, while Louisiana’s was considered to be the most diverse.97

Several states chose to display the accomplishments of their African-American schools. The thirty-one examples included public and private schools ranging from preschool to the university level.98 One particularly interesting feature of the education-themed exhibits was alternating weekly demonstrations of an African-American kindergarten and kitchen garden, both recently adopted as new systems of education in the model school of the local Diana University. The University brought a group of girls to the Colored People’s Department each week to conduct a demonstration of the

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96. Practical Common Sense Guide Book through the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition at New Orleans (Harrisburg, PA: Lane S. Hart, 1885), 44.
activities they were being taught. For the kitchen garden presentation, which applies the principles of kindergarten to preparation for housework, the girls sang songs, and showed the “useful duties” they were learning to perform, including sweeping, washing, and properly setting a dinner table.99

A great deal of handiwork was displayed, including carving, carpentry, and so-called “women’s work,” which consisted of needlework, quilting, and wax and hair work, along with other items. The Colored Ladies Centennial Association organized a display of contributions from women in New Orleans, which included quilts, rugs, paper flowers, clothing, lace, preserves, and antiques, among many other homemade creations.100 One of the most notable exhibits of them all could also be considered “women’s work.” Mrs. Sarah H. Shimm, a schoolteacher from Washington, DC, created an extraordinary piece of silk embroidery on a sofa that told the story of Toussaint l’Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution in pictures and words, which included a panel proclaiming, “Let all be free.”101 Mrs. Shimm’s message was clearly in sync with the radical speakers at the exhibit’s opening ceremonies.

Many visitors were surprised by the high quality of the exhibit, with the selection of inventions exhibited considered to be particularly remarkable; a number of inventions from New York were proclaimed to be “both ingenious and useful.” Visitors’ attention was held the longest, however, by the works of art on display, which included a display of portraits of prominent African-American leaders.102 Some visitors, including Northern journalist Charles Dudley Warner, criticized the small size of exhibit, but realized this

102 Ibid., 379-380
was largely a result of the short amount of time available for its preparation. He proclaimed it “hardly a fair showing of the capacity of the colored people,” but still “wonderful as the result of only a few years of freedom.”\textsuperscript{103}

Significant examples of African Americans’ progress could also be found in the Department of Education exhibit, also located in the Government Building. The northern end of the eastern gallery, presumably close to the Colored People’s Department in the northern gallery, hosted displays from missionary societies that controlled African-American schools across the South. The Freedman’s Aid Society operated as the educational arm of the Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church, controlling twenty-three schools for African Americans. Almost all members of the ME Church ministry were prepared for their duties in these schools. The Society’s exhibit included work from Bennett Seminary, Central Tennessee College and its Meharry Medical College, Claflin University, Clark University, Texas Wesleyan College, and a number of other seminaries and colleges. The display consisted primarily of written work including examination papers, essays, and drawings.\textsuperscript{104} The \textit{Southwestern Christian Advocate}, a mouthpiece for the Methodist Episcopal Church, particularly praised the contributions of Claflin and Clark Universities, stating, “The skill shown in the various articles of mechanical work from these institutions is attractive, and evinces thorough instruction in industrial workmanship.”\textsuperscript{105} Unfortunately, a complete exhibit of the Society’s work in one

\textsuperscript{103} Warner, \textit{Studies in the South and West}, 14.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Special Report by the Bureau of Education}, 162-163.
\textsuperscript{105} C.W. Boothby, “Freedmen’s Aid Society at the Exposition,” \textit{New Orleans Southwestern Christian Advocate}, March 23, 1885.
location was prevented because some materials were placed in various state exhibits and in the Colored People’s Department.\textsuperscript{106}

The American Missionary Association, originally founded as a protestant abolitionist group with white and black members, exhibited in the space immediately adjoining the Freedman’s Aid Society. Their space displayed work from Atlanta University, Avery Institute, Fisk University, Hampton Institute, Le Moyne Institute, Straight University, Talladega College, and Tougaloo University, among others. The items on exhibit included examination papers, drawings, photographs, and industrial work. The production of the industrial branches of the schools was widely varied and the exhibit included building materials, carpentry materials and works, sewing projects such as clothing and quilts, and examples of blacksmithing.\textsuperscript{107}

In conjunction with the Education Department, Colored Education Day was celebrated on May 14, 1885. The most striking speaker was Rev. A. E. P. Albert, an African-American minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church in New Orleans. While several other white speakers emphasized the important role of black education in spreading civilization back to Africa, Albert concentrated on the significance of education for African Americans seeking to improve their status in America. Albert said of education:

\begin{quote}
Under its influence, fostered by charitable, State, and national aid, the night of darkness shall soon pass away. Ignorance, vices, and race prejudices shall perish, and the sunshine of intelligence shall penetrate the darkest nook, the bonds of brotherhood shall be strengthened, and the blessings of our free institutions, founded upon universal suffrage and protected by universal education, shall here be enjoyed by every race alike, and shall be handed down to our children’s children unimpaired.\textsuperscript{108}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{106} Special Report by the Bureau of Education, 22.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 149-151.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 951.
With visions of imminent racial harmony, Albert evoked the same feelings as several speakers upon the opening of the Colored Exhibits. Albert, however, lacked the radical edge of those orators. His statement in the same speech that “The Negro is a man, therefore education ameliorates his condition and enhances his material and moral worth” illustrated his message that education is the key to helping blacks make social, economic and political gains, reflecting viewpoint that was closer to the later accommodationist stance of Booker T. Washington.109

African Americans also had a presence in the Machinery Annex of the Main Building of the Exposition. This section, organized by the white directors, stood out in contrast with the progress demonstrated in the Colored Exhibits. Here, merchants and manufacturers visiting from Philadelphia observed “real Southern-looking negroes” busy sorting cotton and feeding the cotton gins, much to the delight of the Northern visitors.110 The scene could have easily dated to antebellum times. This portrayal of African Americans as agricultural and industrial workers came closest to the white vision for the ideal role of blacks in the Southern economic progress promoted by the fair.

One aspect of the fair where blacks were noticeably absent was in the international exhibits, also contained within the Main Building. The exhibits came from Mexico, Japan, China, Russia, Honduras, British Honduras, Venezuela, Hawaii, Belgium, Siam, Germany, England, Brazil, Jamaica, Guatemala, France, and Austria. Even though several of the western hemisphere nations represented had sizable populations of African

109 Ibid., 950.
descent, their exhibits did not reflect the accomplishments of those populations.\footnote{Fairall, \textit{The World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition}, 389-403.} A number of foreign countries also supported the exposition by donating money towards its operation. While Mexico was the largest donor and the largest foreign exhibitor, Liberia also gave $5,000, presumably in support of the Colored Exhibits since they did not exhibit themselves.\footnote{\textit{Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans and Environs, with map}, Exposition edition (New York: Will H. Coleman, 1885), 319.}

Although most visitors to the Exposition viewed these displays in the midst of hundreds of thousands of others on a typical day at the fair, some attended on days of great celebration. The largest celebration of all was Louisiana Day, held on April 30, 1885. The occasion provided the opportunity for all Louisianans, black and white, to commemorate the accomplishments of their home state and the Exposition. The day began with a large procession that formed on Canal Street and then made its way to the Exposition grounds by boat. Charles Dudley Warner recalled, “…the colored citizens took their full share of the parade and the honors. Their societies marched with the others, and the races mingled on the grounds in unconscious equality of privileges.”\footnote{Warner, \textit{Studies in the South and West}, 15.} The ceremonies were held in the Music Hall, where several hundred distinguished citizens were seated on the platform and all of the 11,000 auditorium seats were filled. The remaining crowd stretched throughout the Main Building. Though the speakers included such notable white men as Louisiana Governor McEnery and Director General Burke, it was the general perception that “the honors of the day were carried off by a colored clergyman, an educated man, who united eloquence with excellent good-

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sense.” Rev. A. E. P. Albert delivered his address as a representative of the state’s African-American population, of which there were thousands present in the audience. Albert praised the New Orleans press for continuing to plead for black civil rights in the face of the 1883 Supreme Court decision, reassuring blacks that their rights would not suffer with the recent election of a Democratic president. He praised the South for making progress in coming to the aid of African Americans by providing educational opportunities, commercial activity, and employment, resulting in great uplift of the race since emancipation. Finally, he recognized that Louisiana leads the Southern rank of States in the recognition of their rights to “life, liberty and the pursuits of happiness.” She has not reached the goal, however, “where a man’s a man if he only will toil;” and where “the rights of equal justice is enjoyed alike by all;” but when she shall have reached that dizzy height, the color, like rank, shall be recognized to be but “the guinea’s stamp, The man’s the gowd for a’tat.”

Albert’s speech was frequently interrupted by the audience’s applause. Fitting with the role of African Americans in 1880s Louisiana that Albert describes, his speech on such a prominent occasion was widely accepted, “as a matter of course.”

In fact, the socialization between the races that occurred on Louisiana Day, and throughout the Exposition, was also accepted as a matter of course. Though there were concerns expressed about the possibilities of discrimination at the fair before it opened, the reports from the Exposition indicate that the management was accommodating of the African-American crowds, and the races interacted in a friendly and cordial manner. Prior to the fair’s opening, the management was taking the anticipated needs of the

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114 Ibid., 16.
115 Fairall, The World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, 165. The speaker is incorrectly identified in this account as E.A.P. Albert instead of A.E.P. Albert.
116 Warner, Studies in the South and West, 16.
African-American population into consideration. Col. James Lewis, the head of the Bureau of Information and Accommodation for the Department of Colored Exhibits, assured the colored state commissioners that “ample arrangements are being made to accommodate, at reasonable rates, all the colored citizens who may visit our city during the Exposition,” and that the managers were taking a great deal of interest in the work.\textsuperscript{117} Director General Burke went so far as to proudly declare, “There is no color line, and that is a great feature of the Exposition. The colored people are treated like the whites, and there certainly can be no complaint that discrimination is shown.”\textsuperscript{118} Charles Dudley Warner’s observations back up Burke’s claims. He described, “at the Exposition white and colored people mingled freely, talking and looking at what was of common interest.”\textsuperscript{119} One of the most striking examples of cordial racial interactions was the result of an effort by the aforementioned Col. Lewis. Lewis established the Experimental Restaurant on the Exposition grounds to guarantee that African-American visitors to the fair could have access to accommodations. The restaurant quickly became very successful, prompting the \textit{Southwestern Christian Advocate} to pronounce, “everyone eats there now, regardless of color.”\textsuperscript{120} These observations of racial harmony on the Exposition grounds clearly reinforce the idea that the 1880s afforded black Americans more freedom, particularly in New Orleans, than any other time period over the next eighty years.

Overall, the Cotton Centennial Exposition received positive reviews from both Northerners and Southerners, black and white, concerning its inclusion of African

\textsuperscript{117}“Accommodations for Colored Visitors,” \textit{New Orleans Times-Democrat}, December 4, 1884.
\textsuperscript{120}C.W. Boothby, “Freedman’s Aid Society at the Exposition,” \textit{New Orleans Southwestern Christian Advocate}, March 26, 1885.
Americans. The *Southwestern Christian Advocate* urged its readers to visit the fair with their children, and opined, “Again, from displaying our wealth and talent here, a new life will spring up among our young people.”\(^{121}\) The *New Orleans Times-Democrat* pronounced the Colored Exhibits “magnificent” and told their readers that a true idea of the “grand appearance of the whole display” could not be obtained “save by personal examination.”\(^{122}\) The merchants and manufacturers visiting the Exposition from Philadelphia proclaimed that the Colored Exhibits “may be called the moral displays of the exhibition” for their effort to remind visitors “that our country is now doing justice to the downtrodden race who, for so many years, were mere chattels.”\(^{123}\) The *New York Times* examined a broad view of how the fair would benefit African Americans in the region, stating, “this exposition will teach them a lesson of great value – the lesson that it pays to be a good workman and to become the master of some branch of industry… The colored people will surely share to some extent in the benefits gained by the whole body of inhabitants in a large region.”\(^{124}\) Though the *Times* did not mention the Colored Exhibits specifically, the editors recognized the importance of all aspects of the Exposition to the African-American population, confirming the viewpoint of the fair managers who allowed for the demonstration of the progress of African Americans in hopes of drawing investment dollars to the region.

The Cotton Centennial Exposition at New Orleans marks the beginning point of divergent lines. At the Exposition, the displays in the Department of Colored Exhibits and the social mixing of the races on the fairgrounds largely reflected the status of


\(^{123}\) *The Visit of the Merchants and Manufacturers of Philadelphia*, 54.

African Americans in New Orleans, who had yet to come face to face with Jim Crow. In the coming years, the public recognition given to African Americans at Southern international expositions would increase, within the boundaries of segregation, while their social, political, and economic standing in the world outside of the exposition gates would steadily decrease.
CHAPTER TWO
A DECADE OF CHANGES

In the decade between the close of the New Orleans Exposition and the opening of the next world’s fair in the South in 1895 in Atlanta, numerous changes occurred in race relations and in the standards by which international expositions were measured. The first big surge in Jim Crow laws aimed at the codification of race relations in the South occurred between the late 1880s and the early 1890s. During this time period, New South leaders were also pushing for accelerated industrialization to catch up with the North, as demonstrated by the proliferation of international expositions in the South. The social tensions released during this push for economic growth contributed to the new resurgence of white supremacy. The resulting racism espoused by white Southerners in the late nineteenth century is horrific by modern standards. This extreme brand of racism, however, was backed up by presumed scientific fact. Whites were surrounded by theories of Anglo-Saxon superiority that confirmed their prejudices. The popular ideas of Social Darwinism, early anthropology, and imperialism gave white Southerners a new vocabulary to describe their ideas about race and the inherent inferiority of the black population in their midst. Scholars and statisticians also published well-received articles showing that African Americans “were falling away from their prewar level of civilization” with the proof found in skewed crime statistics and high mortality rates.

These assumptions about black inferiority served as the justification for the expansion of Jim Crow legislation. As railroads spread throughout the South, they became the first contested ground, and state legislatures responded quickly. Nine

125 Kelly, “Labor, Race, and the Search for a Central Theme in the History of the Jim Crow South,” 57.
126 Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 432; Gossett, Race, 253-254.
Southern states enacted laws to segregate railroad cars between 1887 and 1891.128 Additional Jim Crow laws concerning transportation resulted. In 1888, Mississippi adopted a law requiring segregation in railroad stations, with other states soon to follow. Then Georgia, in 1891, expanded its segregation requirements to streetcars, being the first state to do so.129

In addition to augmenting the legal structure of segregation, in the time between the New Orleans and Atlanta expositions, Southern state legislatures also made the first forays into legally disfranchising African Americans. What had been effectively accomplished in many locales through threats of violence and election fraud was put into the law books. Historian Joel Williamson identifies three primary factors that motivated the disfranchisers across the South. The first was reform. Those who favored disfranchisement laws believed that they were reforming the electorate by promoting an effort to “permanently remove corruptible voters from participation in the body politic.” Because the Southern states were generally under Democratic rule during this period, Democrats also sought to disfranchise their political competition of Republicans, Populists, and independents. The vast majority of Republicans, however, happened to be black, which also points to race as a motivating factor. Some whites aimed to disfranchise black voters for other reasons. Some with a paternalistic view wanted to protect the black man from himself by removing his power to vote, while others sought to disfranchise African Americans because political equality was seen as leading to demands for social equality.130 Mississippi Democrat and virulent racist James K. Vardaman, was a clear proponent of the link between political and social equality. He

128 Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 137.
once stated, “Shut the door of political equality, and you close the door of social equality in the face of the black man; shut the door of social equality and you smother in his native savage breast the fury of his passion, which is but the blind craving of his soul to be equal of the white man, and the partner of the white man.”\textsuperscript{131}

Upon reading Vardaman’s opinion, it is not surprising to learn that by crafting a new state constitution in 1890, Mississippi was the first state to legally disfranchise African American voters. The new constitution included two provisions designed to restrict the black man’s ability to vote: voters were required to pay a poll tax of two dollars, and they had to demonstrate their ability to read a section of the state constitution or understand and explain a section read to them. The second of these provisions, known as the “understanding clause,” was a common loophole, first introduced in Mississippi, used to prevent voting restrictions from applying to poor whites. Because the determination of whether the section was properly interpreted was left to the white registrar, black voters’ rights were infringed upon significantly more than whites.\textsuperscript{132} The new provisions in the Mississippi Constitution made no specific mention of race, a tactic designed to help prevent challenges under the provisions of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The results, however, were clear. With the power granted to white registrars to examine potential voters, state legislators guaranteed white supremacy at the poles.\textsuperscript{133} Vardaman summarized the state’s efforts by stating, “There is no use to equivocate or lie about the matter, Mississippi’s constitutional convention of 1890 was

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\item \textsuperscript{131} Quoted in Litwack, \textit{Trouble in Mind}, 220.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Gossett, \textit{Race}, 266.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Litwack, \textit{Trouble in Mind}, 224.
\end{itemize}
held for no other purpose than to eliminate the nigger from politics.” Mississippi was so successful in their endeavor that other Southern states soon followed their example.

New legal restrictions were not the only thing black Southerners had to worry about, as violence against African Americans was also on the rise during this time period, particularly in the form of lynching. Lynchings were more than simple execution by a mob. They were brutal and torturous affairs that doubled as family entertainment for white onlookers who often scrambled for body parts and bones to take home as souvenirs. In the 1880s, lynching had been predominantly a white phenomenon along the Western frontier. By the 1890s, however, 82 percent of lynchings took place in the South. Lynching nationwide peaked in 1892 with 69 whites and 162 blacks killed that year. Through the 1890s, lynching claimed an average of 139 lives each year, of which 75 percent were black. In the twentieth century, although the number of lynchings declined, the percentage of black victims increased to 90 percent and remained there through the 1930s.

The supposed justification for the rampant lynching of black Southerners was to protect the honor of white women from the sexual predator portrayed by the black man. Supposed crimes that prompted mob violence ranged from actual rape to merely looking at or speaking to a white woman. In reality, black men, women, and children could be lynched for a wide variety of reasons that had nothing to do with rape. The simple act of being disrespectful to or arguing with a white person was sometimes viewed as enough justification for this horrific punishment. Oftentimes there was no apparent reason at

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134 Quoted in Packard, American Nightmare, 69.
135 Williamson, The Crucible of Race, 117-118; Gossett, Race, 269; Litwack, Trouble in Mind, 284.
In this way, lynching shows just a glimpse of how racial hate and fear transformed ordinary citizens into ruthless murderers. The lynching obsession which reached epidemic proportions between 1885 and 1895, clearly demonstrated the cheapness of black life in the South.\textsuperscript{137}

\textbf{African Americans and the World’s Columbian Exposition}

While race relations in the South were rapidly deteriorating, American international expositions also underwent a paradigm shift with the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Organized to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the New World, the fair was massively successful, drawing more than twenty million visitors and earning a profit of $1.4 million, all while garnering an enormous amount of positive publicity. The Exposition also introduced new fair features to American audiences, like the midway and ethnological villages, which would become omnipresent. The utopian vision of the White City at the Chicago Exposition, however, was marred by the way African Americans were treated at the fair. Although race relations in Chicago generally lacked the friction found in the South, Robert W. Rydell argues, “the racism at the World’s Columbian Exposition mirrored, framed, and reinforced the larger horrors confronting blacks throughout the United States where white supremacy meant segregation, second-class citizenship, and sometimes lynching.”\textsuperscript{138} Notably, the same argument can be made regarding the fairs in the South.

\textsuperscript{136} Gossett, \textit{Race}, 269-270.  
\textsuperscript{137} Litwack, \textit{Trouble in Mind}, 284.  
The role of African Americans at the Chicago Exposition was severely limited from the beginning with a complete lack of black representation on any of the planning boards and committees. U.S. President Benjamin Harrison, in appointing members for the National Board of Commissioners, neglected to select a single African American among 208 total appointees. The African-American press, however, eventually pressured President Harrison into designating one black man as an alternate commissioner, a move that demonstrated blatant tokenism. With this meager success on the national board, additional appeals were directed to the actual management of the exposition. The Director General also turned down the opportunity to appoint an African American to any position as a representative of his race. Despite the backing of several prominent black men, the National Board also declined to create a separate exhibit to showcase African American exhibits. Finally, blacks were also denied any representation on the Board of Lady Managers.\(^{139}\)

The fair management also exhibited racial discrimination in the hiring of exposition staff. A few black men served in various capacities, including guarding the Ferris Wheel. Similarly, the 140-person janitorial staff, whose duties included light clean up during the hours the fair was open, was exclusively African-American, conforming to the menial role that visitors expected to see blacks embody. The most striking example of discriminatory practices in hiring came from the Columbian Guard who provided escort, fire and police services for the fair. As they filled 2,000 positions before the opening of the fair, not one African American was hired. In one particularly notable instance, the white staff physician deliberately misread a chest measurement to disqualify

a black applicant, and the leadership refused to be swayed in their decision by an immediate reexamination by another white doctor who contradicted the first reading.\textsuperscript{140}

The shortage of opportunities for African Americans to exhibit at the World’s Columbian Exposition was in part a result of divisions within the race. Some leading African Americans pushed for a separate exhibit, in hopes of duplicating the success of the Colored Exhibit at the New Orleans Exposition, while others, including Ferdinand L. Barnett, the editor of Chicago’s African-American newspaper, insisted that only integrated exhibits would properly recognize African Americans as American citizens. Without a consistent message, it was easier for the white management to deny blacks a dedicated exhibit, and instead, insist that individual blacks submit their exhibits for approval by the existing state committees that were run by whites. Most blacks rejected this offer, and only a few African-American individuals exhibited, while the only other exhibits designed by African Americans were the displays of black colleges in the Palace of Liberal Arts and Education.\textsuperscript{141}

African Americans took a considerable risk in not developing their own exhibits because the door was left open for whites, particularly Southern whites, to represent blacks in an offensive manner. This realization definitely came to pass in the state exhibits of Mississippi and Louisiana, which both placed blacks in positions of subservient labor. Mississippi’s agricultural exhibit focused on the plantation days complete with an old cabin and “Aunt Dinah” filling her basket with cotton.\textsuperscript{142} In the Louisiana State Building, this pattern continued with former slaves selling miniature

\textsuperscript{140} Christopher Robert Reed, “All the World Is Here!” \textit{The Black Presence at White City} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 73-75.
\textsuperscript{141} Rydell, introduction to \textit{The Reason Why}, xvii – xix.
\textsuperscript{142} Reed, “All the World Is Here!”, 117.
bales of cotton in the agriculture exhibit. In addition, the Creole kitchen feature of the building consisted of an entirely black wait staff was supervised by white ladies.\textsuperscript{143}

These demonstrations reflect the attempts of Southern states to legitimize their enforced racial hierarchy for visitors from outside of the region, a practice that would continue in earnest at future Southern expositions.\textsuperscript{144}

The African race was represented at the Chicago fair through significant, though small, exhibits by the diasporan and continental African nations and colonies of Liberia, South Africa, Egypt, Dahomey, Algeria, Jamaica, Curaçao, Hayti, and Brazil. For some black visitors, the prominence of these exhibits only highlighted the absence of a distinctive African-American exhibit.\textsuperscript{145} The Haytian Pavilion, however, was a considerable point of pride, serving to remind African Americans of the possibility of racial triumph. Ida B. Wells called the building “the chosen spot” for African Americans at the fair to gather.\textsuperscript{146} In addition, Frederick Douglass served as Hayti’s official representative at the exposition, prompting Ferdinand L. Barnett to comment, “it remained for the Republic of Hayti to give the only acceptable representation enjoyed by us in the Fair. That republic chose Frederick Douglass to represent it as Commissioner through which courtesy the Colored American received from a foreign power the place denied to him at home.”\textsuperscript{147} Clearly, Hayti helped thwart the fair management’s attempts to exclude African Americans from the exposition.

\textsuperscript{144} Reed, \textit{“All the World Is Here!”}, 117.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 111-114.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 172.
\textsuperscript{147} Wells, Douglass, Penn, and Barnett, \textit{The Reason Why}, 81.
Wells, Douglass, and Barnett, all leading African-American activists, joined forces in protesting the lack of African-American representation at the fair, even though they did not always agree on everything among themselves. These three, with educator Irvine Garland Penn, were determined to do something to call attention to the discrimination at the fair. As a result, they created a pamphlet entitled *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*. In it, the writers presented evidence of the systematic exclusion of African Americans from any meaningful role in the exposition and recounted the horrors of race hate and discrimination that were spreading across the country. Despite the fact that 20,000 copies were printed, the exposition management and white press ignored the pamphlet. In the African American community, however, the pamphlet actually aggravated existing divisions. Some were worried that the writings might weaken any remaining support for African American rights among whites, while others were more embarrassed about calling additional attention to the obvious problems with race at the fair.  

One of the most contentious issues for African Americans at the Exposition was the celebration of Colored People’s Day on August 25, 1893. Wells and Douglass strongly disagreed over whether the idea of a special day at the fair for African Americans should be supported. Wells urged blacks to boycott the event as an example of obvious tokenism, the attempt of the white management to cover up the larger problem of African-American representation at the fair. She feared that black participation at the planned celebration would show the world that African Americans were content with their place as second-class citizens. Conversely, Douglass wanted to use the celebration to highlight the achievements of African Americans and to take advantage of the

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opportunity to criticize the Exposition from within. While the boycott certainly diminished the size of the crowds on August 25, Douglass used the occasion to deliver a rousing speech, challenging white dedication to the promises of equal rights, thundering from the podium, “There is no Negro Problem. The problem is whether the American people have honesty enough, loyalty enough, honor enough, patriotism enough to live up to their own Constitution.”149 When Wells read the accounts of Douglass’s speech, she begged his forgiveness for questioning how the day could be put to good use. Although Wells and Douglass worked together and were both considered to be protest-oriented, this conflict between them demonstrates the greater tensions in the African-American community between protest and accommodation.

The controversies over African-American representation in the management and exhibits of the Chicago Exposition had lasting effects on the organization of future expositions, particularly those in the South. The most influential aspects of the fair, however, were the other ways in which messages about race were conveyed to the audience. Although they had been included at other fairs, anthropological exhibits took on a new prominence at the World’s Columbian Exposition. The Anthropology Building contained exhibits under the direction of Frederic Ward Putnam, head of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard. In addition, the Smithsonian Institution presented a large exhibit in the Government Building. Through these exhibits, considered to be serious and scientific at the time, though thoroughly discredited today, visitors could see the progression of the evolution of man by

149 Rydell, introduction to The Reason Why, xxxii.
comparing the cultures and physical features of “savage” races to the civilized Anglo-Saxons.  

In addition to these scientific exhibits about racial hierarchy, displays at the fair also dealt with the issue of race through entertainment venues. The Chicago World’s Fair presented American audiences with new amusement features by introducing the Midway Plaisance, commonly referred to as the Midway. The addition of this entertainment area was likely inspired by the success of a privately operated amusement area that developed outside the gates of the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.  

By incorporating the entertainment within the limits of the Exposition itself, the Chicago directors influenced the development and content of every American fair to come, all of which would include a Midway under various names. While the Midway came to incorporate a mix of high and popular culture, it was also a new host for racist depictions of African Americans at the fair. For example, Aunt Jemima first appeared selling her pancake mix on the Chicago Midway in front of the R.T. Davis Milling Company’s booth shaped like a giant barrel of flour. She flipped pancakes, sang songs, and regaled her visitors with happy stories of plantation life. Nancy Green, the real woman behind the character, was a former slave, but she made the brand instantly recognizable with her portrayal of the plantation mammy character in the red bandana.  

The Exposition also included an Old Time Plantation display, an idea first promoted by Rebecca Felton, Georgia’s representative on Board of Lady Managers. As a similar display had been popular at the Philadelphia Centennial Expositions, Felton’s

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150 Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 57.  
151 Rydell, Findling, and Pelle, Fair America, 35.  
152 Greenhugh, Ephemeral Vistas, 42.  
plan to create an exhibit to “show the actual life of [the] slave – not the Uncle Tom sort” was supported by the exposition management. Felton selected two former slaves to represent the ideal “ignorant and contented darkey” in the exhibit, describing them as “two darkies of the old regime that didn’t know a letter in the book.”

From a white Southern perspective, this type of exhibit was the best way to demonstrate the proper place of African Americans in society to curious Northerners.

As a complement to the formal anthropology exhibits, the Chicago Midway also included the American introduction of ethnological villages after their very successful international debut at the 1889 Paris Exposition. Even though the villages were included among the amusements on the Midway, prominent anthropologists, including Putnam, testified to the scientific value of the exploitative displays. In fact, the entire Chicago Midway actually fell under the management of the Department of Ethnology, giving the displays “an aura of scientific respectability.”

As such, the villages provided scientific justification for Anglo-Saxons to view the nonwhite world as barbaric and uncivilized. The ethnological villages were even organized in what was then perceived to be a descending order of evolutionary progress, with the “civilized” European villages closest to the main buildings of the fair and the “savage” Africans and Native Americans at the furthest point.

The most attention-grabbing village on the Midway was inhabited by the Dahomeans, who were actually the Fon people of what is today the African nation of Benin. More than one hundred Fon men, women, and children populated the village,

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154 Quoted in Litwack, Trouble in Mind, 197; Brundage, “Meta Warrick’s 1907 ‘Negro Tableaux,’” 1373.
155 Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 62.
156 Ibid., 40.
157 Ibid., 65.
making it much larger than any other village. As a result of the publicity covering their stay at the Exposition, the inhabitants became the archetypal example of sub-Saharan Africans. Frederic Douglass made several publically critical remarks about the Dahomean Village, including his opinion that “the Dahomeans are also here to exhibit the Negro as a repulsive savage.” Similarly, many members of the black American elite generally derided the uncivilized ways of the Fon in an effort to distance African Americans from their ancestors. In accordance with this theory, anthropologist Putman asserted that “African slavery in America had not, after all, been an unmixed evil, for of a truth, the advanced social condition of the American Africans over that of their barbarous countrymen is most encouraging and wonderful.” Clearly this viewpoint proved a double-edged sword, on one side crediting slavery with the uplift of the black race in America, while on the flip side making no differentiation between the continental Africans and African Americans. Despite this conflicting opinion of the Dahomean village, it was one of the most popular attractions on the Midway, and would subsequently make appearances at numerous other expositions.

As demonstrated by these examples, the World’s Columbian Exposition was massively influential to all other expositions held in the United States, if not around the world. It became the new benchmark for world’s fair success. The changing standards demonstrated at Chicago had a particularly great influence on the organization of the world’s fairs that would follow in the South. The Exposition’s portrayal of racial attitudes that overtly emphasized white supremacy was especially influential. Changes in the structure of race relations in the South during the decade between the New Orleans at

158 Reed, “All the World Is Here!”, 144.
160 Quoted in Reed, “All the World Is Here!”, 168.
Atlanta expositions would also greatly affect the content and presentations of Southern expositions through the turn of the century.
CHAPTER THREE
COTTON STATES AND INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION AT ATLANTA, 1895

In the midst of the grand celebration that was the World’s Columbian Exposition, the American economy faltered, leading the nation into a period of deep depression that hit the already struggling South particularly hard. To Atlanta’s visionary leaders, inspired by the successes of the Chicago Exposition, and slightly embarrassed that the South, especially Georgia, had not made a better showing at that fair, the idea of an international exposition in their city, the heart of the New South, appeared to be the perfect solution. They believed that hosting a world’s fair would provide the economic stimulus needed to draw Atlanta and the region out of the depression. Enthusiastic about the idea, Atlantans filed for a charter to incorporate the Cotton States and International Exposition Company during the first week of January 1894.¹⁶¹

Accomplishing the goal of restoring the Southern economy was a multifaceted task. One stated object of the exposition was increasing trade between the South and the nations of Latin America. Because the South was ideally geographically located to pursue these markets, this was a vital component. Additionally, Atlanta wanted to encourage Northern investments to increase its level of industrialization. The Exposition aimed to accomplish these goals by displaying its agricultural, mineral, and manufacturing resources to the North and the world while implying that the prosperity of the nation was dependent on the development of the South. The New York Times described the fair’s broad objectives as follows: “First – To show the world what the South is. Second – To let the South see what are the latest achievements in the world of endeavor. Third – To bring the South into closer relations with the trading countries of

the earth.” As indicated in this statement, the fair was also expected to promote better understanding between the North and South by fostering an exchange of ideas and hopefully capital. Although it was a small city with a population of only 100,000, Atlanta took on these daunting tasks with a high level of enthusiasm typical of its reputation as the capital of the New South.

Construction of the thirteen main buildings of the Cotton States and International Exposition began on the 189 acre Exposition site in Piedmont Park in October 1894. The fair opened just under a year later on September 18, 1895, with great pomp and circumstance, concluding with President Cleveland pressing a telegraphic key to start the fair’s machinery from his summer home on Cape Cod. Visitors were welcomed onto the grounds to examine some 6,000 exhibits from thirty-seven states and thirteen countries. When the fair closed on December 31, 1895, the total attendance was 1,286,863, making it more popular than the New Orleans Exposition. The exposition cost approximately $2.5 million, and closed only $25,000 in debt.

The Cotton States and International Exposition emphasized New South ideals in combination with traditional Southern hospitality to welcome the world to Atlanta’s doorstep and promote the region. Sharon M. Mullis describes, “This vision of the New South was one of harmonious reconciliation of sectional differences, racial peace, and a new economic and social order, based on industrialization and scientific, diversified

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163 Duncan, “Atlanta 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition,” 139.
164 Ibid., 140
166 Duncan, “Atlanta 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition,” 140.
agriculture.”¹⁶⁸ The region’s African-American population played a vital role in Atlanta’s display of resources designed to further this vision. The Exposition created a strong impression of racial harmony, most notably by introducing the first ever fair building dedicated to the display of African American exhibits. The actual purpose of the building, however, was to indicate the industrial and agricultural status of blacks as the labor force to provide for the growth of the Southern economy.

As whites promoted an imaginary wave of racial harmony washing over the South, the actual situation was much different. During the Exposition, South Carolina adopted a new constitution that practically guaranteed the disfranchisement of African Americans. Although South Carolinians made earlier attempts to disfranchise blacks, particularly through the Eight-Box Ballot Act of 1882, the Constitution of 1895 finally completed the task.¹⁶⁹ Despite the eloquent defenses put forth by the six black members of the convention, the new constitution introduced a poll tax and a requirement that voters not have been convicted of certain crimes, particularly those more likely to be committed by African Americans. South Carolina also adopted the use of the “understanding clause” used in the Mississippi Constitution of 1890; however, South Carolina limited its use to two years, after which new voters wishing to register would have to pass a more stringent literacy test or pay taxes on property valued at $300 or more. The effect of these changes was devastating for African-American representation. Even though the majority of adult males in South Carolina were black, there would be no African American elected to the legislature or any other significant office for more than

¹⁶⁹ Packard, American Nightmare, 69.
fifty years.\textsuperscript{170} While the political situation for African Americans was clearly in a sharp decline in many parts of the South, blacks in Georgia continued to hold their own, with representation in the Georgia legislature into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{171}

In addition to the loss of their political rights, African Americans were also subject to increased levels of segregation. As the black population in Atlanta grew, the city developed more racially segregated settlement patterns, resulting in increased social separation of the races. Likewise, because they were excluded from white institutions and businesses, African Americans developed their own organizations, resulting in the increase of “shadow societies.”\textsuperscript{172} These communities flourished in Atlanta because of its significant population of educated and affluent African Americans resulting from the number of black colleges in the city.\textsuperscript{173} Regarding the increased social separation of the races, Miss Alice M. Bacon, who attended the Atlanta Exposition as a representative of the Hampton Institute, observed, “There came to be less and less contact between the better elements of both races, and the whites honestly came to believe that the negroes were deteriorating, while the better class of negroes, seeing with their own eyes the progress made by their race in the arts of civilization, came to regard the attitude of the whites as inexcusably prejudiced, or actually dishonest.”\textsuperscript{174} Given this viewpoint, the exhibition of black industry found at the Atlanta Exposition must have truly surprised local white visitors.

Though Bacon attributes white racist opinion to the lack of opportunity for whites to observe black progress, racist thought thrived in Atlanta and throughout the country.

\textsuperscript{170} Williamson, \textit{The Crucible of Race}, 232.
\textsuperscript{171} Meier, \textit{Negro Thought in America}, 37.
\textsuperscript{172} Harvey, “World’s Fairs in a Southern Accent,” 294.
\textsuperscript{173} Doyle, \textit{New Men, New Cities, New South}, 265.
\textsuperscript{174} Alice M. Bacon, \textit{The Negro and the Atlanta Exposition}, Occasional Papers, No. 7 (Baltimore: Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund, 1896), 8.
On the occasion of the Exposition, one plantation owner described his opinion on the black man to the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, saying, in part, “We know that the negro is improving. He works harder than he used to, though he does not want to work at all. He earns more money. He dresses better and lives better. But you can’t educate him beyond a certain point, and a little education seems to make him worse. He is an inferior, and nothing you can say or do will make it otherwise.” At the same time, the 1895 American edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* described “the inherent mental inferiority of blacks” as “an inferiority which is even more marked than their physical differences,” giving racist thought a validated academic standing. These indications of inferiority only bolstered the position of New South leaders and exposition organizers who aimed to use black labor to build their new empires.

In light of such popular opinion, it is no wonder that many African Americans were anxious to display evidence of their progress at the Atlanta Exposition. The first push for African-American exhibits to be included at the Exposition began shortly after the Exposition Company was formally organized. As early as January 1894, several prominent African-American leaders in Atlanta wrote open letters to the press encouraging a separate black exhibit, and the idea was well received. On March 22, 1894, Bishop Wesley Gaines and Rev. E. R. Carter led a delegation of blacks in an appearance before the Exposition Board to introduce the idea of having a separate building for the black exhibits and pledge the race’s support for the Exposition. Impressed with their actions, the Board created the Committee on Colored Exhibits,

which was made up of five white men who would “take into consideration the suggestions of the colored men.”

Black and white leaders had different ideas about the benefits of a separate African-American exhibit, but they overlapped on enough points to make the effort successful. Still stung from being denied the opportunity to exhibit at Chicago, black leaders believed that the opportunity to exhibit their progress in the thirty years since emancipation would help end discrimination and demonstrate their ability to function in society. I. Garland Penn, the chair of the Negro Department, criticized all naysayers by describing that one goal for the exhibit was “to show to the incredulous and doubtful of both races that their incredulity and doubt are founded upon sinking sand, and that the new negro moves.” African-American leaders also hoped than an exhibit would serve to inspire the race to strive to reach new heights in the future.

White leaders, on the other hand, saw the exhibit as a point of one-upmanship with the Chicago fair, showing that the South willingly granted blacks their own exhibit when the North denied them. Likewise, it was an example of the racial harmony that the South was trying to demonstrate to meet their economic ends. Clark Howell, editor of the Atlanta Constitution and an Exposition supporter, wrote, “the action of the Atlanta management in making this feature one of the prominent points of interest of the Exposition is a striking evidence of the good will and cordial feeling existing between Southern white people and the negroes – between former masters and former slaves.”

White supporters recognized that an African-American exhibit focused on industrial progress would certainly augment their goal of demonstrating the black role as laborer in the new industrial Southern economy. Additionally, the Exposition management saw that the exhibit had the potential to serve as a promotional tool to draw visitors and encourage additional Northern philanthropy to educate blacks, saving Southerners from giving their money to the cause.

Booker T. Washington was one of the most influential supporters of the African-American exhibit at the Cotton States and International Exposition, and through events at the fair he would soon become the leading African-American figure in the nation. Washington was born into slavery in what would become West Virginia in 1856. In his teens, he attended Hampton Institute and graduated with honors. In 1881, Washington translated his support of industrial education into his own school, opening the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama. Through the 1880s and 1890s, Washington frequently embarked on speaking tours of the North to raise money for Tuskegee. During this time, Washington finalized the details of the philosophy that would define him as a leader.

Washington, and many other black leaders of the time, adopted an accommodationist viewpoint, taking the popular ideas of the gospel of wealth and Social Darwinism and applying them to provide uplift for the black race, in contrast with the previous era of political action and protest. Because blacks demonstrated a growing disenchantment with the political realm in light of increasing disfranchisement, Washington’s philosophy did not emphasize the agitation for political rights. Instead, his message concentrated on moral virtue and economic prosperity to be achieved through

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180 Meier, Negro Thought in America, 24.
industrial education. African-American historian August Meier described, “The central theme in Washington’s philosophy was that through thrift, industry, and Christian character Negroes would eventually attain their constitutional rights.”\textsuperscript{181} Washington, however, was rarely so explicit about his ultimate goals.

In his public persona, Washington tried to be exactly what each constituency expected. In his speaking engagements, he would only express ideas that would meet with white approval. Hence, he took great care to hide his involvement in a number court cases advocating for black civil rights.\textsuperscript{182} His message appealed to self-made middle class blacks as common sense. Though middle class Northern blacks often disliked his conciliatory tone, they assumed it was used to appease the white South, and many still agreed with Washington’s message.\textsuperscript{183} White Northern self-made businessmen also saw Washington’s philosophy as common sense, and they accepted him “on perhaps more completely equal terms than any other black man in American history.” Washington could also shift his image depending on his target audience in the South. To white Southerners, he was humble and careful to keep his place, but to Southern blacks, Washington presented a “fatherly image.”\textsuperscript{184}

With this gift for changing his persona according to the situation, it is no wonder that Washington came to the attention of the Atlanta Exposition managers early on. Exposition organizers were familiar with Washington’s ideas from speeches at the Labor Congress that took place in conjunction with the World’s Columbian Exposition and before the Annual Conference of Christian Workers in Atlanta, also in 1893. They were

\textsuperscript{181} Meier, \textit{Negro Thought in America}, 103.
\textsuperscript{183} Meier, \textit{Negro Thought in America}, 118.
\textsuperscript{184} Harlan, \textit{Booker T. Washington}, viii.
impressed with his thoughts on “the dignity of labor” and importance of industrial education. ¹⁸⁵ Although Washington had been in touch with black supporters of the African-American exhibit at the fair, it was the white directors that persuaded him to become an active participant in the Exposition by inviting him, on very short notice, to join the fair’s delegation in testifying before the Appropriations Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives to ask for financial assistance for the Exposition. The delegation was made up of twenty-five of the most prominent and influential white men of Georgia and three African-American members: Wesley J. Gaines of Georgia and Abram L. Grant of Texas, both bishops in the AME Church, and Booker T. Washington. In a clever political move, the exposition management hoped to attract more federal support, and demonstrate racial harmony in the South by including African Americans in the group.

The appropriations hearing was scheduled for May 1894, and the African-American members of the delegation were summoned hastily to Washington, DC, by telegram. The entire delegation had only a few minutes to congregate before proceeding to the hearing. In the hearing, several white members of the delegation spoke at length, allowing the three black men very little time to give their testimony at the end of the session. Even with the short amount of preparation time, the eloquence of the black men amazed the rest of the delegation and the members of the committee. Walter G. Cooper, in the official fair history, recalled, “Profoundly moved and inspired by the opportunity of a lifetime, they rose to the full height of the occasion, and the thoughts and aspirations of years crowded upon their lips, giving them an utterance which in power and in

¹⁸⁵ Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 83; Booker T. Washington, Up from Slavery, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 120.
earnestness exceeded anything which had been heard by the distinguished men who waited upon their words. Bishop Gaines spoke first, emphasizing black progress in the South. Bishop Grant followed, stressing the particular role of the black man as a laborer. Both bishops accentuated the friendly relationship between the races in the South that would make the Exposition a success. Washington spoke last, referring occasionally to notes he had jotted down on the back of an envelope. Though nervous about saying just the right thing, he impressed the members of Congress with his comments on racial self-help. He concluded by explaining that he had broken his personal rule about not getting involved in politics to address the Committee for a worthy cause, and he called on their support to help allow the black population to give an account of their progress at the Cotton States and International Exposition. Largely as a result of these final speeches, the Appropriations Committee unanimously recommended that the Exposition receive funding.

The appropriation was debated on the floor of the House of Representatives in August. The speeches of the black members of the delegation made a strong impression on the congressmen, as several mentions were made of the role African Americans would play at the fair. In the course of the debate, several congressmen presented petitions from groups of black citizens across the South in support of a federal appropriation for the Exposition. Several representatives, including George W. Murray, an African-American congressman from South Carolina made eloquent speeches in favor of the appropriation as well. Murray explained that African Americans were in favor of the Exposition because it would allow them the opportunity to exhibit their extraordinary progress since

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emancipation. He also believed that the chance for whites and blacks to work together to manage the exposition was bound to result in better relations between the races, with whites ultimately realizing that the black man is entitled to participate in the government of the nation. Murray concluded his remarked in a stirring fashion, stating, “We want an opportunity to prove that this country is truly a cosmopolitan country, that it is neither a white man’s country nor a black man’s country, but a country to the building up of which all American citizens have alike contributed, whether by effort of muscle or of brain.”

Democrat William J. Coombs of New York also spoke in favor of the appropriation, largely inspired by the testimony of Bishops Gaines and Grant. Until he heard their testimony he “had no idea of the advances which have been made by the colored race.” Coombs was impressed that “Instead of being a hindrance to the prosperity of the South, they will furnish a body of workmen to be drawn upon for the development of the future enterprises of that section.” The divergent reasons for supporting the Exposition, as demonstrated by Representatives Murray and Coombs, illuminate the overall differences between black and white opinions about the role of the African-American exhibit at the Atlanta Exposition and other expositions in the South.

The appropriation amendment passed the House by a vote of 171 to 49, awarding $200,000 in support of the Exposition. The money, however, came with one important provision. Instead of including the African-American exhibit within the confines of the Government building, the legislation required the exposition company to provide a separate building to house the exhibit. In response, Charles A. Collier, President of the Exposition Company, with Exposition Board members Evan P. Howell and Clement A.  

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189 Ibid., 8384.
190 Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 28.
Evans pledged to provide a building of at least 25,000 square feet for the exhibit, “free of all expense for entrance fees and rent for exhibits.”

With plans for an African-American exhibit progressing quickly, the all white Committee on Colored Exhibits met on September 11, 1894 and elected state commissioners from eleven Southern states to officially establish the Negro Department. The Committee initially requested that Washington serve as the chief of the Department, but he turned down the appointment in favor of his work at Tuskegee. He did, however, accept the position of state commissioner for Alabama. The Rev. A. E. P. Albert from Louisiana, who had spoken so eloquently at the New Orleans Exposition, was among the other notable commissioners. The Committee then appointed four auxiliary commissioners from each state to form state boards of five members each to do the work of collecting appropriate and representative exhibits for the Negro Building. The Exposition managers also allocated $4,000 to cover traveling expenses incurred by the state commissioners while securing exhibits for the Department.

The Negro state commissioners met in Atlanta on January 19, 1895, with the purpose of electing a chief for the Department. Largely due to Washington’s influence, the commissioners unanimously selected I. Garland Penn, the principal of a black school in Lynchburg, VA. Penn had experience with world’s fairs through authoring a section for the pamphlet protesting the lack of black involvement at the Chicago Exposition. He also had experience as a correspondent for several black newspapers; and most importantly, he was a disciple of Washington’s philosophy of self-help. The

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192 Washington, Up from Slavery, 122.

193 Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 58.
commissioners’ selection was approved by the Executive Board of the Exposition Company, who provided a monthly salary of seventy-five dollars for the position.\(^{194}\) Penn’s office and the headquarters for the Negro Department were located in the predominantly black neighborhood on Auburn Avenue, separate from the Exposition offices.\(^{195}\) The initial work of the Negro commissioners at this first meeting was widely praised among whites. An *Atlanta Constitution* editorial applauding their work commented, “they are the right men in the right place” and added, “These peaceful, faithful, intelligent and enterprising people deserve every encouragement from their white neighbors.”\(^{196}\) Likewise, some blacks enthusiastically praised the idea, hopeful that the Department would “go farther toward breaking up the accursed prejudice against them than anything that has ever happened.”\(^{197}\)

While Penn aimed to use the Negro Department to accomplish these goals by highlighting the best and most accomplished of the race, there were many in the African-American community who questioned the wisdom of the exhibit and the goals of the Negro Department. Observer Alice Bacon reported, “Many of the most cultivated and refined colored men and women looked upon the project with disfavor.” Some, particularly Northern blacks, doubted the good faith of the Exposition managers and did not see the potential for any positive outcomes from the exhibit. Others feared that the black community would be unable to raise enough money and exhibits to make the endeavor a success. They believed that failure would be worse than turning down the


\(^{195}\) Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 211.


opportunity. The leading reason for opposing the Negro Building, however, was a fear of discrimination at the fair and throughout the region. For many African Americans, the Negro Building itself was the ultimate example of Jim Crow segregation, and they believed that supporting such a project would only lend approval to discriminatory policies. Several artists adopted this stance and refused to allow their work to be shown in a separate African-American exhibit. Likewise, some states had trouble soliciting representative exhibits because of opposition in the African-American community.

Some opponents took an even broader view and vowed not to support the Exposition because blacks’ rights were restricted across the South. Similarly, many African Americans were concerned about discrimination while traveling to the fair. For example, well before the opening of the fair, Booker T. Washington received a letter from a black schoolteacher in Florida expressing concern over traveling to the Exposition in Jim Crow railroad cars. The teacher wrote, “There are some strong reasons shown why [negroes] should not [attend],” and requested Washington’s help in countering these arguments. There is no record of Washington’s reply, if any, but he almost certainly would have taken the accommodationist stance that only through opportunities like presenting an exhibit of black progress at the fair would blacks prove that they were worthy of better treatment.

As preparations for the Exposition began in earnest, local African Americans easily found additional reasons to oppose the fair. Demonstrating a distinct contrast with all of the Exposition propaganda espousing African-American progress, black convict

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199 Ibid., 19.
200 Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 84.
labor was used in the site preparations for the fairgrounds. Not only did this decision create additional opposition in the black community, but it was also a large obstacle to overcome for black leaders who supported the Exposition. The presence of the chain gang made their mission to create a new image of a race that was not inherently prone to criminal behavior significantly more difficult.  

Fulton County donated the labor of its chain gang to the Exposition Company as the county’s contribution to the Exposition in light of their inability to make a direct donation of cash. The convicts worked on grading the park for nearly a year, moving about a million yards of earth, instead of their usual duty working on the public roads. The value of this labor was estimated to be at least $100,000. The Exposition Company was approached by a delegation of workingmen who asked that only free labor be used, and many African-American groups were outraged with the use of this barbaric labor system. The managers, however, continued to use the chain gang, justifying their actions with the opinion that “In Georgia it has been found better to put [convicts] to work on the public roads than to let them lie in jail, where they become victims of disease.”

While construction was underway on the grounds, the Exposition management and the Negro Department were also hard at work making plans to accommodate the influx of African-American visitors that would be drawn to the fair because of the Negro Building. The Negro Department established a public comfort department to help African-American visitors find suitable accommodations in Atlanta, in the same way that there was a department to serve white visitors. Due to concern that out-of-town visitors would not want to stay in the type of boardinghouses typically available to blacks in the

203 Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 29.
city, the department compiled a list of all available rooms, both in hotels and private residences, and assigned rooms to visitors by correspondence to assure that everyone was taken care of to the best of their abilities. Black entrepreneurs also undertook projects so that three hotels would be available to African Americans during the fair, with one conveniently located near the Negro Building and the Jackson Street entrance to the fairgrounds.\textsuperscript{204} The Exposition management also made a special appropriation of funds to provide hospital services on the grounds for the black population.\textsuperscript{205} While these efforts by the Exposition directors may seem helpful, they also reveal the high level of segregation that existed in the city. These accommodations were all part of the great charade of racial harmony being put on by the Exposition leaders in that it took an event of the size and visibility of the fair to make these services available to the black population at all.

The Exposition’s opening day ceremonies were the ultimate stage to demonstrate the fair’s dedication to racial inclusion, and for the modern observer to see just how far removed from the daily struggle of most Southern blacks the portrayal had become. For his part, I. Garland Penn worked tirelessly to promote the goals of the Negro Department, one of which was to have some representation of the race at the Exposition opening. In early August, Penn used his position to convince the Committee on Negro Exhibits to pass a resolution stating their recommendation “that Booker T. Washington, or some suitable colored man be selected to represent the colored Race in the opening ceremonies of the Exposition.”\textsuperscript{206} Penn also pledged to visit each member of the committee on


\textsuperscript{205} Cooper, \textit{The Cotton States and International Exposition and South}, 63.

\textsuperscript{206} Irving Garland Penn to Washington, Atlanta, August 12, 1895, in \textit{BTW Papers}, Vol. 3, 567.
ceremonies to further push his point. Within the week, Exposition President Collier made it clear that he did not like the idea of an African-American speaker at the opening by suggesting to Penn that they hold separate opening ceremonies for the Negro Building. Penn pledged to Washington that he would continue the fight, stating, “I shall insist upon your name on the principal programme and shall either get you or a point blank refusal, then it may be that I will take to the dedication business.”207 Penn continued to lobby the Exposition directors by emphasizing that Washington’s speech before Congress helped the Company win its appropriation. Finally, on August 23, Penn notified Washington by telegram and letter that the directors had voted to invite him to speak. In the letter, Penn wrote, “Accept congratulations and I feel congratulated my self over the success of our fight. We have verily fought a good fight. You are the man.”208 The next day Washington received the official invitation from President Collier, who also clarified that a portion of the auditorium would be set aside for African Americans during the ceremonies. Washington replied to accept the invitation, and explained how much he appreciated “the honor of this invitation, not so much in a personal sense, but in the recognition of the race.”209

With the ceremony program finalized, the morning of September 18, 1895, opening day of the Cotton States and International Exposition, dawned as a perfect fall day in the Atlanta. The celebration began with a lengthy parade to the Exposition grounds including various directors, officers, and dignitaries along with a number of military groups. Penn wrote to Washington earlier in September about his efforts to “do

As a result of his efforts, and reminding the crowd of the role that African Americans had been granted at the fair, the Georgia Second battalion of colored infantry and the black Lincoln Guards from Macon, Georgia both under the command of Lieutenant Colonel F. H. Crumbley rounded out the military section of the procession. The troops were followed by carriages occupied by the Exposition officers, including the chief and commissioners of the Negro Department.211

Upon reaching the Auditorium Building, the Exposition officers and speakers took their places on the stage in front of a segregated audience that filled the hall nearly to capacity. Washington and Penn were the only two African Americans on stage. As Alice Bacon recalled, the Exposition opening had two surprises in store for visitors, “One was the negro exhibit, the other was the exhibit of the negro” in the form of Booker T. Washington.212 Washington recalled that the African-American section of the audience cheered vigorously when he entered the room, while the white portion of the crowd offered only a few faint cheers.213 After the opening prayer and a dedicatory ode were presented, Exposition President Charles A. Collier spoke. Amidst his praise for the supporters of the Exposition and his confident predictions that the fair would help raise up the South, he proclaimed that African Americans “will share largely in the honors and practical benefits of the Exposition” due to their involvement in the preparations for the fair and their responsibility for their own department.214 After a brief address from the

211 “Miles of Moving Soldiers,” Atlanta Constitution, September 19, 1895; Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 94.
212 Bacon, The Negro and the Atlanta Exposition, 11.
213 Washington, Up from Slavery, 126.
214 Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 96.
President of the Woman’s Board, the stage was set for the most important and memorable minutes of the fair, the address of “The Negro Orator.”

Washington’s speech overshadowed all of the other addresses at the Exposition’s opening, as well as any other occurrence in the entire span of the fair in terms of lasting historical impact. Washington agonized over the content of his speech; never before had he spoke to Southern whites, Northern whites, and blacks at the same time. Though he “was determined to say nothing [he] did not feel from the bottom of [his] heart to be right and true,” he also believed that he had the potential to destroy the success of the Exposition and any additional progress of his race with the wrong words. With these possible implications on his mind, Washington thought it strange that no Exposition official ever asked him what he planned to say, or made any attempt to censor his remarks.

Washington was introduced to the crowd as the “representative of negro enterprise and negro civilization” and was greeted with considerable applause, particularly from the Jim Crow section, when he rose to speak. The sunlight streaming through the auditorium windows lit him dramatically on the stage, and Washington initially moved about to try to avoid having the sun directly in his eyes. Eventually planted his feet with his heels together and toes turned out, faced into the light, and clenching a pencil in his hand, began to speak. The crowd quieted, eager to hear what he had to say. The New York World described the scenes as follows: “His voice rang out

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215 Ibid., 98. While all other speakers at the opening are listed under headings including their names in Cooper’s history, the section detailing Washington’s speech appears under the heading “The Negro Orator.”
216 Washington, Up from Slavery, 124.
clear and true, and he paused impressively as he made each point. Within ten minutes the multitude was in an uproar of enthusiasm, handkerchiefs were waved, canes were flourished, hats were tossed in the air. The fairest women of Georgia stood up and cheered. It was as if the orator had bewitched them.\footnote{“Article in the New York World,” September 18, 1895, in BTW Papers, Vol. 4, 9.}

Washington’s speech, later dubbed the Atlanta Compromise by W. E. B. Du Bois, did not include any new additions to the core philosophy that he had been teaching for years.\footnote{Bacon, The Negro and the Atlanta Exposition, 12.} The prominence of the event and the nature of the audience, however, brought tremendous attention. Washington began by pointing out that African Americans made up one-third of the population of the South and they could not be ignored if the region was to make additional progress. He thanked the Exposition management for its recognition of the race, and presented the exhibit of black progress, warning the crowds, “you must not expect overmuch.” He went on to acknowledge the white men, particularly Northern philanthropists, who made such progress possible. In keeping with his philosophy, Washington urged both blacks and whites to “Cast down your bucket where you are” and work together in the South, in areas of expertise according to race, and among the people they were familiar with to build the economic progress of the region. To illustrate his point, Washington famously thrust his hand into the air and stated, “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” With this concession to the white Southerner’s desire for segregation, the audience leaped to its feet in applause.\footnote{Harlan, Booker T. Washington, 218.}

Although throughout the speech Washington focused on the mutual dependence of black and white Southerners, he went on to further sacrificed black equality by stating, “The
wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly… The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house.”

Thus Washington expounded on the foundation of his “compromise,” trading black civil rights for economic opportunity.

When Washington concluded his address, the audience reacted with frenzied adulation. White Southern women threw flowers onto the stage where Washington stood. Whites and blacks alike found themselves moved to tears. Former Governor of Georgia, Rufus K. Bullock, who was acting as the Master of Ceremonies, rushed across the stage to shake Washington’s hand, as did other officials on the platform. Clark Howell, editor of the Atlanta Constitution, commented, “That man’s speech is the beginning of a moral revolution in America,” bringing the audience to a renewed roar.

Washington recorded his recollections the next day in a letter to the editor of the New York World:

As I sat on the platform… as I saw these Southern men and these black men and beautiful and cultured Southern women wave their hats and handkerchiefs and clap their hands and shout in approval of what I said, I seemed to have been carried away in a vision, and it was hard for me to realize as I spoke that it was not all a beautiful dream, but an actual scene, right here in the heart of the South.

Washington received so many congratulations after giving his speech that he found it difficult to leave the building.

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223 Harlan, Booker T. Washington, 220.
225 Washington to the Editor of the New York World, Atlanta, September 19, 1895, in BTW Papers, Vol. 4, 16.
Washington’s speech was very well received among whites in the North and South. The *New York World*, proclaimed Washington to be both “the Hero of the Occasion” and “A Negro Moses” in its headlines alone.\(^\text{227}\) The *Atlanta Constitution* proudly pronounced Washington as “without a peer among his race.”\(^\text{228}\) The *Constitution* also declared that the speech “could not have been excelled… It was in the very best of taste and there was not a jarring note in it.”\(^\text{229}\) Additionally, Clark Howell, the paper’s editor, called the comments “a platform upon which the whites and the blacks can stand with full justice to each,” and a paper editorial proclaimed Washington to be “a wise counselor and a safe leader.”\(^\text{230}\) There was no doubt that Washington’s accommodationist position, which had won him the invitation to speak in the first place, was becoming more and more popular, as word of the speech spread across the South and the nation. After reading the address, even President Cleveland thanked Washington for making the speech, and told him, “Your words cannot fail to delight and encourage all who wish well for your race.”\(^\text{231}\)

Several papers, primarily from the North, commented on Washington’s theme of interracial cooperation. The *Washington Post* praised the speech by saying “Both races may well be proud of him.”\(^\text{232}\) Additionally, *Scientific American* hailed the Exposition opening as “the day of reconciliation between the whites and the negroes,” largely as a result of the impact of Washington’s address.\(^\text{233}\) Meanwhile, a reporter in Atlanta from the *Chicago Inter Ocean*, after hearing much talk about the speech as an example of the

\(^{228}\) “Opened with Great Éclat,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 19, 1895.
\(^{229}\) “A Plea for His Race,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 19, 1895.
\(^{231}\) Grover Cleveland to Washington, Buzzards Bay, MA, October 6, 1895, in *BTW Papers*, Vol. 4, 50.
awakening of the race, commented, “It seems to me, however, that is would be more appropriate to speak of the awakening of the white race to the real merit of the earnest effort, the work accomplished, and the possibilities of the colored people.”234

Other Northern papers, though also largely in support of the speech, occasionally gave more critical feedback. While the New York Tribune pointed out the ironies of a black man giving such a prominent speech in the South at the same time as the South Carolina Constitutional Convention sought to “degrade the negro to a brute level and keep him there,” the Charleston News and Courier fired back, stating, “There is not one delegate in the South Carolina Constitutional Convention who would refuse the right of suffrage to Booker Washington – the convention is planning to keep the negro away from the polls until he is fit to vote. It is planning to establish such a standard for citizenship as will remove the danger of negro domination in South Carolina.”235 These editorial comments reflect the true nature of race relations in the South. While Washington and many others looked to portray a happy picture of interracial cooperation within the Exposition gates, the realities were far more difficult.

Chiefly as a result of this contrast, reaction to the speech from the African-American community was far more varied. Those who supported the accommodationist viewpoint widely praised the speech, while often those who questioned the best course of action initially reacted favorably, but weeks, months, or even years, later changed their opinion. The Southwestern Christian Advocate published weekly in New Orleans, believed that the speech was “in every way creditable to the head and heart of the intensely earnest speaker, and we have reasons to believe that untold good will result

235 Booker T. Washington on the Negro’s Progress,” Literary Digest, October 5, 1895, 7.
therefrom.” Amid congratulations from his well-known contemporaries, Washington also received messages of encouragement and approval from ordinary people. William J. Cansler, a black teacher in Knoxville, Tennessee, praised the speech, and encouraged Washington to have a lapel pins made of a hand with fingers extended to symbolize the speech’s most famous phrase. Even W. E. B. Du Bois, who within the decade would become one of Washington’s most outspoken critics, initially praised the speech. He wrote to Washington, “Let me heartily congratulate you upon your phenomenal success at Atlanta – it was a word fitly spoken.” Du Bois also wrote to the New York Age to suggest that Washington’s philosophy as described in the address could serve as a new basis for race relations in the South.

In contrast, several prominent African-Americans in Atlanta condemned the speech. Bishop Henry M. Turner, who was one of several radical black speakers at the New Orleans Exposition, thought that Washington “will have to live a long time to undo the harm he has done to our race.” Likewise, John Hope, who would soon be the president of Atlanta University, commented, “I regard it as cowardly and dishonest for any of our colored men to tell white people or colored people we are not striving for equality.” The Washington Bee was one of the leaders in criticizing Washington in the black press, although it took the editors a month to acquire the courage to do so. In an editorial published on October 19, the paper excoriated Washington, calling the speech “nothing more than an apology for the white negro haters of the South” which “suited the

236 “Another Epoch,” New Orleans Southwestern Christian Advocate, September 26, 1895.
white prejudiced element of this country.” The Bee encouraged members of the race to “understand a speech before [they] applaud it.”\textsuperscript{241} The Bee later reported on one effort to do just that, when the members of the Bethel Literary and Historical Society organized an event to review the speech. Although both sides of the argument were represented, those who criticized Washington “carried the house by storm,” contending that the speech “conceded the inferiority of the negro” and “ignored the civil rights of the negro.”\textsuperscript{242}

After the initial outpouring of support, these blacks realized that Washington’s “compromise” was in no way a fair trade. On behalf of his race, he gave up tangible rights with immediately visible consequences like voting, to accomplish the “vague, subjective, and gradual” goal of black economic advancement, which whites had no reason to fear. Although by 1895 blacks had been stripped of their political power in many areas of the South, speaking in Georgia where blacks continued to be represented in the state legislature, Washington traded away rights that some blacks in his audience still held.\textsuperscript{243} This extreme use of the accommodationist viewpoint by Washington marked a striking change in popular black thought. Using Washington’s address as the epitome of black thought at the Atlanta Exposition, there were drastic changes in the ten years since the New Orleans Exposition. At New Orleans, although the white managers hoped to use the Exposition to restrict opportunities for blacks to agricultural and industrial pursuits, the black speakers and exhibitors used the venue to demand justice for their race. In contrast, at Atlanta, black speakers and white directors delivered the same

\textsuperscript{241} “Apologizing for Wrongs,” Washington Bee, October 19, 1895.
\textsuperscript{242} “Booker T. Washington Denounced,” Washington Bee, October 26, 1895.
\textsuperscript{243} Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 325.
message of black progress directed through industrial and agricultural channels at the expense of civil rights.\textsuperscript{244}

Despite the criticism based on the arresting nature of his accommodationist viewpoint, Washington was quickly thrust into a position of national black leadership as a result of the Atlanta speech. The death of Frederick Douglass only a few months before the opening of the Exposition created a power vacuum in the African-American community that Washington was able to fill. The black community, however, had almost nothing to do with anointing Washington as the new national leader. Ultimately, white Exposition managers selected him to speak at the opening, and the praise of the white press brought his renown to a national level. Washington presented the safe choice for white leaders, and his message fit perfectly with the dominant forces of the time.\textsuperscript{245} Many blacks, however, also acknowledged Washington’s new leadership position. T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the prominent African-American newspaper, the \textit{New York Age}, confirmed Washington’s meteoric rise to national leadership in a letter to Washington dated September 26. He wrote, “It looks as if you are our Douglass and I am glad of it… You are the best equipped of the lot of us to be the single figure ahead of the procession. \textit{We must have a head}, and it ought to be in the South and every one of us should hold up his hands.”\textsuperscript{246} The transition of power between Douglass and Washington clearly marked the transition from protest to accommodation, with new theories based in pragmatism that tried to find ways for blacks to survive and thrive in their own way.\textsuperscript{247}

\textsuperscript{244} Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 82. 
\textsuperscript{246} Timothy Thomas Fortune to Washington, New York, September 26, 1895, in \textit{BTW Papers}, Vol. 4, 31. 
\textsuperscript{247} Litwack, \textit{Trouble in Mind}, 355.
Despite the fact that Washington’s address overshadowed all of the other events at the Exposition opening, there were two additional speeches that touched on the issue of race. Speaking in place of Georgia Governor W. Y. Atkinson, who was too ill to give his address, Mr. George Brown had the unenviable task of following Washington. In discussing the recent successes of the state, Brown emphasized the “absolute justice and fairness with which we have treated our colored citizens.”248 U.S. District Court Judge Emory Speer gave the keynote address for the occasion. In a particularly lengthy speech, Speer declared that “the so-called ‘race question’ does not exist,” and condemned those who aimed to “disturb the good feeling between the races to advance their political ends.” He believed in industrial education as the key to black progress in the South, as displayed in the Negro Building.249 Speer’s comments demonstrate that he and Brown both sought to further the Exposition’s goal of creating an illusion of racial harmony in the South.

The key to this illusion was the Negro Building itself. One writer raved, “The Paris exposition had its Eiffel tower, the world’s fair had its Ferris Wheel, but Atlanta has its negro building.”250 The 25,000 square foot building was located at the southeastern corner of the fairgrounds, near the Jackson Street entrance but away from most of the other main buildings. All of the work on the building was done by African Americans, led by black contractors J. F. King of LaGrange, Georgia, and J. W. Smith of Atlanta at a total cost of $10,000 (see fig. 2). Artwork on the pediments above the entrances was meant to illustrate the progress of the race. One side showed a slave woman with a one room log cabin and a log church, representing the African American at emancipation. The other side had a portrait of Frederick Douglass, a comfortable modern home, a stone

248 Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 100.
249 Ibid., 104.
250 Quoted in “To Open October 21,” Atlanta Constitution, October 13, 1895.
church, and other images representing the race’s progress over 30 years. In the center there was an image of a plow and mule, representing black man plowing his own field in 1895, but also serving as a reminder of how far he has come from plowing the field for someone else.251

![Image of Negro Building Exterior, Atlanta]


Although fair visitors had been able to view the exhibits for more than a month, the Negro Building was officially dedicated with special ceremonies on October 21. Many white northern philanthropists came to see the results of their efforts, and African Americans flocked to the Exposition from across the South. The New York Times proclaimed the crowd to be “the largest attendance the exposition has had,” while the Atlanta Constitution estimated the attendance in the auditorium to be made up of at least

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251 Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 59-60.
5,000 blacks and 500 whites, and declared “It was [the negro’s] day. He gloried in it.”

In addition to the audience, many notable attendees, including Booker T. Washington, had the privilege of observing the program from the stage. An opening ode set the tone of the event, placing imagery of loyal slaves, the lost cause, and elements of Washington’s philosophy into rhyming verse. J. W. E. Bowen, professor at Gammon School of Theology in Atlanta, was the featured speaker of the event. In contrast to radical speeches heard at a similar event at the New Orleans Exposition, each speaker at Atlanta tried to put the theory of accommodation into his own words. Bowen urged blacks to stay in America and “contribute to [the race problem’s] correct solution until this nation shall become in truth homogeneous in sentiment though heterogeneous in blood.” The sentiment Bowen was hoping would evolve, however, was not one of equality, for he also denied that there was any such thing as “perfect equality of individual or race,” and declared those who believed in such a theory to be “woefully deficient in rudimentary training or are still wrapped in the swaddling bands of medieval infancy.” Following Bowen’s address, I. Garland Penn spoke briefly to present the exhibit to the Exposition management, and President Collier responded, again stressing the cooperation between the races that enabled the display to be made.

Visitors to the Negro Building first saw an eye-catching statue inside the main entrance. W.C. Hill’s statue, “The Negro With Chains Broken but Not Off,” portrayed a black man with his wrists bound, although the chain that held the handcuffs was nearly broken. Penn recognized the connection between the scene in the statue and the

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253 “Negro Progress,” Atlanta Constitution, October 22, 1895.
“condition of the colored man in the entire country” during this time period. Hill’s statue was part of the exhibit from the Amateur Art Club of Washington, DC. Hill actually traveled to Atlanta for the Exposition and operated a concession selling busts of Frederick Douglass based on his own artwork.

While many rightly hailed the Negro Building at Atlanta as an important first for the race, the exhibit space granted was actually 9,000 square feet less than the Colored People’s Exhibit at New Orleans. Similarly, there were fewer exhibits and fewer states represented at Atlanta. New Orleans had participation from African Americans in nearly every state and territory, but Atlanta had contributions from only twenty-two states concentrated in the South, with dedicated state exhibits only for those eleven states from which Negro commissioners were appointed. Space in the Negro Building, however, was free, while other exhibitors at the Exposition paid one dollar per square foot of exhibit space.

Despite the smaller exhibit size, the displays still included an enormous variety of materials. Penn described the exhibits as covering the areas of literature, manufacturing and industrial work, agricultural work, mechanical work, businesses, art, domestic preparation, and horticulture, among others. Taking a more literal view of the assortment of objects, the Brooklyn Daily Eagle Information Bureau informed visitors that they could find the following objects in the Negro exhibit:

- portraits, books and papers by colored authors and editors, some tile work showing good color, wood working, edibles, jellies, preserves, cabinet work, upholstery, needle work, artificial flowers, a few paintings that are

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256 Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 80.
257 Ibid., 60.
pretty bad, metal work, surgical supplies, photographs, farm work, field crops, relics, model locomotives and ships, school work showing remarkable capacity and a bank statement.\textsuperscript{258}

The exhibition of the U.S. Patent Office was particularly notable. It included such African-American inventions as the ventilation system used in Pullman’s train cars. Some inventions were also displayed in the state’s exhibits. For example, Georgia’s exhibit included a car coupling device invented by A. S. Bailey. Similarly, New York made a display of the electrical inventions of Granville T. Woods including the synchronous multiplex railroad telegraph and an underground system of electric propulsion that was being tested at Coney Island at the time.

The building’s strength was in the education exhibits which included Howard University, Hampton Institute, Claflin University, Tuskegee Normal and Industrial School, Fisk University, Clark University, and many others that displayed the industrial work of their students. Hampton’s 1,200 square foot exhibit was the largest single exhibit in the building, and was widely considered to be the most impressive. One highlight of the artistic displays was the exhibition of three paintings by Henry O. Tanner on loan for the Exposition from Hampton Institute and from a private collector.\textsuperscript{259} Additionally, several areas of black progress were represented via photographs. Penn solicited and organized contributions to illustrate black progress in church building and home life, with photographs of churches and homes built and owned by African Americans throughout the South.\textsuperscript{260}

Although businesses were not strongly represented, two banking companies owned and operated by African Americans captured visitors’ attention. The Grand

\textsuperscript{258} Hand book to the Cotton States and International Exposition, 59.
\textsuperscript{259} Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 61.
Fountain banking system based in Richmond, VA, was organized by a former slave. At the time of the exhibit, the system had spread to twenty states and had done more than two million dollars in business. The South Carolina Banking Association, based in Florence, South Carolina, was a similar operation that exhibited examples of its success.

Always the radical, Bishop Turner’s booth in the Negro Building was marked “Uncivilized Africa.” It contained a variety of items he collected from Liberia and Sierra Leone, demonstrating the capabilities of the race even away from the “civilizing” influence of the Anglo-Saxon. Turner displayed several examples of textile work such as a silk quilt with the design of a coffee tree in bloom made by a woman in Liberia and a priest’s robe of woven flax. Other items in this exhibit included religious charms, leatherwork, drums, weapons, jewelry, and carvings. Turner also organized an exhibit displaying the work of former slaves to demonstrate their various talents and abilities. Although he was proud of all of the displays in the Negro Building, he explained his unique exhibits by stating, “There is nothing new in all this fine work… I have no patience with the talk about the new negro as a workman. Why, that was the reason he was kept in slavery so long. He was too valuable to be set free.”

In addition to the serious exhibits of African-American progress, the Negro Building also hosted leisurely pursuits. On a daily schedule, jubilee singers and banjo players performed for the crowds in the pavilion of the tower. The Building also

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contained a large restaurant, which was “patronized liberally by both races without the slightest friction.” The restaurant, however, became the center of controversy because it was the only place on the grounds with a liquor license. This fact instigated a heated conflict between members of the race about the issue of temperance, and several groups angrily called upon the Exposition management to stop the service of alcohol in the Negro Building. Although the directors refused to step in, on one of the final days of the fair, the National Colored Women’s congress added its voice to the argument, condemning “the drink service even at tables in the restaurant of the negro building.”

The report of the Exposition’s Highest Board of Award encouraged every visitor to see the exhibits of the Negro Building where “the advancement of the colored population in intelligence, industry, and enterprise is shown.” The Board did, however, acknowledge that the strength of the exhibit was mainly in the educational exhibitions. The importance of the Building was further demonstrated when President Cleveland visited the Exposition on October 23. Exposition

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266 “For Their Race,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 29, 1895.
267 Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 75.
President Collier scheduled him to hold a reception in the Negro Building in the afternoon, stating, “I would rather that Mr. Cleveland should see what the negro has done since the war and what the exposition shows him to be doing now than almost any other feature of the fair.”

Upon visiting the Building, the President met with Penn and Washington, shook hands with a number of visitors who were anxious to meet him, and briefly toured the exhibits (see fig. 3). He concluded that the exhibit was “a credit to the exposition and to the race.”

During his own visit to the Exposition, Vice President Adlai Stevenson made a special trip outside of his set itinerary to visit the Negro Building. After viewing the exhibits and meeting Washington, Penn, and Turner, he declared, “From what I have seen in the way of industrial progress in the colored race and in the manner in which it is permitted to be displayed, I can say that it may safely be left for the southern people and the negroes to settle their own problems without outside interference.”

Stevenson, a Democrat, was likely making a subtle reference to the defeat of the Federal Elections Bill of 1890, sponsored by Northern Republican Henry Cabot Lodge, which would have provided federal supervision for congressional elections, aimed at preventing African-American disfranchisement in the South. With Stevenson’s ringing endorsement, the Exposition organizers clearly achieved above and beyond their original goals. In welcoming African-Americans to participate in creating the illusion of racial harmony at the Exposition, the organizers won the opportunity for the South to manage race relations in any way the region’s white leaders saw fit.

Outside the confines of the Negro Building, the illusion of racial harmony was stronger in some places than in others. In many other areas of the fair, the ideas of white
supremacy flourished. After the Chicago world’s fair whetted the white public’s appetite for scientific racism until the veil of anthropology, the scientists of the Smithsonian prepared to make a new exhibit for the Atlanta Exposition. After some ill-advised remarks to the press, however, the Institution found itself at the center of a racial controversy. During a trip to Atlanta to discuss the progress of the U.S. Government exhibit, Dr. Charles W. Dabney, the chairman of the board in charge of that exhibit enthusiastically described a new and rare display that would be a part of the Smithsonian’s exhibit. He remarked, “here will be seen a series of figures illustrating the development of the negro from the earliest animals, through the ape, the chimpanzee and the south African bushman down to the negro as he is in this country.”271 This news piece was picked up by the Associated Press and spread across the country, deeply upsetting the African-American community. The Southwestern Christian Advocate editorialized, “we do not think our government exhibits should be the first occasion to revive the old question of Negro inferiority. The figures… were no doubt gotten up or prepared for the special benefit of those who are too ready to classify the Negro with the most inferior animals.”272 I. Garland Penn, as the chief black representative at the Exposition explained to the directors that the “race would strongly oppose such an exhibit and already felt highly offended that such a show was contemplated.” In turn, the directors directly contacted G. Brown Goode at the Smithsonian to inquire about the planned exhibit. Goode responded promptly, stating, “There is no foundation whatever for the report that a collection of figures of different types of the negro race, associated with figures of anthropoidal apes, will be exhibited… The idea that such a thing would be

271 “It Is About Ready,” Atlanta Constitution, March 27, 1895.
272 “A Rare Exhibit,” New Orleans Southwestern Christian Advocate, April 25, 1895.
done is the height of absurdity.”

Although this controversy was quickly quieted, the Smithsonian exhibit still perpetuated racist thought with an exhibit displaying twelve types of humanity, illustrating a racial hierarchy based on skin color ranging from the least civilized “Black types” to the most civilized “White types.”

Although this exhibit also clearly portrayed people of African descent as inferior, it did not add insult to injury by implying any evolutionary relation to lower animals.

While the Smithsonian anthropologists were able to back up their ideas of white superiority with scientific theory, attractions on the Midway sold racial stereotypes as entertainment. After their American introduction at Chicago, ethnological villages thrived at world’s fairs across the country. In Atlanta, visitors could see Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, Turks, Syrians, East Indians, Dahomeans, and Native Americans on the Midway. In contrast with Chicago, however, the Dahomean village was the only international presence of any group of African descent. There was no Haytian pavilion to be found at Atlanta, leaving visitors with the impression that African savagery spread throughout the Diaspora. As in Chicago, African-American visitors did not particularly care for the Dahomean village display. One newspaper reported that “the civilized blacks” regarded the Africans with deep suspicion and would jump back when approached by the villagers. When the reporter questioned a black man about what he thought of the villagers, he replied, “Day are no great shakes, Cap’n.”

Bishop Turner, curator of his own African exhibit in the Negro Building, was outraged by what he saw on the Midway. On at least one occasion, he challenged the white barker who was

273 “Apes and Evolution,” Atlanta Constitution, April 17, 1895.
274 The Exhibit of the Smithsonian Institution at the Cotton States Exposition, Atlanta, 1895 (Washington: n.p., 1895), n.p.
275 Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 89.
promoting the villagers as “wild cannibals from the west coast of Africa.” Turner caused quite a scene calling the man a liar and vowing,

There are not, and never have been, any cannibals on the west coast of Africa. You are simply repeating some of the lies told by white men who went to Africa and had to lie about the country to magnify their own efforts and pose as heroes of great courage and endurance. The natives on the west coast of Africa may be heathens and uncivilized, but they are more peaceable and gentle than many of you civilized and enlightened white men here in America.\(^{277}\)

At least one African-American newspaper, however, praised the savage life portrayed in the village as a “wonderful contrast with the surrounding evidence of culture and refinement of the American negroes.”\(^{278}\)

Another striking example of racial stereotyping and prejudice on the Midway was the Old Plantation concession. More elaborate than a similar attraction at Chicago, it was one of the most popular attractions and the only one visited by President Cleveland, giving the vision of the ignorant plantation darkey an implicit federal sanction. In its effort to recreate the popular myth of the Old South, the Old Plantation placed its actors in the same category as the inhabitants of the ethnological villages; they were all colonial subjects in one form or another.\(^{279}\) One description highlighted the presence of actual African Americans playing the roles, describing that the attraction was “as much superior to negro minstrelsy by white men as real life is to acting.”\(^{280}\) Playing the role of the happily enslaved “aunty,” a large black woman enticed visitors to enter the concession with her cries, “dis here am sho’ ‘nough possum eatin’ black nigger in here, ‘tain’t no black faced white trash. Come along an’ see de nigger at de corn shuckin’ in de reg’lar

\(^{277}\) “A News Item in the Chicago Inter Ocean,” September 28, 1895, in BTW Papers, Vol. 4, 41–42.
\(^{278}\) “The Colored Race at Atlanta,” Salt Lake City Broad Ax, December 7, 1895.
\(^{279}\) Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 88.
\(^{280}\) Cooper, The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, 91.
ole plantation.” Visitors entered to see exaggerated singing and dancing, joking, and other reenactments of plantation life put on by black minstrel players. One patron saw a closer connection between the Old Plantation and the Dahomean village than the Negro Building. Apparently oblivious to the performance aspect of the attraction, he explained, “Not very different in their movements and voices are these darkies who have lived all their lives amid civilization, from those wild creatures in the Dahomey Village.”

A stop at this concession could easily undo in a few minutes any impression of black progress imparted by the exhibits in the Negro Building.

With the increasing culture of consumerism surrounding the international expositions, a bustling market for guidebooks and souvenir writings thrived at the Atlanta Exposition. In these books and pamphlets, the stereotypical view of the Old Negro flourished as well. In the photograph book Views of Atlanta and the Cotton States and International Exposition, the reader could see images of all of the main buildings at the fair as well as photographs of black workers picking cotton, as if the publishers were intentionally trying to contradict the progress displayed in the Negro Building by showing blacks back in their place in the fields.

Another souvenir booklet, entitled Thought Blossoms from the South, compiled writings portraying visions of the Old South. In the poems and short stories, often written in dialect, blacks were portrayed as simple, happy, carefree, and occasionally scheming or thieving. One poem celebrated the simpler times of the Old South:

> With its simple words ‘n’ music, round y’ very heart, ‘n’ brings
> Back the mem’ry o’ the old times ‘n’ the old plantation life,
> When the darkies used ter sing it, ‘fôre they knew of hate ‘n’ strife;
> ‘N’ it makes y’ feel so restful, though them times are far away,

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282 Views of Atlanta and the Cotton States and International Exposition (Columbus, OH: Ward, 1895), n.p.
When Josiah plays the fiddle ‘n’ I sing ‘Nelly Gray.’

Other stories took a less nostalgic tone when discussing race relations and refer to blacks on the same level as animals. One tale about dove hunting described, “A number of small-sized darkies and a company of dogs are a necessary part of the sportsman’s retainers.”

The depictions of African Americans in these souvenir publications provide a message that far closer in theme to the Old Plantation concession than the modern Negro Building.

In contrast, some guides emphasized African-American life and education in Atlanta to fit with the progress exemplified by the Negro Building at the fair and promote the illusion of racial harmony. Margaret Severance’s *Official Guide to Atlanta* included listings of African-American churches and schools, and encouraged Exposition visitors to visit the Atlanta Baptist Seminary (now Morehouse College) and Spelman Seminary (now Spelman College) to see firsthand the educational progress being made in the black community.

Exposition managers hoped to draw more African-American visitors to the fair by hosting special days and congresses for the black community. Although the dedication of the Negro Building on October 21 was widely considered to be Negro Day at the fair, the directors also announced that December 26 would be celebrated as Negro Day. They anticipated that many thousands of African Americans who had not yet visited the Exposition would take this opportunity during the last week of the fair to see the work of their race in the Negro Building as well as the other attractions. In order to make the day

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284 Ibid., 41.
a success, the directors asked the people of Atlanta to grant their black servants the day off so they could attend the Exposition. They stated, “Hundreds of citizens have already agreed to do this, and to give their Negro servants money to pay their way into the grounds. We hope that the example thus set will be very generally followed.”\textsuperscript{286} While the day did not draw a particularly large attendance, the celebration no doubt boosted slower numbers immediately following Christmas and during the final week of the fair.

A wide variety of African-American congresses and conventions were also held in conjunction with the Exposition. These events not only attracted more black visitors to the fair, but also gave blacks an additional venue where they could take the agenda in their own hands and promote black progress in a way that a static exhibit could not. Alice Bacon observed that the congresses “attracted numerous visitors of both races and showed to all the best side of negro development.”\textsuperscript{287} The congresses were held in two groups. The first group met throughout mid-November and included religious congresses of all denominations, the colored Young Men’s Christian Association, colored professionals (primarily doctors and lawyers), businessmen, a temperance congress, and the National Afro-American Press Convention. The second group of meetings occurred in December and focused primarily on education, with a Congress on Africa, the American Association of Educators of Colored Youth, and the National Colored Woman’s congress.\textsuperscript{288} The Congress on Africa discussed particularly pressing issues for African Americans, including the issue of colonization, missionary outreach to the

\textsuperscript{287} Bacon, \textit{The Negro and the Atlanta Exposition}, 22.
\textsuperscript{288} Cooper, \textit{The Cotton States and International Exposition and South}, 62.
continent, and the future of the race.\textsuperscript{289} The National Colored Woman’s congress, however, was the most politically inclined of the conventions, and their resolutions reflected a deep concern with the popular image of the drunk and lazy black man. The women praised the Exposition for “the opportunity afforded the race to make a display of the progress thus far attained.” They then went on to condemn the service of alcohol in the Negro Building, Jim Crow car laws, the Georgia convict lease system, and lynching law.\textsuperscript{290} The woman’s congress was perhaps the only place at the Exposition where these issues were publically discussed, due in large part to the fact that they would be taken less seriously because of their gender.

Several of the problems confronted by the woman’s congress go straight to the heart of issue of discrimination. Tacit support of Jim Crow policies as demonstrated by the separate Negro Building was a main reason that many African Americans chose not to participate in the Exposition from the beginning. As a result, the level of discrimination at the Exposition as a whole was under constant scrutiny. Although the first month of the fair passed quietly, by mid-October rumors of discrimination began to multiply. These rumors were made public in a virulent editorial titled “The Fakest of All Fakes,” published in the Atlanta black newspaper, \textit{The People’s Advocate}. Editor H. A. Hagler wrote, “Several of the buildings on the grounds the negro dare not enter. He is afraid to go to any of them, especially if he has a lady, for he might be told ‘no niggers allowed in here.’” He then advised those who wrote to the paper asking if the Exposition was worth attending, stating, “If they wish to feel that they are inferior to other American citizens, if they want to pay double fare on the surface cards and also be insulted, if they

\textsuperscript{290} “For Their Race,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, December 29, 1895.
want to see on all sides: ‘For whites only’ or ‘No niggers and dogs allowed,’ if they want to be humiliated and their man and womanhood crushed out, then come.”291 This editorial was reprinted in a number of newspapers nationwide. The Washington Bee viewed Hagler as confirming its earlier reports of prejudice at the Exposition.292 T. Thomas Fortune of the New York Age was more cautious, agreeing that if the claims were true the people should be aware, but advocating that Hagler be sued for libel if the claims were false.293

Fair officials and supporters immediately fired back. An Atlanta Constitution editorial expressed regret that “a few sensation mongers have attempted to create the impression that the negroes are discriminated against… This is a big mistake or an intentional falsehood.”294 Meanwhile, Penn solicited letters from a number of leading African Americans to support his claim that blacks were well treated on the Exposition grounds. Everyone who replied indicated that they were allowed in all of the exposition buildings and faced no molestation whatsoever. Penn also reported that two concessions on the Midway that had been turning away black patrons had been addressed by the management and the problem was resolved.295 Similarly, Alice Bacon reported that shows on the Midway that initially tried to repel black customers soon took their signs down when they realized it was hurting their earnings.296

Most Northern and Southern blacks could easily see the difference between the illusion of racial harmony being promoted by the Exposition and the actuality of race

291 “The Negro at the Atlanta Exposition,” Literary Digest, November 2, 1895, 6. No copy of The People’s Advocate has survived.
293 “The Negro at the Atlanta Exposition,” Literary Digest, November 2, 1895, 6.
295 “Negro Editors Meet,” Atlanta Constitution, November 22, 1895.
relations in the South. It was simply their choice if they opted to champion the accommodationist philosophy of the fair supporters who believed that the opportunity to display black progress at the Exposition was worth suffering the humiliation of riding in a Jim Crow car on the way to Atlanta or sitting in segregated seats in the Exposition Auditorium. In contrast, most Northern whites, viewing a society different from their own, bought the illusion of racial harmony promoted by the Exposition. *Scientific American* lauded the Exposition for showing that the South had “taken hold of the [negro] problem in a spirit worthy of the best traditions of the Constitution; and, realizing that ‘all men are created equal’ they have lifted their unfortunate brother to the same platform of social, political and humanitarian rights as themselves.”

Similarly, the *New York Times* reported that the black man in and around Atlanta “can complain of no injustice” as he is given equal opportunities with the white man.

The Board of Commissioners representing New York picked up precisely on the Exposition’s other goal of portraying the African-American population as a willing workforce for the South. They observed, “This exhibition may mean a great deal to the Southern negroes, for it signifies not alone the advancement of the South, but of their race, which, as the physical and motive power of this great and prosperous section of the country, cannot help sharing in its continued advance and development.”

Only a few Northern papers observed the contrast between the Exposition’s portrayal of friendly race relations and the reality of the situation for blacks in the South. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* quickly realized duality of the illusion, observing that African-

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298 “Recorder on Atlanta,” *New York Times*, November 2, 1895.
299 *Report of the Board of Commissioners Representing the State of New York*, 279.
Americans were treated equally with everyone else on the Exposition grounds, but acknowledging the “touch of pain” that the Northern will feel upon realizing that white supremacy reigns outside of the gates, where segregation is a fact of life and “it will be many years before the negro is admitted to his real freedom.” Some observers were less delicate and condemned the Exposition for glossing over the difficulties of black life in the South. The Detroit Tribune snidely remarked, “That latest Tennessee lynching should be exhibited at the Atlanta Exposition as a fine specimen of one of the staple products of the South.”

As these reporters, who saw past the smoke and mirrors, prove, directors of the Cotton States and International Exposition intentionally created the illusion of racial harmony throughout the South in an effort to further their goals of revitalizing the region’s economy. Accommodation-minded African Americans who supported the Exposition were willing participants in this illusion because they believed they could use the opportunity to display their material progress as a stepping stone on the path to achieving their own goals of securing economic opportunities and eventually civil rights. Frederick Douglass’s son, Charles R. Douglass, went so far as to assure the African-American community, writing “All things considered, our people made no mistake in going to Atlanta… Staying away would have accomplished nothing. Our existence and qualities would have been unknown.” While some blacks imagined what could have been accomplished with united support from the African-American community, it would not come to pass.

300 Hand book to the Cotton States and International Exposition, 5, 12.
301 Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 286.
Although the Atlanta Exposition set a remarkable precedent for the recognition of African Americans that would be followed and even exceeded at Southern fairs to come, there would never be a completely unified front supporting separate black exhibits. In fact, as race relations grew progressively worse and the reach of segregation extended inside the exposition grounds at the coming Southern fairs, more and more African Americans would come to oppose the idea of the Negro Building.
A full scale model of the Parthenon still stands in Nashville, Tennessee, as a lasting reminder of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition. Built as an exact copy of the original, it served as the Fine Arts Building and primary landmark on the Exposition’s 200 acre site in West Side Park. Major Eugene C. Lewis, director-general of the Exposition, proposed that the replica be built and suggested that all of the other buildings base their architectural design in the ancient Greek.\textsuperscript{303} The Parthenon had many symbolic meanings. The building was the key in Nashville’s attempt to build an ideal city for the fair, inspired by the White City at the Chicago World’s Fair. It also exemplified Nashville’s reputation as the “Athens of the South” due to its strong educational tradition. The building and its connection to ancient Greece also had racial overtones. Its mythical association embodied the parts of the Anglo-Saxon racial character that helped the race excel above all others in the arts and literature, thus promoting white superiority.\textsuperscript{304} The Parthenon served as a reminder of the connections between the Old South and ancient Greece, but it also made a connection between the New South, democracy, and arts and culture.\textsuperscript{305} Through the symbolism of the Parthenon and the Exposition as a whole, Nashville leaders sought to expand the city’s reputation as a cultural center, but also raise it up to compete with Atlanta as a vibrant commercial hub.\textsuperscript{306}

The Tennessee Centennial Exposition opened its six-month run on May 1, 1897, precisely eleven months after the date it was meant to celebrate, the one hundredth

\textsuperscript{304} Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 104.
\textsuperscript{306} Harvey, “World’s Fairs in a Southern Accent,” 45.
anniversary of Tennessee’s statehood. The idea to celebrate the state’s centennial with an exposition was proposed as early as 1892, two years before even the Atlanta Exposition was organized. It took several years for the idea to fully take shape, especially with the nation in the depths of a difficult economic depression. Ultimately, the Exposition was moved forward to 1897 instead of 1896 to allow for a better chance of financial success and to avoid the political chaos of a presidential election year. This additional preparation period also allowed the Exposition Company time to contemplate how it could best emulate the exposition standards recently set forth by Chicago and Atlanta.

Although the idea of the Exposition was founded with a motive of “pure patriotism” in commemorating the history of the state of Tennessee, other publicized goals of the Exposition included developing the state’s natural resources, encouraging foreign investment, and increasing the state’s population. The Exposition directors were also eager to promote their adherence to the New South creed of “industrial progress, racial harmony, and national reconciliation.” The simultaneous focus of the fair on the past, present, and future resulted in a highly idealized image of the Old South as “a bygone era that no potential investor or visitor needed to worry about.” This multipurpose approach to the Exposition was highly successful, and the fair attracted a total of 1,786,714 visitors. At a total cost of approximately $1.1 million, the fair also

308 Ibid., 34.
309 Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 144.
312 Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 336.
made a final profit of thirty-nine dollars, making it more financially successful than any other Southern exposition.  

As the state capital and the largest city in Tennessee, with a population of just over 76,000, Nashville was ideally suited to host the Centennial Exposition. Although Nashville was an older city than Atlanta, the two shared many similarities, both benefitting from the shift of trade from older port cities to interior cities with the expansion of the railroad in the South. Nashville was “one of the most aggressive centers of economic development and social change in the postwar South,” second only to Atlanta. Like Atlanta, Nashville also had experience hosting smaller regional expositions, making it particularly knowledgeable about their benefits and the logistic details needed to be successful. Nashville biggest previous success was the exposition held to celebrate the city’s centennial in 1880. This event gave Nashville its first opportunity to create a vision of new racial harmony, as the exposition included exhibits from several African-American schools located in the city. Although many things changed between 1880 and 1897, Exposition planners no doubt looked back to this success to help them envision their next attempt at recognizing black achievements.

Nashville had a significant black population, reaching a high point of 39 percent of the city’s population in 1890, and declining only slightly to 37 percent in 1900. In 1890, 20 percent of the black population held skilled jobs, while a prominent 6 percent held professional positions. Nashville developed an educated and prosperous black bourgeoisie in the 1880s and 1890s. Many prominent black leaders had roots in the

318 Ibid., 235.
319 Ibid., 109.
antebellum free black community, most of whom were light-skinned mulattoes, while others were self-made professionals drawn to the Nashville’s strong culture of African-American higher education.\textsuperscript{320} A number of black schools, including Central Tennessee College, Roger Williams University, Fisk University, and Meharry Medical College were all located in the city.

Race relations in Nashville initially remained fluid for a number of years after the Civil War, as they did throughout the South, but “between the 1880s and the 1900s the races were pulled apart in ways that were unprecedented in Nashville’s history,” as the result of white supremacy, racial violence, and black accommodation.\textsuperscript{321} A major factor in changing race relations was the increasing black population in the center of the city. With this change, urban whites faced added competition for jobs. Additionally, developing black slums were seen as threats to public health. Due to these changes, after the late 1880s strict Jim Crow segregation was a fact of life in Nashville, with even segregated fairgrounds and a separate grandstand for blacks at the racetrack.\textsuperscript{322}

White politicians viewed the black population as an increasing threat to white supremacy in all levels of politics. Rather than alter the state constitution to disfranchise blacks, as many Southern states did, Tennessee, instead, passed a number of laws over several years in the late 1880s and early 1890s that accomplished the same goal. The fraud-ridden 1888 state elections granted the Democrats a controlling majority in the state legislature, enabling them to pass laws that would both disfranchise black voters and weaken Republicans to the point that they could no longer challenge for power. The Dortch law required secret ballot voting with ballots to be printed by election officials

\textsuperscript{320} Ibid., 110.  
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid., 109.  
\textsuperscript{322} Ibid., 113, 115.
and candidates for each office listed in alphabetic order with no party indication. Thus, it basically amounted to a literacy test, which most blacks could not pass. In 1890, the state legislature approved of the addition of a poll tax in another blow to poor black voters. Finally in 1893, the Democratic Party initiated the all-white primary, which essentially eliminated any power in interracial alliances. Though some blacks in Nashville continued to vote despite these obstacles, they no longer had any hope of influencing political policy.\(^\text{323}\)

Though blacks in the city of Nashville were not often victims of racial violence, it did infiltrate the areas surrounding the city, as yet another indication of worsening race relations and white fear. Several blacks were lynched in the area, but by far the most horrific spectacle was the lynching of Eph Grizzard. In April 1892, Grizzard was among a group of black men arrested for rape. After one man confessed, he was immediately hanged by a mob, and officials brought Grizzard to the Davidson County jail in the city for his protection. An angry mob several thousand strong pulled Grizzard from his cell, tied a rope around his neck, and hung him from the side of the Cumberland River bridge. Members of the mob then shot Grizzard at least fifty times as his lifeless body jumped with each hit. A crowd of at least 10,000 men, women, and children, watched the gruesome spectacle.\(^\text{324}\) Five years later, as the Exposition tried to demonstrate racial harmony in the region, Tennessee Governor Robert L. Taylor spoke out in support of lynching, stating, “There have always been lynchings. There always will be until the dawn of the millennium… The way to suppress lynch law is to suppress rape, and the

\(^{323}\) Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 140-142.

\(^{324}\) Ibid., 142; Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 262.
way to suppress rape is to break the necks of those who commit it.”

In the face of these brutal examples of enforced white supremacy, black accommodationists looked to the African-American middle class in Nashville as an example of the successful application of the theory of self-help.

The short period between the Atlanta and Tennessee Expositions was notable for one additional blow to black status across the South. On May 18, 1896, the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The black plaintiffs argued for their right to ride in a first class railroad car if they paid a first class fare. The defendants countered that separation by race was inevitable, and the Court agreed in a seven to one decision. The decision validated the doctrine of “separate but equal,” by affirming that equal rights did not demand “an enforced commingling of the two races.” Justice John Marshall Harlan, a Southerner, was the lone dissenting voice. His prophetic dissent recognized that the separate car laws were truly motivated by race hate, and stated, “the thin disguise of ‘equal’ accommodations for passengers in railroad coaches will not mislead anyone, or atone for the wrong this day done.” Although the decision did not receive much attention at the time because it merely legitimized a system already in use across the South, the “separate but equal” doctrine would become the basis for racial discrimination case law for the next half-century.

One way in which Exposition organizers hoped to bring modern and organized race relations to the fair was through the creation of Centennial City. The Exposition grounds were incorporated as the municipality of Centennial City for the duration of the

325 “Defends the South,” *Nashville Banner*, June 8, 1897.
327 Quoted in Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 243.
328 Quoted in Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 327.
fair “in order to successfully control the crowds of people.” With this rationale, Centennial City created the Centennial Guards who formed a police and fire department to protect the visitors and to take care of any social transgressions. Creating a municipal government allowed Exposition directors to regulate morals via city ordinances prohibiting such infractions as “gambling, selling whisky, brandy, etc., breaches of the peace, and improper conduct generally.” These rules stood out in contrast with the city of Nashville proper, where these vices and more were readily available for consumption.

Part of the allure of the ideal city for white patrons was that African Americans were guaranteed to be in their proper place. As in Atlanta, this was guaranteed through the cooperation of white Exposition directors and black accommodationists who worked together to create an illusion of racial harmony each for their own reasons. The establishment of a Negro Department of the Exposition was first mentioned in 1895 as several black educators made public complaints that African Americans had not yet been given any opportunity to be involved with the fair. Their complaints, however, were short lived. Especially in light of the success and attention garnered by the Negro Department at Atlanta, the Tennessee directors viewed it as an “essential feature” of the Exposition. They believed that the Negro Department was “a necessary feature because, in the first place, it determines their industrial status. This done we shall be able, with each succeeding exposition, to measure their strides and determine their progress.” The Exposition managers also hoped to correct the way in which race relations in the South had been “misunderstood and grossly misrepresented” in the North through their efforts

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329 Justi, Official History, 92.
330 Ibid., 93.
at the fair. Though the Department received considerably less attention from the national press than the one in Atlanta, it was still successful in illustrating racial harmony and black self-help to Northern and Southern visitors alike. The Negro Department was initially established with J.C. Napier, a local black lawyer, as the department chief. He resigned his position, however, and Richard Hill, a local schoolteacher was named in his place. Hill was well-known in Nashville as the son of “Uncle Jim Hill” a fiddler who was a popular performer at parties and balls for the city’s elite. The Exposition directors likely chose Hill not only because of his father’s reputation, but because they believed that someone less outspoken than Napier would more easily bend to their will. Additionally, as a schoolteacher, Hill was dependant on the white school board for his salary, and would therefore be less likely to profess any radical sentiments.

As in Atlanta, the idea of a Negro Department to manage a separate Negro Building, prompted significant opposition in the African-American community. Because a separate Negro Building was intrinsically linked with segregation and the philosophy of black accommodation, there were simply those who did not support the idea. Supporters of the exhibit in Nashville acknowledged the “efforts of certain ‘eminently respectable’ negroes to make it a failure.” One of the Negro commissioners pointed out that, ironically, the prominent men who opposed black participation in the Exposition because of the necessity of traveling in Jim Crow cars actually benefited in their businesses from segregation because black clientele were forced to patronize only black service providers. Within the Nashville black community, personal politics played a role for those opposed to the exhibit as well. Some of the men who were initially involved in the

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333 Ibid., 193; Larson, “Three Southern World’s Fairs,” 141.
334 “The Negro Department,” *Nashville Banner*, June 8, 1897.
Exposition resigned and switched their loyalties over issues of financial management of the Department. As a result, they joined the prominent African-American citizens who worked against the Negro exhibit.\textsuperscript{[335]} Additionally, increased opposition to the Negro Building affected the Department’s ability to acquire exhibits. In Nebraska, for example, the Negro Commissioners decided that they opposed the idea of a Jim Crow exhibit, and would not send anything to display.\textsuperscript{[336]}

Some elements of the black press, particularly the \textit{Cleveland Gazette} and the \textit{Washington Bee}, vehemently opposed the Negro Building, actively warning their readers about the discrimination they would face if they chose to attend. The \textit{Gazette} repeatedly referred to the Negro Building as the “Jim Crow annex,” and cautioned its readers in advance of the Exposition opening, “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.”\textsuperscript{[337]} The paper also noted that all of the efforts to recognize black progress were simply a trick put on because “the exposition management needs badly the money they hope to get from Afro-Americans who visit.”\textsuperscript{[338]}

Despite the increased opposition, many African-Americans still supported the Negro Building by organizing exhibits or simply by attending the Exposition. Nearly 10,000 people, predominantly blacks, took advantage of the first opportunity to publically display their support by attending the cornerstone laying for the Negro Building on March 13, 1897. In his opening speech, Hill emphasized how much the Exposition Company had done for the race. Major John J. McCann, speaking for the Exposition Company had done for the race.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{[335]} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{[336]} “Tennessee Centennial,” \textit{Cleveland Gazette}, April 10, 1897.
\item \textsuperscript{[337]} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{[338]} “The Nashville Exposition,” \textit{Cleveland Gazette}, May 8, 1897.
\end{itemize}
management, praised efforts in black education, calling their accomplishments in this area “the first grand step in the scale of human progress.” Professor William H. Council, a prominent black educator from Alabama, was the featured speaker of the event. Though a supporter of the philosophy of accommodation, Council struck a careful balance in his address between a strictly conciliatory message and one of a slightly more radical nature. Council praised Southern whites for being so brave as to give blacks the opportunity to display their progress in the South. Echoing Frederick Douglass, but framed in the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, Council declared,

Negro history has solved the negro problem from the negro side. There still remains a 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 to enlarge the work of encouragement to the struggling race; or will he use the shotgun instead of the Holy Bible; the bloody knife instead of the spelling book? These are problems for Caucasian brains.  

Council went on to praise the virtues of industrial education, recognizing that “The South owes her industrial significance largely to the negro.” Although he acknowledged the white perspective of using black labor to support the South’s industrialization, Council also managed to include a plea against racial violence.

After the conclusion of the ceremonies in the auditorium, the audience adjourned to the eastern bank of Lake Watauga to lay the cornerstone. The Negro Building that arose from that spot made an indelible impression on nearly everyone who saw it. The Building, designed by white Exposition architect Frederick Thompson, but built exclusively by black labor, was widely considered to be the most beautiful on the

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340 Ibid., 196
At 250 feet in length and 80 feet in width, it was larger than the Atlanta Negro Building, and in a much more prominent location, directly across the lake from the Parthenon. The Building was designed in a Spanish Renaissance style with two floors and a pavilion used as a restaurant; ninety foot towers rose on either side of the main entrance (see fig. 4). The building’s total cost was $12,300, provided in full by the Exposition Company.342


The exhibits in the Negro Building were not fully installed in time for the Exposition opening, and exhibits continued to arrive from across the country throughout

the first week of the fair.\textsuperscript{343} Everything was in order, however, for the formal opening of
the Negro Building on June 5, celebrated as Negro Day at the Exposition. The
ceremonies were very well received, and although some estimates ranged as high as
30,000 attendees, the turnstiles registered a still impressive 19,171 people who took
advantage of reduced admissions for the day, often traveling some distance to attend.\textsuperscript{344}
The morning began with “the largest, the most dazzling and most representative negro
parade ever held in Nashville” winding its way from the State Capitol to the Exposition
grounds. Several thousand people participated in the parade including nine bands, a
bicycle brigade, African-American veterans and military organizations, Negro
Department officials, black fraternal organizations, floats representing black schools and
colleges, black railroad employees, and black firemen. All told, the procession reached a
length of five miles.\textsuperscript{345}

Once all the participants reached the grounds, Richard Hill spoke first before the
segregated audience in the Auditorium. He began with several radical statements,
pronouncing, “We are arrayed in citizens’ clothing, but do not enjoy a citizen’s privilege.
We are protected by the Constitution of the United States, yet we are handled at will by a
stronger race.” After this outburst of defiance, however, Hill resumed his usual
conciliatory tone, insisting “Nothing will save us except our own efforts. God helps
those who help themselves,” and repeating the virtues of industrial education and racial
pride to lift the race above the evils of Jim Crow.\textsuperscript{346}

\textsuperscript{343} “Exhibits in Negro Building,” \textit{Nashville Banner}, May 1, 1897; “Work in Negro Building,” \textit{Nashville
Banner}, May 6, 1897.
\textsuperscript{344} Justi, \textit{Official History}, 199; Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 86; “Negroes Have a Great Day,” \textit{Nashville
Banner}, June 5, 1897.
\textsuperscript{345} “Negroes Have a Great Day,” \textit{Nashville Banner}, June 5, 1897; Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 86.
\textsuperscript{346} “Negroes Have a Great Day,” \textit{Nashville Banner}, June 5, 1897.
Charles W. Anderson, a black secretary to the state treasurer of New York, followed Hill and was the featured speaker of the occasion. His speech clearly reflected the influence of Booker T. Washington’s philosophy of accommodation, and hit on many of the same points as Washington’s Atlanta address. Anderson emphasized the importance of industrial education and the cooperation of the races to lift up the nation to meet its potential. In stressing the concept of racial self-help, he declared that the country is governed not by laws and courts, but by public opinion, stating, “…we are, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, directly or indirectly, according to our opportunities and our influence, responsible for the public sentiment which secures every citizen or else deprives him of, his rights and the opportunity for the highest intellectual and industrial development.”

Anderson urged blacks to acquire education, character, and practicality before agitating for civil rights, imploring them not to “indulge in the pastime of throwing stones at the stars,” but to each do their own part to better the race and bring about “the day when the negro shall take his place by the side of the other great races of men.”

Exposition President John W. Thomas ended the program with a few apparently unplanned remarks reflecting on his memories of the devotion of his “black mammy” and the loyalty of his slaves. Thomas connected these thoughts to the present day by extolling the black workers he employed at the railroad company, and the overall virtues of black labor. In doing so, Thomas concluded the ceremonies by ensuring that the directors’ message of racial harmony as the means to greater industrialization and economic strength was heard. Anderson stayed on point with the accommodationist

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348 Ibid., 201.
349 Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 87.
message that black presence at the Exposition would result in more economic opportunities for the race. Although Hill primarily relayed this message as well, the radical sentiments he expressed at the beginning of his speech reveal his frustration at the continued downward spiral of race relations in the region. Although all three speakers sold the illusion of racial harmony to a willing audience, the small glimpses of the truth were beginning to show.

As the crowd dispersed from the Auditorium, many of them made their way to the Negro Building to inspect the evidences of black progress for themselves. The building contained more than 300 exhibits by 85 cities throughout the nation. The Exposition management made a special effort to assist the exhibitors by granting free exhibit space in the Negro Building and brokering an agreement with the railroads to transport the exhibits free of charge. \(^{350}\) In contrast with previous Negro exhibits, in Nashville the exhibits were organized by category rather than state (see fig. 5). The departments included History and Old Relics, Arts, Agriculture, Live Stock, Manufacture and Transportation, Mines and Minerals, Library, Marble and Stone, and Dentistry. \(^{351}\)

\(^{351}\) “Negroes at the Exposition,” *Nashville Banner*, April 15, 1897.
As in Atlanta, African-American educational institutions, public and private, constituted the bulk of the exhibits, and were often considered the most interesting. Tuskegee Institute secured the largest exhibit, covering 1,500 square feet, and including two full-size buggies constructed by its students. This biased emphasis on education as black progress makes a great deal of sense due to the fact that the institutions, particularly those of higher education, had the most to gain by exhibiting. Not only could they draw attention to the industrial progress of their students which fit with the ideas of black and white leadership alike, but they also attracted the attention of Northern investors and advertised their benefits to future students.

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353 “Negroes at the Exposition,” Nashville Banner, April 15, 1897.
Some of the exhibits indicated a turn towards more sensational displays. Dr. William Key, an African-American self-trained veterinarian, displayed his horse, Jim Key, who was trained to do math and spell. The Building also displayed other zoological specimens, including an “insectory,” where “15,000 insects will be kept hatching.” Department leaders also found two ways to illustrate the contrast between the great progress made by African-Americans and the uncivilized state of their brethren in Africa. First, in one of the exhibits closest to the main entrance, John Tevy, a native of Dahomey, displayed objects from the continent that he sold in the United States. Although Tevy himself was an educated man, he spoke to visitors “entertainingly about the contrast between the American negro and the Dahomean.” Additionally, Meharry Medical College’s exhibit included a number of African objects, including a leopard skin and hats from African kings, collected by alumna Miss Georgia Patton, who spent time in Africa as a missionary. Similar to Bishop Turner’s exhibit in Atlanta, these exhibits served in part to demonstrate contrasts, but also to remind African Americans of their noble history, and to serve as simple curiosities for other visitors.

The Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition recognized that the Negro Building exhibit “was on the whole excellent, and yet it was not the best of which he is capable, though possibly the best one thus far made.” Similarly, the New York Times found the exhibit to be sparse considering the capacity of the building, but nonetheless praised it for establishing “the right of the race to be treated with care and to

355 “Exhibits in Negro Building,” Nashville Banner, May 1, 1897.
357 “Exhibits in Negro Building,” Nashville Banner, May 1, 1897.
358 Justi, Official History, 203.
be encouraged in the cultivation of tastes and skill not suspected to be in their gift a few years ago.”

Unlike the Atlanta Exposition, African-American presence at the Tennessee Centennial was not strictly limited to the self-representation of Negro Building and the stereotypes of the midway. Instead, white exhibit managers also incorporated blacks into several other exhibits. Fisk University contributed portraits of William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury, two prominent British abolitionists, to a portrait exhibit in the History Department to illustrate white support for black freedoms. The Bureau of Education’s exhibit in the Government Building included a case of photographs of showing a number of African-American educational institutions. Meanwhile, the Smithsonian exhibit in the Government Building with life-sized figures illustrating the racial types of humanity in order of level of civilization was the same display presented at Atlanta, emphasizing the evolutionary inferiority of the African race. Finally, the Agricultural Department contained the most extensive representation of African Americans outside of the Negro Building. The exhibit managers furthered the goals of the Exposition by portraying African Americans simply as willing laborers boosting agricultural production in the state. Upon entering the Agriculture Building visitors saw a series of large pictures made from seeds, grains and grasses high up in the central dome. The most prominent of these illustrations depicted black workers in a cotton field. The exhibit on tobacco also featured the figure of a black man working in the field constructed out of the varying shades of tobacco. In addition to these static displays, there were actual cotton and

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360 Justi, Official History, 137.
362 Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 100.
tobacco fields planted outside of the building, where visitors could observe the African-American laborers at work (see fig. 6).\textsuperscript{363} These depictions all helped to create the illusion of racial harmony and order at the Exposition.

![Figure 6. Cotton Picking Outside the Agriculture Building, Nashville. Source: Herman Justi, ed., \textit{Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition} (Nashville: Brandon Printing Co., 1898), 368.](image)

While these meaningful portrayals of African Americans flourished in the exhibition buildings, the midway, called Vanity Fair at Nashville, hosted derogatory and stereotypical images of black men and women. Located in the western part of Vanity Fair, the Old Plantation concession was by far the most popular attraction, and was “vastly improved” since its appearance at Atlanta.\textsuperscript{364} The concession was owned by whites, and managed by B.C. Bass, a show business veteran who had also managed the attraction at Atlanta. Patrons observed, “… pickaninnies with their woolly and white-headed grandmas, young bucks and thick-lipped African maidens, and, happy as a big sunflower, they danced the old-time breakdowns, which were joined in by all the negroes


\textsuperscript{364} \textit{The Official Catalogue of the Tennessee Centennial}, 161.
with weird and guttural sounds to the accompaniment of the scraping of the fiddle and the old banjo.”365 In addition to the usual singing and dancing, scenes of camp meetings and craps games were added to draw in the crowds. This effort to recreate the “fun and frolic” of the antebellum days, while reinforcing a stereotypical view of the black Southerner, was popular among white Northerners and Southerners alike. Vanity Fair also included the Palace of Amusements, in which carnival games were all concentrated in one location. One popular game featured among the amusements was a ball game in which the object was to hit a black man in the head. One observer declared, “There is some strange sort of fascination in watching the negro dodge the ball, and he usually does dodge it, but every man thinks he can hit the head that looks so tempting.”366 Although it is unclear in this description whether the target was a real person or not, games of this type featuring actual African Americans as targets were extremely popular at turn-of-the-century amusement parks, including Coney Island, which had a “Hit the Nigger – Three Balls for Five” concession.367 The imagery of the game clearly promoted and reflected a growing interest in enforcing white superiority.

President McKinley, by all accounts a great lover of expositions, visited the fair on June 11 and 12. As a small part of his busy itinerary, he visited the Negro Building where a large crowd welcomed his arrival. He and his entourage viewed the exhibits with “great interest and surprise,” and were treated to a vocal performance by the Mozart Society of Fisk University. A short reception followed to allow the performers as well as the officers of the Negro Department to meet the President. McKinley made a point to stop and see the performance of Jim Key, the educated horse, before departing the

365 Justi, Official History, 209.
building. The President was also treated to an impromptu minstrel performance by the entertainers from the Old Plantation attraction, who gathered outside of the Agriculture building with the perfect backdrop of cotton and tobacco fields, and greeted the President’s arrival there with several old-time melodies, providing a “pleasant diversion” for the group.\(^{368}\) The inclusion of the Negro Building in the President’s schedule was a reflection of the Exposition management’s attempts to demonstrate black progress and racial harmony in the South to the nation at large.

In another effort to demonstrate “that the white and black people of the South understand each other perfectly, and do, if left to themselves, get along as pleasantly and peaceably as any two races that ever dwelt together,” and to attract African-American visitors to the fair, Exposition leaders sponsored a number of special days for the black community.\(^{369}\) Throughout the fair, celebration days were set aside for each of the local African-American colleges, black Exposition employees and their families, and other groups. The Exposition offered discounted admissions on these days in an attempt to increase attendance.\(^{370}\) Centennial Negro Employee’s Day, celebrated on August 25, was one of the most successful events, with an estimated 6,000 African Americans traveling to the Exposition by train for the celebration, in addition to local attendees.\(^{371}\) African Americans were even offered a special role in the celebration of Nashville Day on September 11, during which several elderly black residents of the city were honored and special exercises were held in the Negro Building.

\(^{368}\) Justi, *Official History*, 251-252.
\(^{369}\) Ibid., 202.
\(^{370}\) Ibid., 198, 202.
The most notable occasion for the black community, however, was Emancipation Day, celebrated on September 22, the anniversary of Lincoln’s first executive order freeing the slaves in the Confederate States. The day was well-attended and the crowd began to fill the Auditorium well before the scheduled start time for the program in anticipation of hearing the most famous black orator of his day, Booker T. Washington. After several musical performances, Washington took the stage and delivered an address similar in message, although less lyrical, than the one he delivered in Atlanta. He drove home his key point emphasizing that “The key to the solution of the race problem in the South is in the commercial and industrial development of the negro.” He urged the race to gain “property, industry, intelligence and character” to demonstrate their worthiness to acquire their civil rights. Washington’s speech once again confirmed the aims of white Exposition leaders by positioning blacks as the ideal industrial and agricultural labor force to facilitate increased trade with other parts of the country and the world.

One of the many African-American conventions held in association with the Exposition, the National Association of Colored Women found themselves more supportive of Washington’s philosophies than when they met two years previous. In Atlanta, the women spoke out adamantly about pressing issues such as lynching and convict labor. However, in Nashville, under the leadership of Mrs. Booker T. Washington, who was no doubt influenced by her husband’s ideas, the conference emphasized the “awakening of home pride and the devotion to self-culture.” The only convention to issue any blatantly political statements was the National Race Council, who called for basic civil rights and an end to mob violence. They, however, were also

372 “Negroes at the Exposition,” *Nashville Banner*, September 22, 1897.
373 Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 89.
supporters of accommodation, and acknowledged that equal rights would only be granted when African Americans could claim more commercial influence. The prevalence of the accommodationist point of view at these conferences further solidified the illusion of racial harmony at the Exposition.

As in Atlanta, the press and other observers widely scrutinized the level of discrimination present at the Tennessee Centennial, and with good reason; the color line that existed outside of the fair was encroaching more and more. The Exposition Company boasted of its emergency health care plan for the fair, which involved separate ambulances and hospitals for the African-American population. In this case separate was most certainly not equal, as the black hospital was actually a field hospital set up near the Negro Building, while white patients were offered care in a permanent structure. Jim Crow also ruled in the Exposition Auditorium, where black patrons were consistently relegated to the gallery. In fact, during the Exposition opening, even the officers of the Negro Department were forced to sit in the gallery. Visitors also observed that “the eating and refreshment stands claim that they have the right to say whom they shall serve, and some of them do not choose to serve Negroes, while others have special places reserved for his accommodation.” As these examples demonstrate, segregation clearly existed on the grounds, but there were also a number of people who were falsely informed via “secret letter” that African Americans were only allowed in the Negro

376 Justi, Official History, 395.
Building on the grounds and nowhere else. Negro Department officers worked tirelessly to contradict this misconception.379

In one guidebook, the ideal world of racial harmony promoted inside the Exposition and the reality of the outside world collided. The book praised the Negro Building as the most important display ever made by the race, but one of the advertisements featuring a fold-out map of the Exposition grounds prominently proclaims “Positively No Negro Washing Taken.”380 The growing infiltration of white Southern mores, indeed, national ideas of white supremacy, in the world of the Centennial Exposition hampered the ability of the Exposition leaders, black and white, to fully portray their vision of racial harmony in a convincing way. Similarly, Exposition organizers at Charleston would face even more difficulties as the codification of white supremacy continued to progress.

CHAPTER FIVE
SOUTH CAROLINA INTERSTATE AND WEST INDIAN EXPOSITION
AT CHARLESTON, 1901-2

The years immediately surrounding the turn of the century witnessed additional upheaval in American race relations. The effects of continued disfranchisement, the Spanish American War, and increased racial violence would influence race relations for decades to come. Southern racial interactions became increasingly codified. As African-Americans prepared exhibits for the South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition in Charleston they likely faced challenges that their compatriots preparing for other previous Southern international expositions had not faced.

In the years between the Tennessee Centennial Exposition and the South Carolina Exposition, or 1897 to 1902, white Southern politicians continued their efforts to disfranchise African-American voters by any means available to them. In 1898, the Supreme Court made this goal more easily attainable by deciding against the plaintiff in Williams v. Mississippi. In this decision, the Court ruled that the provisions of 1890 Mississippi Constitution which effectively disfranchised black voters through a poll tax and the “understanding clause” did not constitute racial discrimination because they did not mention race by name. 381 Sanctioned by the Court decision, Louisiana wrote several disfranchising clauses into its 1898 Constitution. In addition to adopting a poll tax, and literacy and property requirements, Louisiana famously introduced the “grandfather clause” under which a voter who failed to qualify by other means could register to vote if he, his father, or grandfather was entitled to vote on January 1, 1867. 382 The combination of these measures was brutally effective in eliminating the African-American vote, as

382 Williamson, The Crucible of Race, 233.
shown by registration statistics indicating that there were 130,334 black registered voters in Louisiana in 1896, and the number dropped dramatically to 1,342 by 1904.\textsuperscript{383} As South Carolina Exposition officials set plans in motion to recognize the achievements of the African American, three more states disfranchised him through various combinations of the poll tax, literacy requirement, property requirement, understanding clause, and grandfather clause: North Carolina in 1900, Alabama in 1901, and Virginia in 1902.\textsuperscript{384}

The advent of the Spanish American War in 1898 and rise of American imperialism also brought a number of racial issues to the forefront of American minds. For many whites, imperialism was the fulfillment of Anglo-Saxon racial destiny to govern backwards and barbaric people, a position that only vindicated white Southern racial policies. Historian C. Vann Woodward described, “At the dawn of the new century the wave of Southern racism came in as a swell upon a mounting tide of national sentiment and was very much a part of that sentiment. Had the tide been running the other way, the Southern wave would have broken feebly instead of becoming a wave of the future.”\textsuperscript{385} The black community was divided in its willingness to participate in the war. Some, including Booker T. Washington, thought the war would be an opportunity for blacks to prove their value in service to the country. Others, however, agonized over whether to fight for a government that had essentially abandoned them. They believed that the war would only serve as another excuse for whites to ignore the blatant injustice in their own country.\textsuperscript{386} African Americans also realized that “a nation which oppressed and degraded its own colored citizens was unlikely to pursue a different course among

\textsuperscript{383} Woodward, \textit{The Strange Career of Jim Crow}, 68.
\textsuperscript{385} Woodward, \textit{The Strange Career of Jim Crow}, 56.
\textsuperscript{386} Ayers, \textit{The Promise of the New South}, 329.
colored peoples in colonial possessions.”

For those who did serve and lived outside of the South, traveling through the region on the way to the battlefront was their first exposure to the extent of Southern atrocities against African Americans.

As a result of increasing tension during this time period, episodes of racial violence increased as well. Bloody race riots broke out in Wilmington, NC, in 1898 and New Orleans in 1900. The continued codification of white supremacy through Jim Crow laws and disfranchisement also resulted in an increasing cultural separation between whites and blacks. One white South Carolina leader declared in 1899, “the feeling of race antagonism and prejudice is more intense now than a year after emancipation, and will grow more intense as time progresses.” In this time of growing uncertainty, some African Americans banded together locally to fight back in small ways, through boycotts and conventions, petitions and lawsuits. Many in the black community, however, continued to rely on the leadership of Booker T. Washington. There was not yet another national African-American figure for the community to rally around. This division between protest and accommodation is particularly visible at the South Carolina Exposition.

Charleston, with population of approximately 60,000, over half of which was African American, struggled mightily after the Civil War. Similar to New Orleans, the old port city began to fall into economic decline with the rise of inland cities built on the strength of the railroad. In addition to economic hardship, Charleston also suffered at the hands of Mother Nature. The city endured a direct hit by a hurricane in 1885, and a

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389 Quoted in Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 427.
390 Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 434.
devastating earthquake reduced many sections of the city to rubble the following year. Charleston’s fortunes finally began to change for the better with federally sponsored harbor improvements during the Spanish American War, which drew new investment to the city. At the same time, a new generation of business leaders emerged to lead an economic revival. Following the example of New Orleans, Atlanta, and Nashville, these new leaders proposed the idea of an exposition to help revive the city and demonstrate the New South vision of economic and social progress. Exposition organizers aimed to “inaugurate new industries and commercial relations” nationally and internationally. As a part of these efforts, the Exposition focused specifically on the advantages of its geographic closeness to the islands of the West Indies, which had taken on increased prominence since the Spanish American War. As in previous Southern expositions, the demonstration of racial harmony was a key factor in the ability to successfully expand the regional economy.

A permanent exposition company was established in June 1900 to work towards these goals. Open from December 1, 1901 to June 1, 1902, the Exposition took place on a picturesque 160 acre site along the Ashley River that incorporated the mansion and grounds of an old plantation. Although the Exposition made a small profit in its six-month run, it attracted less than half of the number of visitors of the Tennessee Centennial, with a final attendance of 674,086. Competition from the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York in the same year, and a lack of support from the federal

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391 Doyle, New Men, New Cities, New South, 76.
392 Ibid., 51.
395 Doyle, New Men, New Cities, New South, 182.
government hurt the potential success of the Exposition. Attendance also suffered from poor weather and a boycott organized by local African Americans.\textsuperscript{397}

As a predominant port city of the Old South, Charleston’s African-American community was significantly different from those in Atlanta and Nashville. Charleston’s social system and culture were based in the idea of black servitude, resulting from its former position as the center of a slave society.\textsuperscript{398} As the result of this heritage, paternalistic relationships survived, especially between upper class whites and their servants. Likewise, white residents helped preserve their supremacy recognizing a distinctly separate status for mulattoes who made up the majority of the city’s black elite, and observing a three-tiered racial caste system similar to New Orleans. Compared to Nashville and Atlanta, there was far less physical separation between the races in Charleston. Even Exposition architect Bradford Gilbert commented on the “old-time courtesy and politeness” of the Charleston black population.\textsuperscript{399} With a population that was more than 50 percent black until after World War I, there was more casual mixing of the races in day to day life. There was no solid black ghetto in Charleston, and the city depended on black labor to function. Due to their utmost confidence in the customs of white supremacy and the high degree of social separation between the races, however, this level of contact was accepted.\textsuperscript{400}

Despite this seemingly harmonious relationship between whites and blacks, African Americans in Charleston as a group were actually much worse off than in the newer cities of Atlanta and Nashville. Urban blacks often had difficulties finding

\textsuperscript{397} Doyle, \textit{New Men, New Cities, New South}, 184-185.
\textsuperscript{398} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{400} Doyle, \textit{New Men, New Cities, New South}, 291-305.
employment outside of domestic service or other similarly menial jobs. 401 Because of the black majority in the city’s population, whites emphasized their supremacy by giving blacks little hope that they could be useful to society. Rather than support collective efforts to raise up the African-American population like industrial education, many white residents preferred to fall back on old paternalistic traditions and help individual blacks with whom they had relationships. 402 With white supremacy thoroughly enforced through cultural practices like paternalism, Charleston was late to adopt the modern Southern standard of managing race relations through Jim Crow. Using both newly developed “customs” and occasionally the force of law, Charleston moved to accept Jim Crow during the period between 1898 and World War I. Various public places were designated as off limits to African Americans, and the city finally created legal separation on street cars in 1912. 403

Despite steadily worsening race relations on a national and local level, organizers of the South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition still sought to portray an image of racial harmony across the South and relied on the standards developed by previous Southern fairs to do so. In late 1899, J.L. Dart, head of a local African-American industrial school, was the first to advocate for the inclusion of a Negro Building at the Exposition. He believed that it was necessary to secure the cooperation of the black community and to gain national attention for the Exposition. 404 By June 1900, the white editors of the Charleston News & Courier called for the organization of a Negro Department of the Exposition “without delay.” Citing examples of other Southern

402 Doyle, New Men, New Cities, New South, 306.
403 Ibid., 304.
fairs, the editors emphasized the potential for such a display to be “one of the most attractive and instructive of the special exhibits at the fair.” The editors went on to make suggestions about who would be ideal leaders for the Department, first recommending Booker T. Washington on account of his national renown and influence.405 Less than a month later, John Averill, director-general of the Exposition, met with a large group of African-American men to discuss plans for the Department. From this meeting, Averill announced the selection of Washington to head the Department in order to “make the Negro Department as broad and national in its scope as the lines upon which the whole project has been cast.” Dr. W. D. Crum, a black physician and Republican Party leader in Charleston, and Thomas E. Miller, president of the State Colored College at Orangeburg, were named as vice presidents. The directors and gathered men also selected additional members of the executive board of the Department.406

Because the Exposition Company was not formally chartered under state law until October 10, 1900, actions taken prior to that date were informal recommendations that required formalization by the Board of Directors.407 As a result, the Exposition directors did not formally establish the Negro Department under the leadership of Booker T. Washington as one of the eleven main departments of the fair until November 15, 1900, at which point they also allocated a total of $15,000 to construct the Negro Building.408 White Exposition organizers and black supporters viewed the Negro Department as fulfilling an important role for all three intended audiences of the Exposition: for African Americans, it provided material evidence of their progress; for Northern whites, it

408 “The Negro Department,” The Exposition, December 1900, 5.
demonstrated what their investment in black education accomplished; and, for Southern whites, it at minimum satisfied their curiosity, though many had more admirable motives. Although the Exposition managers still recognized the important role of the Negro Building in contributing to the revival of the regional economy, they also acknowledged that this purpose would not necessarily drawn white Southern visitors to the exhibit.

Although Washington had been involved in expositions in the past, the South Carolina Exposition was his only appointment as chief commissioner of the Negro Department. He served primarily in a ceremonial capacity. With the frequent absence of Washington from Charleston, Crum took on most of the responsibility for the operation of the Department. He spent several months organizing different bureaus including Agriculture, Arts and Sculpture, Manufactures and Transportation, Horticulture and Fruit, History, Minerals and Forestry, Medicine and Dentistry, Education, Women’s, and Livestock, among others, with officers supervising each. As the result of this work, the Negro Department was not considered to be fully organized until April 1901. Shortly thereafter, Washington issued a notice to African Americans across the country, urging their participation to make the exhibit “the most complete and satisfactory of any exhibit that the race has made since its freedom.”

As with previous Southern expositions, some members of the African-American community objected to the Negro Department and the Exposition as a whole. Writing after the fact, Crum described, “Some were of the opinion that it was fostering the ‘Jim

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Crow’ idea to have a separate building, while others objected to the name given the department.‖

A number of African Americans also protested the necessity of riding in Jim Crow railroad cars to travel to the Exposition. The total effect of these objections resulted in the appearance that the Board of Directors “manifested a far livelier interest in the success of the Negro Department than the negroes themselves displayed.”

Despite these protests, plans for the Negro Building proceeded with elaborate ceremonies for the cornerstone laying on July 4, 1901. The day’s exercises began with a parade from the city center out to the Exposition grounds. A number of African-American civil and military organizations participated in the procession including the Negro Department officers, a military band, the colored battalion of the National Guards, a variety of black fraternal organizations, several black unions, and many African-American schoolchildren. After the parade reached the fairgrounds, a crowd of at least 8,000 gathered to listen to the addresses on behalf of the Negro Department. Crum served as the Master of Ceremonies, and several short speeches were given, including those by Director-General Averill and Exposition President F.W. Wagener, before the introduction of the featured speaker of the occasion, Rev. Richard Carroll of Columbia, South Carolina.

Carroll was a great supporter of the accommodationist philosophy, and his address reflected the influence of Booker T. Washington and other African-American orators of the day. He urged the local black community to “take a special interest in this Exposition and do all in their power to make it a success, for whatever benefits are

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414 Hemphill, “A Short Story,” 139.
derived from it they will have their share in proportion to the whites.” Carroll echoed almost exactly Charles Anderson’s comments at the opening of the Negro Building in Nashville regarding the role of popular sentiment in determining the rights held by African Americans and the ability of material displays of progress to help change that sentiment for the better. Although Carroll condemned the disfranchisement of the race, he then toned down his message and explained, “The discriminations and oppressions on the part of the white people will not impede our progress as much as we may fear,” instead, he believed the divisions within the race itself may be more harmful.\footnote{The News & Courier praised Carroll’s “extremely practical view of the true policy which should be pursued by the negroes.”\footnote{The Negro Building,” \textit{Charleston News & Courier}, July 5, 1901.} \footnote{The Negro at the Exposition,” \textit{Charleston News & Courier}, July 5, 1901.}} At the end of Carroll’s speech, just as the sun was setting, the cornerstone was set in place, and a collection to support the Negro Department was taken from the crowd.

Washington attempted to solicit additional support for the Negro Department, particularly among the local population, by delivering a lecture in Charleston on September 12 before a crowd of several thousand black and white citizens. In his address, Washington recognized the ample public criticism of another separate Negro Department, but hoped to silence the critics, stating, “They were perfectly right in the beginning in stating their objection to the separate department, but now that is has been definitely decided to have a separate negro department, it seems to me that such objections should disappear and that there should be the completest unison and harmony.” Washington pleaded for support of the Exposition, emphasizing his belief that
such opportunities to display the material progress of the race only help to solve the race problem.\(^{419}\)

While in town, Washington also visited the Exposition grounds and was greatly impressed with the progress being made in preparing the grounds and erecting the buildings.\(^{420}\) The vast majority of this progress was no doubt due to the tireless efforts of black laborers. As Fulton County had done for the Atlanta Exposition, the City of Charleston “placed the chain gang at the service of the Exposition Company for such labor as could be performed by it in preparing the grounds and buildings.”\(^{421}\) Additionally, paid black laborers provided the majority of the workforce, and were portrayed by the Exposition leaders as happy, carefree, and even “picturesque.”\(^{422}\)

Figure 7. Negro Building Exterior, Charleston. Source: Charleston and the South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition: An Illustrated Souvenir of the Beautiful Exposition and of Historic Places and Prominent Features of the City (Boston: Bartlett Press, 1902), n.p.

Although designed by the white Exposition architect from New York, Bradford Gilbert, the Negro Building itself was also constructed entirely by black labor. Gilbert designed the building in an unadorned Mexican mission style with ivory walls and a red tile roof. It was H-shaped with two wings enclosing the central courtyard (see fig. 7).

The central part of the building contained the main hall serving as a meeting space, while

\(^{419}\) “Mr. Washington’s Lecture,” Charleston News & Courier, September 13, 1901.


\(^{421}\) Hemphill, “A Short Story,” 146.

\(^{422}\) “The Growth of the Exposition City,” The Exposition, May 1901, 211.
the exhibits were displayed in the wings. The smallest of any Negro exhibit at a Southern exposition, the building enclosed only 12,000 square feet.\footnote{“The Negro Building,” The Exposition, July 1901, 272; Smith, “The Ivory City,” 504; George Keenan, “The Charleston Exposition,” Outlook, March 22, 1902, 717.} Additionally, the building was surrounded by a “negro village” evoking an old plantation and slave quarters with the effect intended to “show the development of the negro within the last twenty-five years.”\footnote{“Exposition Echoes,” The Exposition, July 1901, 281.} Located in the Natural Section of the Exposition grounds, as opposed to the Art Section which hosted most of the main buildings in the Court of Palaces, the Negro Building was nestled in a grove of live oaks near the Ashley River, further suggesting a plantation setting.\footnote{Keenan, “The Charleston Exposition,” 713, 717.} This section of the grounds was particularly popular with Northern visitors due to its largely unaltered landscape and natural beauty.\footnote{James B. Townsend, “A Great Southern Exposition,” Cosmopolitan, March 1902, 529.} Whether intentional or not, the location of the Negro Building and the Women’s Building in the Natural Section of the Exposition grounds brings to mind the anthropological debate of nature versus culture, with the inferior groups considered closer to nature than the advanced civilization that represents culture.

In the courtyard of the Negro Building, Gilbert intended for there to be a statue representing the race. This project quickly developed into a racial controversy unlike anything seen at previous fairs. Gilbert planned to have five statues on the grounds, each characterizing particular groups of people that had connections to the geographic areas represented at the fair with eight foot tall figures on pedestals of the same height. In addition to the Negro group, there was “one typical of Colonial Days, one of the Huguenots, another of the Spanish and Aztecs and one of the Aborigines or Indians.”\footnote{Bradford Lee Gilbert to Washington, New York, June 4, 1901, in BTW Papers, Vol. 6, 146.}
As early as June, Gilbert communicated with Washington about his plans for the Negro

group statue. He described the statue as follows:

The central figure of the group is a young Negress poising on her head a
full basket of cotton and standing up in a most dignified and effective
manner. At the right is a typical figure of a muscular and well-formed
man holding a plough... it is in this figure that I propose to have designed
as an ideal a likeness of yourself... On the left, with a leather working
apron round his loins and the tools of a mechanic lying at his feet, is a
young man resting at noon-time on a bale of tobacco or cotton with a
banjo which he is intently examining and playing.\textsuperscript{428}

If Washington responded to Gilbert regarding his proposed description of the statue no
record of his reply has survived. The figures were designed by Charles A. Lopez of New
York City and put into place in front of the Negro Building in early October (see figs. 8
& 9).\textsuperscript{429} The News & Courier praised the statue as “a splendid work of art, correctly
showing the colored race as an industrial people.”\textsuperscript{430} Similarly, another observer thought
the statue reflected “that side of the race so ably advocated by Mr. Booker T.
Washington, the moral, agricultural and educational.”\textsuperscript{431}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{428}{Ibid., 145.}
\footnotetext{429}{“The Negro Group,” The Exposition, November 1901, 470.}
\footnotetext{430}{“A Veritable Work of Art,” Charleston News & Courier, October 25, 1901.}
\footnotetext{431}{T. Cuyler Smith, “The Charleston Exposition,” The Independent, January 16, 1902, 146.}
\end{footnotes}
The Exposition managers’ intentions to honor African Americans as they were honoring other ethnic groups, however, clearly backfired when the African-American community saw the statue. The *Exposition* magazine reported that a “violent protest was entered against this group” by the “new” Negroes of Charleston. The black community held a mass meeting to discuss the issue, and then sent a formal request to the Exposition Company to remove the statue from the front of the Negro Building. The white community was puzzled about the particular nature of the opposition to the statue, but believed that many objected “for personal reasons” as the group represented African Americans in menial positions.\footnote{432 “The Negro Group,” *The Exposition*, November 1901, 470.} Several people passed along the community’s complaints about the statuary to Washington. Thomas E. Miller, one of the Vice Presidents of the Negro Department, explained that “the group is being condemned by every hopeful, aspiring, self respecting Negro of both sexes.” Washington attempted to calm the crisis by pointing out that the statue accurately reflected the position of most
members of the race in menial or agricultural positions.\textsuperscript{433} His words proved ineffectual, however, and the controversy received more and more attention. The \textit{New York Times} even commented on the debate, calling it “amusing and instructive.” They, however, attributed the opposition to mulattoes in the community who thought the figures looked too purely African.\textsuperscript{434} As a result of the opposition, the statue was relocated to the Court of Palaces, “where it attracted even more attention from both white and colored visitors than it would have received in the place for which it was designed.”\textsuperscript{435}

Despite this prominent demonstration of the divisions in the African-American community and the local propensity to protest, Exposition directors and black supporters continued their efforts to portray racial harmony at the fair. The formal opening of the Negro Building was celebrated on January 1, 1902, one month after the Exposition’s opening. Directors selected the date to coincide with the celebration of Emancipation Day in the state. The date, also New Year’s Day, was conveniently a holiday so that more blacks would be available to attend the ceremonies, just as the cornerstone laying had been celebrated on the Independence Day. The Exposition directors also lowered the admission fee to twenty-five cents, or half-price, for the day.\textsuperscript{436} In another effort to promote attendance, 5,000 handbills promoting the events of the day were distributed in Charleston and the surrounding country, and officials expected over 20,000 attendees for the celebration.\textsuperscript{437} Although this estimate proved to be quite inflated, Negro Day attendance was the seventh highest of the Exposition, with 7,174 attendees.\textsuperscript{438}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{433} Thomas J. Jackson to Washington, Charleston, October 9, 1901, in \textit{BTW Papers}, Vol. 6, 238.
\item \textsuperscript{434} “Charleston and Its Exposition,” \textit{New York Times}, December 1, 1901.
\item \textsuperscript{435} Hemphill, “A Short Story,” 139.
\item \textsuperscript{436} “Negro Day at Exposition,” \textit{Charleston News & Courier}, January 2, 1902.
\item \textsuperscript{437} “This Is Negro Day,” \textit{Charleston News & Courier}, January 1, 1902.
\item \textsuperscript{438} Hemphill, “A Short Story,” 159.
\end{itemize}
The celebration began with a parade from the city to the Exposition grounds. The African-American Carolina Light Infantry led the group, which included many of the same organizations that participated in the procession for the laying of the cornerstone. The bands of the State College at Orangeburg and Jenkins Orphanage provided music during the procession and the ceremonies. The featured speaker of the day was Thomas E. Miller, President of the State Colored College at Orangeburg and a Vice President of the Negro Department. Miller spoke at length, touching on many of the main points of the accommodationist agenda. After expressing his wish that one day Jim Crow railroad cars would be clean and comfortable, he claimed, “There is no such thing as social equality anywhere in the world, and no sane white man or negro should pay any attention to the clatter about social equality, for it is all bosh to talk about it. No sensible negro aims at it or expects it. But we do aim at, and expect to achieve, all the enjoyment of domestic happiness that belongs to a free and untrammled citizenship.” The editors of the News & Courier responded with support for Miller’s address, and clarified that the Southern white man would continue to deny the black man any political rights, but would help him achieve “the right to absolute protection of his life, the right to establish his own social customs, when they do not affect injuriously the larger life of the State, the peaceful pursuit of his vocation or profession, and security for his possessions.” Basically, the News & Courier proposed that blacks only have access to rights that did not threaten whites in any way. At the conclusion of Miller’s speech, Crum took the stage and formally presented the Negro exhibits to the Exposition Company. Director-General Averill then returned the keys to Crum, expressing the

directors’ complimentary wish that “the colored people should remain the custodians of the building to the end of the Exposition.”\textsuperscript{442} The Exposition officials’ generous gesture clearly reflected their attempts to promote the illusion of racial harmony, even while the opinions of the News & Courier tended to ruin it.

After the conclusion of the ceremonies, visitors spilled out of the Auditorium. Some headed to the midway where, in celebration of the occasion, the attractions developed a program of free activities for attendees. The program included a grand cake walk, a greased pig chase, and a balloon ascension, among other things. Jim Key, the educated horse, even gave a special performance for the crowd immediately following the ceremonies.\textsuperscript{443} Other visitors went straight to the Negro Building to see the exhibits for themselves.

The building held a wide variety of displays filling the entire floor and wall space of the building. In collecting the exhibits, the Department put the main emphasis on “quality, not quantity.”\textsuperscript{444} As at the other Southern expositions, some of the most impressive exhibits were developed by African-American schools. At Charleston, Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes each presented large exhibits including everything from wagons to bricks, furniture, and shoes made by their students. The American Missionary Association, as well as South Carolina’s State Colored College, Claflin University, and the Agricultural College of North Carolina also presented exhibits showing work by their

\textsuperscript{442} “Negro Day at Exposition,” Charleston News & Courier, January 2, 1902.
\textsuperscript{443} “On the Midway To-day,” Charleston News & Courier, January 1, 1902.
\textsuperscript{444} Crum, “The Negro at the Charleston Exposition,” 331-2.
students. The Building also included a notable section devoted to art, in which photographs, oil and water color paintings, and hand painted china were displayed.

Unlike Nashville and Atlanta, which presented exclusively static exhibits, at Charleston the Negro Department officials also presented practical demonstrations of various pursuits where African Americans had opportunities to advance. T. W. Thurston of the Ashley Bailey Silk Mill, which exclusively employed African Americans, sent several machines and black employees to the Exposition to demonstrate silk manufacturing, and pieces of the woven cloth were given out as souvenirs. Similarly, a broom manufacturer and a dairy demonstrated work being done by black employees at their facilities. These exhibits went straight to the heart of the Exposition directors’ desire to demonstrate the industrial capabilities of the African-American population as a building block for economic expansion in the South. The Women’s Bureau of the Department adopted the idea of practical demonstration as well and presented “living object lessons” to illustrate what black women could accomplish in “millinery, kindergarten work, poultry raising, hair and wig making, nurse training, domestic economy, and other similar occupations.”

Also in contrast with the Nashville and Atlanta expositions, which made special concessions for African-American exhibitors by providing free space or free transportation, the South Carolina exposition did neither and expected the black community to cover their own costs. This policy may have been the reason that Washington failed to secure exhibits for the Negro Department from Haiti and San

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445 Ibid., 332.
446 Ibid., 334.
448 Ibid., 371.
Domingo as he originally intended to bolster the Negro Building’s connection with the Exposition’s West Indian theme.\textsuperscript{450} Washington was successful, however, in securing the American Negro Exhibit from the Paris Exposition of 1900 for presentation in the Negro Building after it was displayed at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo (see fig. 10). The popular and critically acclaimed exhibit endeavored to show African Americans’ history, present condition, literature, education, and other examples of progress. The exhibit included a statistical examination of the condition of African Americans; photographs and miniature models illustrating African-American life and history; exhibits from Fisk, Atlanta and Howard Universities, and Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes; and, a selection of books and newspapers written and published by African-Americans.\textsuperscript{451}

\textsuperscript{451} Thomas J. Calloway, “The Negro Department,” \textit{The Exposition}, June 1901, 242-244.
The combination of different exhibit styles led one visitor to proclaim that the Negro Building contained “the most complete, comprehensive, and carefully selected display of negro work ever brought together.”452 While frequent comments in this vein illustrate the attraction of the exhibit to distant visitors, it did not draw much attention from the local or regional community.453 One visitor observed that “it seems to excite little interest among the whites – I never saw more than a dozen persons in it at a time.”454 Even Washington recognized the difficulties faced by the Department, though he disavowed any responsibility, claiming “The Exposition as a whole is far from the success that it was expected to be… Those in charge of the Negro Department, however, are in no way responsible for the general failure of interest being taken in the Exposition.”455 A notable exception to this statement, President Theodore Roosevelt took great interest in the Exposition and the Negro Department. April 9, 1902 was President’s Day at the Exposition and as part of his itinerary Roosevelt visited all of the principal buildings, including the Negro Building.456 While touring the Negro exhibits, Roosevelt was particularly impressed with the invention of Burkins’ automatic firing gun, while Mrs. Roosevelt was presented with the gift of a large white feather fan made by Mr. Tobias Scotts, one of the individual exhibitors in the Building. The Roosevelts were duly impressed with the display of African-American progress at the Exposition.457

In addition to the Negro Building, Exposition organizers also sought to draw black visitors and demonstrate their dedication to the idea of racial harmony by hosting several special days and conferences for African-American groups. Though they

452 Smith, “The Ivory City,” 504.
453 Hemphill, “A Short Story,” 139.
455 Washington to Hollis Burke Frissell, Tuskegee, February 1, 1902, in BTW Papers, Vol. 6, 387.
received less publicity than at other expositions, black fraternal organizations, colored military groups, and local groups of African Americans were all granted celebration days. Similarly, the Exposition hosted African-American congresses for the Masons, educators, and farmers, among others.

As at other Southern expositions, while the Negro Department officers tried to portray black progress and racial harmony, images of subservient African Americans in the Old South also appeared at the Exposition. In the Women’s Building visitors found the Carolina Rice Kitchen restaurant, in which “Negro cooks give free instruction in the true Southern methods of preparation.” Even as the Women’s Bureau of the Negro Department tried to encourage black women to pursue new careers such as nursing, this demonstration put them back into the position of cooking for white patrons. Likewise, the Agriculture Department reinforced the status of African Americans as menial farm laborers with black workers tending to the six acres of cotton and tobacco planted on the Exposition grounds. This agricultural work best illustrates the differences between the goals of black exhibitors and the goals of the white Exposition management. While black exhibitors and Negro Department officials, particularly Washington, acknowledged African American’s role as agricultural workers, they wanted to show their successes in new methods of cultivation and in owning their own farms. On the other hand, Exposition leaders were simply interested in demonstrating the basic capabilities of the black workforce. On the Midway, there were fewer stereotypical portrayals of African Americans than at other fairs. The Old Mill concession, however, provided a boat ride

460 Smith, “The Ivory City,” 507.
through tunnels and past panoramic scenes where patrons glimpsed a cotton plantation complete with actual African-American workers picking cotton.462

Stereotypical portrayals of African Americans in the Old South flourished in Exposition publications. Like souvenir booklets from the Atlanta Exposition, the *Exposition*, a monthly journal published by the Exposition Company, featured nostalgic poetry, including one poet’s recollection of the “darkies’ plaintive song” as they worked on the rice plantation.463 Another section described the wonders of Kiawah Island and its abandoned plantation homes, instructing tourists that “one may linger beside the quaint old well and horse-trough, and hold instructive converse with old negro ‘maumas’ of a type fast passing away.”464 Rather than hosting the gross exaggeration of Old Plantation concession on the Midway, visitors from the North were urged to get an actual look at the ruins of the South’s former glory and the old-time black plantation workers to provide contrast with the progress demonstrated in the Negro Building.

In addition to these stereotypical portrayals that echoed the controversy over the Negro group statue, African-American visitors to the fair faced more discrimination than visitors to any other Southern exposition. W. D. Crum lamented that poor railroad accommodations for African-American passengers resulted in many choosing not to attend the Exposition, “while other incidents made them feel that they were not as welcome as their money.”465 These incidents are revealed through a number of specific examples. On the Midway, concession operators posted Jim Crow signs. The Old Mill had clearly marked “Colored” and “White” ticket lines (see fig. 11). Black patrons were

allowed to pay their money and attend just like anyone else, but there was no permitted social contact with the white patrons.\textsuperscript{466}

The \textit{New York Age} similarly described “all sorts of discriminations” that took place at the Exposition, which led to the development of a local boycott, influencing the number of African-American attendees at the fair. In refuting these claims, the \textit{News \\& Courier} actually went on to confirm much of the disputed treatment, attributing the discrimination as follows:

[It is the] natural and proper condition which could not be changed even during ‘Exposition times.’ It is true, also, that the ‘public comfort’ provisions on the Exposition grounds have not been common to both races, but that could hardly have been expected. There have been, in fact,

\textsuperscript{466} \textit{Charleston and the South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition: An Illustrated Souvenir of the Beautiful Exposition and of Historic Places and Prominent Features of the City} (Boston: Bartlett Press, 1902), n.p.
no differences in the treatment of the two races at the Exposition except such as were dictated by custom and approved by common sense.\footnote{467}{“Negro at the Exposition,” \textit{Charleston News & Courier}, April 29, 1902.}

Clearly the editors believed that maintenance of a strict system of white supremacy and black inferiority was more important than the illusion of racial harmony at the Exposition.

In order to better explain why the African-American attendance at the Exposition was not as large as had been hoped, Robert J. Macbeth, who organized local contributions to the Negro Department exhibit, clarified the situation for the \textit{News & Courier} editors. Macbeth emphasized the “impossibility of securing decent railroad accommodations” for out-of-town visitors. He also explained that not only were the public comfort stations segregated, but no provisions were made for African-Americans outside of the Negro Building. Additionally, food and drink vendors in restaurants and booths on the grounds blatantly discriminated, causing Macbeth to declare, “it is not pleasant to a hungry or thirsty man to see food and drink all around him and yet be unable to get it.”\footnote{468}{“The Negro at the Exposition,” \textit{Charleston News & Courier}, April 30, 1902.} Macbeth’s few examples clearly illustrate a pervasive problem with discrimination on the Exposition grounds. Despite the Exposition management’s attempts to portray black progress, the increased discrimination evident at the Charleston Exposition indicates that to a white audience the very idea of what constituted racial harmony was changing from the old system of paternalism to modern segregation. Jim Crow and white supremacy had become facts of life in the South that could no longer be kept out of the ideal city created by an Exposition.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS

The South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition was the last fair of a
dying era, simply aiming to promote local, regional, and national economic growth and
technological advancement. With the American acquisition of a foreign empire, the next
group of fairs looked to show off the new colonies, demonstrate how American
paternalism would benefit the conquered people, and emphasize American military
power. Although both groups of fairs focused on the message of white superiority, the
new imperialist twist added a new dimension which emphasized paternalism more than
self-help. With this change, displays of black progress no longer had the same benefits
for white Exposition organizers, and they gradually fell by the wayside.

At the Jamestown Tercentenary Exposition in 1907, the last major international
exposition to be held in the South, the transition was clear. The Exposition broke away
from the previous theme of Southern material progress to truly focus on a celebration of
patriotism with the anniversary of the settlement of Jamestown and a large military
display. The Jamestown Exposition had a Negro Building; however, it was funded by
the state of Virginia, as more of an exercise in public relations than anything else. For
whites, the emphasis had clearly shifted to segregation rather than progress. Without
Southern white interest in continuing to support exhibitions of black progress, some
members of the African-American community turned further inward, creating their own
exposition, the Negro Historical and Industrial Exposition in Richmond, VA in 1915.

469 Rydell, Findling, and Pelle, Fair America, 44.
471 Greenhalgh, Ephemeral Vistas, 99; Dwight W. Hoover, “Jamestown 1907 Jamestown Tercentennial
Exposition,” in Findling and Pelle, Historical Dictionary, 201.
Despite these developments, as late as 1936, the Texas Centennial Exposition included a Hall of Negro Life which “treated coloured people as a useful economic resource,” echoing the intentions of white exposition organizers from an earlier era.\textsuperscript{473}

The four Southern international expositions from 1884 to 1902 were unique, however, in the cooperation demonstrated between white fair organizers and black leaders and exhibitors to each meet their own goals through separate African-American exhibits. White exposition officials believed that exhibits of black agricultural and industrial skill, in the guise of progress, would help draw Northern and foreign investment to the South to revitalize an economy that was still struggling from the aftereffects of the Civil War and the depression of the 1890s. White leaders also expected that the illusion of cordial race relations presented at the fairs would convince outside observers that the race problem in the South had been solved, allowing Southern whites to continue to manage race relations as they saw fit. The defeat of the Lodge Bill and the Supreme Court decisions in \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson} and \textit{Williams v. Mississippi} during this time period reflect Southern victories on this issue and ensured that it would not be raised again. On the other hand, black leaders aimed to use the exhibits to encourage additional industrial progress among their people and demonstrate to whites the potential for black economic power, in hopes that the advancement of the African-American community in this way would bring them closer to the attainment of their civil rights.

The expositions displayed a harmonious and orderly vision of interactions between blacks and whites in the South that strongly contrasted with the reality of the world outside the exposition gates where racially-motivated conflict, anxiety, and

\textsuperscript{473} Greenhalgh, \textit{Ephemeral Vistas}, 100.
violence abounded. This illusion of racial harmony was achieved in part by the simple existence of Negro Departments at each fair. The departments demonstrated that white exposition directors believed that the African-American community had something of value to contribute to the exhibits of the fair, despite the fact that whites had ulterior motives for their inclusion. Exposition officials also invited prominent black orators and introduced special celebration days and African-American congresses to further the illusion of racial harmony, but also to draw additional black attendance to the fairs. Even the stereotypical and often offensive portraits of African Americans that flourished on the Midway and in exposition related publications largely did not work against the illusion of racial harmony because the depictions presented blacks as happy with their inferior position.

During the nearly two decade span of these fairs, as the exposition organizers worked to create this illusion of racial harmony, race relations in the real world were getting progressively and distinctly worse as white supremacist policies became commonplace. Jim Crow segregation grew to encompass nearly every aspect of Southern life. Southern state legislatures disfranchised black voters almost completely. Episodes of mob violence and lynching claimed more and more black lives. In 1903, only one year after the close of the Charleston Exposition, African-American writer, Charles W. Chesnutt observed, “the rights of the Negroes are at a lower ebb than at any time during the thirty-five years of their freedom, and the race prejudice more intense and uncompromising.”\(^474\) Despite exposition directors’ efforts to portray cordial relations between the races, the growing problems of the real world gradually encroached on the ideal cities of the fairs. Segregation and discrimination on the fairgrounds increased with

each exposition. As a result of the increasing proliferation of Jim Crow and other forms of racial discrimination, the organizers’ visions of racial harmony blurred, and the concept no longer meant what it once did by the time of the Charleston Exposition. After four fairs, the cooperation between the white exposition directors and black leaders failed to work to the satisfaction of either group. Despite criticism in recent years, this progression of segregation and discrimination at international expositions in the South provides definitive support for the Woodward thesis that racial segregation did not develop in full force immediately after emancipation, but rather took shape after a transitional period of flexibility in race relations that ended in the 1890s.

Despite the great hopes of black leaders, particularly Booker T. Washington and his followers, the Negro exhibits at these expositions made little measurable difference in the material or social condition of the race. As African Americans faced more difficult struggles in their daily lives and more discrimination on the exposition grounds, support for separate black exhibits declined significantly. The progression of black thought about African-American representation at international expositions during this era reflects the transition from protest to accommodation and back again. At the New Orleans Exposition, blacks took advantage of the opportunity to exhibit, but used the platform to promote their own agenda, with several speakers espousing radical ideas in front of mixed audiences. By the time of the expositions in Atlanta and Nashville, the accommodationist philosophy clearly ruled, and the African-American speakers all followed the lead of Washington’s Atlanta Compromise. At the Charleston Exposition, the accommodationist leadership remained in place, but local opinion noticeably shifted to a more protest-oriented viewpoint. The African-American community in Charleston

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had no national leader to take up their cause, but only a few years later W. E. B. Du Bois would emerge as the protest-minded alternative to Washington’s leadership with the formation of the Niagara Movement in 1905.

One purpose of the Southern expositions was to rebuild national connections that were severed by the Civil War. The South hoped to catch up with the rest of the nation economically and philosophically to recreate a sense of national identity. After the Chicago Exposition emphasized the national acceptance of white supremacy through its policies and displays, fair organizers in the South were free to accentuate similar ideas about race in order to help create a new sense of American identity based on white supremacy and black inferiority. White Southern exposition organizers were able to deftly balance this emphasis on white supremacy with displays of black progress in industrial and agricultural areas in order to create the illusion of racial harmony.

The organizers of the international expositions at New Orleans, Atlanta, Nashville, and Charleston intentionally obfuscated the fairs’ reflections of the reality of race relations in the South to create an image demonstrating racial harmony for the benefit of all groups involved. Although the fairs themselves were all considered to be successes, eventually, the illusion of amicable race relations failed as a result of the increasing amount of oppression suffered by blacks at the hands of whites in the South. The spreading Negrophobia could not be forced to remain outside of the exposition gates.
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