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Fighting for Recognition: The Role African Americans played in World Fairs

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State University of New York
College at Buffalo
Department of History

*Fighting for Recognition:
The Role African Americans played in World Fairs*

A Thesis in
History

By

Andrew R. Valint

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At the turn of the 19th century African Americans were locked in a constant struggle for equality. Having made political, social, and economic progress in the 35 years since the end of the Civil War, African Americans now looked to display their gains on a national level at the popular world fairs.

Influential black leaders such as Ida B. Wells and Fredrick Douglass fought endlessly against the stereotypical displays of people of color at the fair's midways. At the turn of the 19th century the U.S. was enthralled with the idea of empire and the spreading of democracy, leaving the African American race and their progress largely subverted at world fairs.

Until recently the only instance of African Americans having a factual depiction of their post Civil War advancement was at the Paris Fair of 1900. History has since learned that the 'Negro Exhibit' was not only displayed in Paris but also at Buffalo's 1901 Pan American Exposition.

The presence of the exhibit in Buffalo details exactly how hard both the white and black elite in Western New York wanted African Americans to show off their progress to the citizens of the United States.

As the United States ushered the new era of technology and science into the 20th century, important civil and social changes were taking place across America. The world fairs gave races that were largely considered inferior an opportunity to highlight their culture on a global scale. It was precisely that opportunity that led African Americans to fight and succeed in bringing their exhibit to Buffalo in 1901.

The Transformation of American Leisure

Expositions are the timekeepers of progress. They record the world's advancement. They stimulate the energy, enterprise, and intellect of the people and quicken human genius. They go into the home. They broaden and brighten the daily life of people. They open mighty storehouses of information to the student. Every exposition, great or small, has helped this onward step.

President William McKinley
Pan American Exposition
Buffalo 1901

The 1890s and early 1900s saw an increase in nightlife activity, but by no means were the clubs the only form of leisure activity. The "vacation habit" that arrived in America in this period would support the expansion of a host of new leisure-time activities and amusement sites, from world's fair midways to amusement and baseball parks.

Vacations were nothing new for the well-to-do citizens of America who regularly left the metropolis during the summer season for lake shore resorts, European getaways, and cabins in the hills. The "vacation habit" that David Nasaw described in his book *Going Out - The Rise And Fall Of Public Amusements*, refers to the influx of the middle class citizen or the commoners leaving their homes for weekend or weeklong trips across the country.

Edward Hungerford detailed the new fad in an August 1891 article for *Century* magazine:

All classes and conditions of men enter into the streams of population which from the middle of May to the middle of October ebb and flow through the land. Every social grade, every occupations is represented. The rich and well-to-do middle classes appear most conspicuously, but the currents are swollen by small tradespeople, by pensioners on limited legacies ... Then comes the work people, who in one way and another manage to move with the rest. Your colored barber, when trade begins to slacken in the large town, informs you that he is thinking of taking a little vacation. The carpenter and joiner sends his wife and babies a hundred miles away to spend weeks or months on a farm that takes boarders. Factories...empty their armies into the open fields...Professional men, college

students, teachers, seamstresses, and fresh-air fund beneficiaries pour forth to the mountains, the seaside, the lakes, where they spend their summer outings in rest or in various forms of service.¹

Hungerford may have been exaggerating. For most city workers during the turn of the century, summer months brought no relief to work. Both during summer and winter, working people were expected to work at least five and a half days a week. Few and far between, when vacations came they were often unwelcome and unpaid.

During this time many reformers and journalists preached that a rested worker was the best type of worker; however, many laborers saw little time off. The vast majority of vacationers came from the ranks of the self-employed, professionals, and white collar workers. The self-employed worker and teachers had always saved their money to take vacations. Author David Nasaw goes on to state, “in the early 1900’s they were joined by white collar employees in government offices, banks, financial houses, and insurance companies, and salesmen and saleswomen from the larger department stores.”² Some employer’s encouraged their workers to take a week’s unpaid vacation. It was becoming clear that vacations boosted morale and attracted qualified people to work hard for their companies.

While the cabin in the woods and the cottage on the beach remained the favored vacation destinations for those who could afford a week’s vacation, more and more Americans with less expendable money were beginning to spend their summer holidays in the cities. Nasaw describes two instances where people chose city vacations: In the 1904 Ladies Home Journal article on The Best Two Weeks’ Vacation for a Family, Mrs. George Archibald Palmer glowingly recounted her family’s vacation in New York. Each

¹ Nasaw, David, *Going Out: The Rise And Fall Of Public Amusements* 1991 Basic Books, pg 63

² Ibid.

of the fourteen days yielded recreation, entertainment and instruction. Those who had prophesied that a New York vacation would wear us out saw us return with renewed strength, high spirits and a firm conviction that there could be no better way to do it.” An article of the same taste, “The Best Two Weeks’ Vacation for a Girl: How Girls with Little Money Enjoyed Their Holidays,” the writer described her “City Park Vacation”; another, her metropolitan holiday “By Way of the Trolley Cars.”³ Cities were beginning to be heavily promoted as vacation spots by tourist boards, hotels, and railroads, all of which took out newspaper ads or circulated their own publications conveying the joys of summer in the city.

Visitors to New York City, Chicago, Boston, and places like Niagara Falls were bombarded with a steady diet of urban adventure stories before they even reached their destinations. Visitor guidebooks assisted travelers, weekly tourist guides and hotel personnel, specially trained to guide strangers through the streets of the city, were available. Less desirable than traditional vacation spots, cities had their special places and their own type of charm. It was also much, much cheaper for the new type of vacationer to afford.

The city’s diversity was presented as an attraction. The guidebooks, travel magazines, and tour guides pointed proudly to the city’s diverse populations and types, its parks, shopping districts, building styles, and neighborhoods. Visitors found it intriguing to enter a city and become apart of the heterogeneous crowds, to take part in the urban life that was foreign to many of them. Nasaw quotes an anonymous author of “A Vacation on Fifth Avenue” in *Outlook* in May 1906, “It is not the things which Fifth Avenue contains that gives it its greatest interest—it is the moving, pulsating life which it bears

³ Ibid.

along in its great current. It is like a splendid river filled with all sorts of craft engaged in ministering to the pleasure or the needs of the world.”⁴

The city was being discovered as not only a place of work but as a place of leisure and play. Still, compared to the beaches, mountains, and overseas, the cities of the United States were still considered by many as less a tourist attraction than a place to leave during the summer months. The stereotypical image of the American city would change greatly with the emergence of the world’s fair midways and later the amusement and baseball parks, which would contribute immensely to the city’s allure as a warm-weather amusement center. Nasaw explains, “The worlds fairs were paeans to progress, concrete demonstrations of how order and organization, high culture and art, science and technology, commerce and industry, all brought together under the wise administration of business and government, would lead inevitably to a brighter, more prosperous future.”⁵ Everyone concerned knew that without drawing the populations to the attractions it would be impossible to educate them. The authors of the history of the St. Louis exposition admitted, though hesitant, visitors came to the fairs “to be amused, instruction being secondary. The educational features, of course, should be paramount, and perhaps they are, but the incontestable truth remains that without a great amusement feature, the light frivolity that ministers to the masses, an exposition cannot hope to succeed.”⁶

The first major American fair, was held in Philadelphia, it was dubbed the “Centennial Exposition” of 1876. The fair was remarkably dull but it pointed future fairs into the direction of progress. Visitors lined up to see the “wonders of the age”, this exhibit showed the latest inventions: the Corliss Engine, the world’s largest steam engine, ready-

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

made shoes, elevators, canned foods, Fleischmann's dry yeast, Westinghouse air brakes, telephones, sewing machines, and typewriters—all products of America's developing scientific and technological advancements.

In order to keep education as the fair's main goal, Philadelphia fair directors banned amusement from the fair grounds. There was, however, nothing they could do when the unofficial "Centennial City" popped up across from the manicured lawns and the exhibition halls. A band of hustlers, showmen, saloon keepers, and sideshow attractions (including learned pigs, a five legged cow, "the man-eating Feejees," and a 602-pound fat lady) kept visitors intrigued.

In contrast to the Philadelphia exposition, the directors of the Paris Exposition of 1889 had no problems about mixing education with amusement on their fairgrounds. Nasaw details, "Parisian fairgoers could visit the Galerie des Machines, if they wished, but they could also spend the day climbing the Eiffel Tower, laughing at themselves in the Hall of Mirrors, riding wooden horses down a roller-coaster track, or visiting the reproduction of the Bastille, transformed 100 years later into an amusement concession."⁷ Space was granted to over 62,000 exhibitors, some using their space for educational purposes, others for amusement. Over thirty-two million visited the Paris Exposition, a huge upgrade from the ten million visitors the Philadelphia Exposition received.

The World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and the American fairs to follow would take a position halfway between Philadelphia, which banned amusements, and Paris, which fully mixed amusement and education on the fairgrounds. It was clear to American fair directors that amusement needed to be integrated into the fairs, it was the only way to attract more people; however, fair directors worried that the amusements

⁷ Ibid.

would detract from the fair's more noble purposes. Their solution was to designate a portion near the fairgrounds called a "midway" where amusement could be had clear from the rest of the other educational exhibits.

The difference between the midways and the education exhibits was as different as black and white. In the main exhibit areas, known as "The White City" in Chicago in 1893, "The Little City of the Beautiful" in Omaha in 1898, "The Rainbow City" in Buffalo in 1901, and "The Ivory City" in St. Louis in 1904, everything from building styles, materials, exterior coloring, design elements, and decorative motifs were coordinated by central planning directors or committees. A few terms to describe what visitors thought about the main exhibit are: stately, orderly, dignified, majestic, monumental, imperial, classical, cosmopolitan, correct, uniform, and harmonious. The cities were portrayed as beautiful, without crime, without poverty, without decay, urban utopias made possible through the advancement of science, technology, learning and high culture.

If the main exhibits were "white" and high culture, the midways were entirely different. They were constructed as a maze of different design and presentation. Exhibitors were free to use any building materials they wanted; it was up to them on how to design their exhibits, and how to display their attraction. Nasaw explains, "The result was a jumble of shacks, sheds, stalls, tents, and booths, some wooden, some canvas, of every conceivable color and design."⁸ The authors of the official history of the St. Louis fair wrote, "What was lacking in stability was made up by the artist, in stucco, gilding, and paint, minarets, towers, domes, peristyles, monuments, arcades, balconies, arches, and in fact all manner of ostentatious designs and devices to produce impressive

⁸ Ibid.

architectural effects were employed.”⁹ Business was pleasure at the midways, the spectacle of calling vendors, over decorated buildings, billboards, posters, and electric lights overhead at the Buffalo exposition all played a role in defining the midways.

Nasaw described the spectacle of Chicago.

The Chicago Midway was a mile-long amusement strip with restaurants, rides, ethnic villages, and stage shows starring singers, dancers, comics, and novelty performers who during the winter made their living on vaudeville or musical comedy stages. Here were the “ethnological” villages, the most popular of all, the “street in Cairo,” with Fahreda Mahzar, or “Little Egypt, the Darling of the Nile,” the bewitching bellyrinal of the Dance du Ventra.¹⁰

Often times the visitors were treated to a cruel, racist depiction of so-called inferior cultures or races.

Except for possibly Paris, the Chicago midway was second to none in its flamboyance. Compared to the midways that would succeed it, it was only the beginning. From Chicago to Atlanta in 1895, Nashville in 1897, Omaha in 1898, Buffalo in 1901, and St. Louis in 1904, the midways and amusement section grew in size and profitability. With the advancement of technology and the use of electricity vendors could show brief, furious light shows that became addicting to travelers. Midway exhibitors learned that by charging twenty-five cents for a shorter show they could make much more than collecting a dollar for a long show.

Like today’s amusement parks, midway visitors passed in and out of various shows until they ran out of energy or ran out of money. Each amusement show only whetted the appetite for more. If any ride or attraction had satisfied the travelers hunger for excitement and pleasure the train of exhibits would have stopped. But that never

⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Ibid.

happened. The shows were just entertaining enough but insufficiently satisfying, leaving their customers searching for more.

In Buffalo's Pan American Exposition, the demand for amusement space on the fairgrounds was so great that a "Midway Annex Company" was formed to build a second midway outside the official amusement district, known as the Pan. Fredrick Thompson, one of the most successful of the Pan exhibitors, was the future designer and owner of Luna Park on Coney Island and the Hippodrome in Manhattan. Before reaching Buffalo, Thompson had experience working at every fair since Chicago. In Buffalo, he created his masterpiece, the "Trip to the Moon," an early twentieth-century *gemeinkunst* with a live narrator, a cast of midget in uniforms, recorded sounds, projected images, elaborate stage settings, lighting effects, and simulated motion in simulated vehicles to create the illusion of space travel and a moon landing. The amazing attraction was highlighted by the visitors having their own roles in the moon landing. Once the visitor entered the exhibit they were giving small parts in the play. "Here was the ultimate tourist spectacle, where the visitor not only viewed but also became part of the sight, part of the show, simultaneously insider and spectator."¹¹

By the time the world's fairs reached St. Louis the directors of events conceited to the fact that the midway was no longer a sideshow to the educational portions of the fair. Their amusement section, "The Pike", was placed directly in the middle of the fairgrounds, with its own entrance onto the street. The sideshow business, once the home of small time hustlers, minstrels, and drifters, had become a respectable investment where millions of dollars were spent. In St. Louis, one of the largest and most profitable of the exotic villages was a re-created model of Jerusalem on 11 acres, with 22 streets, 300

¹¹ Ibid.

structures, a wall “of the same height and aged tone as the one on the yellow hills of the Holy Land,” “and one thousand inhabitants of Jerusalem, conveyed to the Exposition by chartered steamer, sailing from Jaffa.”¹² The exhibit, costing almost a million and a half dollars to construct, had been paid for by a group of local investors whose Board of Directors were mentioned in a *Who’s Who* of business in St. Louis.

The St. Louis fair also had a government sponsored Philippine Exposition Board that imported 1,200 Filipinos to inhabit several different native villages. Author Nasaw explained, “To counter anti-imperialist arguments that the savage Filipinos were “inherently unfit to be members of the American body politic,” the government experts carefully distinguished between the lighter skinned Igorots, who it claimed were capable of progress, and the dark skinned Negritos who were not. Fair goers were continually bombarded with the idea that “primitive” people required the good graced leadership and example of their white brethren; however, only the lighter skinned could be civilized.

Although African Americans were not restricted from any of the world’s fairs or designated to separate entrances, they were as a race, treated with consummate disdain. “Fairgoers of European background were welcomed with festive villages commemorating mythologized past and ethnic days and parades saluting their contributions to the present. African Americans were represented in exhibits that highlighted their racial inferiority. As Frederick Douglass explained, ‘The Dahomians are here to exhibit the Negro as a repulsive savage.’”¹³

Barely tolerated as paying guests at the world’s fairs, African Americans did play a big role at the midway as prized entertainers. Every fair, including Buffalo’s, had some

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

version of an “Old Plantation” village, managed by white directors; where as the Nashville fair proclaimed, “young bucks and thickliped African maidens ‘happy as a big sunflower’ dance the old-time breakdowns, joined in by ‘all de niggahs’ with weird and guttural sounds to the accompaniment of ‘de scrapin’ of de fiddle and ‘de old bangjo.’”¹⁴ Because of its success the “Plantation Village” at the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition in Nashville was shipped in its entirety to the Omaha Midway where it was joined by a group of “thirty-five to seventy-five ‘jolly, rollicking niggers’ living in slave cabins transported from the south.” The most spectacular plantation village was the one in Buffalo managed by Skip Dundy, it was held directly across the street from “Darkest Africa”. To ensure that his African American performers were “authentic”, Dundy sent them to a special performance school in Charleston to learn how to act like “darkies.”

The African Americans were not the only people of color to be degraded and used for enjoyment. All non-European people were falsely depicted at the fairs, but none with the same dogged, and cruel consistency as the Africans and African Americans. The lessons fair goers learned was loud and clear. “Unlike other people of the world who could, with appropriate training, be civilized or at least lifted up toward white standards, Africans and people of African descent were permanent outsiders, people to be feared or hated in their primitive African mode, ridiculed and humiliated in their African American incarnations.”¹⁵

The exhibits ideological views fit perfectly with their promotional purposes. The racist depictions and ideology they supported and highlighted made the exhibits even more attractive to fairgoers. The midway was a place where crowds of people could

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

gather and support each other's racist views. "In their portrayal of Africans and African Americans as the irrefutably inferior and indecent other, the showmen provided an ideational and emotional ground for crowd's otherwise ephemeral unity. Fairgoers of various ancestries and backgrounds, native born, immigrant, and ethnic, were literally brought together as a white public to witness the spectacle of "black" inferiority and collectively celebrate their "whiteness." This being the case, many white and black reformers stood up for the African race, their voices were heard in Chicago and Buffalo. Ida B. Wells and Fredrick Douglas fought to further the African American cause in Chicago, while Buffalo's African American elite pushed for a space to showcase the "Negro Exhibit" at Buffalo's Pan American Exposition.

Women joining the fight

Members of the race, only 30 years removed from the status of slavery, felt keenly that proud America's record of achievements and progress could not be completed unless it included on history's impeachable scroll the matchless triumph of the former slave. The Race, however, from the start was doomed to bitter disappointment, for during the preliminary arrangements our people were given to understand that so far as active participation by them was concerned they were "outside the pale."

Albert G. Barnett, Chicago Defender, 1933

A group bound by the chains of slavery just two decades prior attempted to do what no other generation of African Americans had done, seek inclusion at the national level in an international event. The trailblazers of their cause were the well-educated and highly trained citizens that sought inclusion at Chicago's fair as early as 1888. They made it clear to white America that their race would fight for a spot at the Exposition. This position signified African American achievement under the toughest conditions that usually demanded recognition by whites in leadership positions. Christopher Robert Reed's "All the World is Here!" The Black Presence at White City describes the unity of the African American race: "Against the obstacles of gender and race, African Americans were poised not just to confront but to overcome the discrimination that they had encountered throughout their nearly three centuries in America."¹⁶ This black social elite, from across the nation, gained the support of middle-class, respectable citizens. Their goal initially was to push for representation in matters affecting the shape of the fair, specifically in decision-making and planning.

The direct descendants of slaves who, just over two decades prior received the most abuse of Jim Crow America, pinpointed the center of power from which African

¹⁶ Reed, Christopher, "All the World Is Here!" The Black Presence At White City (Indiana University Press, 1984)

Americans could best attain the just representation at the fair. With experience in post Civil War politics where some held seats in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, their tactics lead them to the nation's capital. "In Washington, petitioning and lobbying served as their major tactical approaches. They based their claim to representation as a distinct group on more than two centuries of unrewarded toil along with an unwavering loyalty to the highest ideals of the nation. From coast to coast, they were convinced of the rightness of their cause."¹⁷ Willing to go the distance, they first directed their efforts toward the office of the chief executive who authorized the holding of a world's fair, and then to the Congress, which appropriated money for its support.

Immediately drawing distain from African Americans, President Benjamin Harrison announced his all white choices for membership on the National Board of Commissioners, the governing board of the fair in 1889. Harrison's decision not to include an African American on the board was by no means the first decision of its kind, however, African American leadership perceived Harrison's reluctance to champion the cause of racial fairness on the issue of representation as a stumbling block to equality. Reed goes on to verify Harrison's attitudes toward race,

Yet, upon cursory examination, Harrison's record on race relations appeared impressive, if not exemplary. He had soothed the leading African American politicians through his political appointments, while he vigorously pursued the rights of African Americans, personally sponsoring the Federal Elections Bill and Federal Education Bill. However, historian George B. Sinkler found that the president tended to act on matters of race with great circumspection, being aware that the nation had embraced a near contentious, if not overtly hostile, Social Darwinian attitude.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

With the racist ideology of the times, Harrison's appointments to the highly prestigious Board would have involved choosing African Americans over whites scrambling to hold their positions of power. Reed favorably states, "Any hesitation that he exhibited probably had more to do with his reluctance to challenge the covetousness of his friends and party favorites in a time of spoils politics and social climbing than anything else."¹⁹

Harrison missed a golden opportunity in 1890 when he failed to intervene in the appointments of representatives to fill a National Board of Commissioners which was in charge of running the fair. Each state and territory had the responsibility to send two delegates along with alternates to sit on the Board; one alternate was appointed for every commissioner. Their all male ranks would total 208 members. Interesting enough, each state had as much influence on the appointment of commissioners as the other. From the African American viewpoint, Ferdinand L. Barnett examined the scenario, "The Colored people of our country number over seven and one half millions. In two of the states of the south the colored population exceeds the white population. The colored people therefore thought that their numbers, more than one eighth of the entire population of the country, would entitle them to one commissioner at large, and that their importance as a labor factor in the South would secure for them fair representation among the commissioners appointed from the states."²⁰ Despite their efforts, it was not until 1892 that they realized any success. A single black man was appointed as part of the Missouri delegation to serve as an alternate member on the national board. Hale Parker, a St. Louis high school principal and attorney, was chosen.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Despite Parker's efforts for total inclusion, certain African Americans remained dissatisfied with their group's role at the fair. Most African Americans looked to distinguish their race; they were strongly against being included into a melting pot of "colored races". Reed explained, "This notion appeared as anathema to Afro-Saxons who saw their future insured best in a color-blind yet egalitarian nation. For his part, Parker lambasted his fellow blacks for exhorting racial pride and a racial destiny as viable means to achieve the end of full recognition as American citizens."²¹

Mentioned earlier, African American citizens had lobbied both houses of Congress for inclusion at the fair. Extreme pressure was exerted both through selected white representatives and through three sitting African American members of Congress in the House of Representatives. Henry P. Cheatham of North Carolina served during the 51st and 52nd Congresses (December 2, 1889-March 3, 1893). Two other Southerners, the well known John Mercer Langston of Virginia and Thomas Miller of South Carolina, served almost identical terms between September 23, 1890, and March 3, 1891. Of the three, Cheatham advocated the protection of African American interests during the proposed world's fair. Cheatham's efforts were continually blocked by more high profile issues. "A Democratic tumult over a Republican-sponsored National Election Act to protect African American rights submerged Cheatham's bill to pay for an exhibit on Negro art, industry, and agriculture. 'It seems that whenever the Colored people of this country as for anything,' he lamented, 'something unfortunately intervenes to hinder their getting what they ask.'"²²

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

When Chicago sought another \$5 million to finance the fair, pressure to receive the money came through petitions and direct pleas from white congressmen. In 1892, a series of bills appeared asking for African American representation through federally sponsored exhibits. On July 15, in the Senate, the petition of thirty organizations, including that of Baltimorean Thomas L. Hall, Right Worthy Grand Supreme Ruler, Order of Galileans, requested that “the appropriations for the World’s Columbian Exposition be withheld unless ample provisions be made for the representation of the colored people’s interest at the Exposition.” The following day in the House, an Iowa Congressman submitted a resolution from Chicagoans “urging that \$200,000 be set apart by Congress for the purpose of gathering statistics of the colored race.” In August, in the House, another white congressman presented a petition from the bishops of the A.M.E. Church and the A.M.E.Z. Church requesting that “the moral, intellectual, and industrial progress and development of the colored people during the first quarter century of their freedom should be made to form a part of the Government exhibit at the World’s Fair.”²³

To no avail, at that point African American men could not gain the fullest representation they sought for their race, so the cause was voluntarily passed to the women. Reed explained, “It seemed by design and indicated acknowledgment among some African Americans of a once latent, but now potent, ideological agenda that progressive elements of both genders could endorse. That African American women acted both collaboratively across the chasm of gender and separately when responding to particularistic gender interests merely attested to the decade of the 1890’s as an era of feminist/womanist agency.”²⁴

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

The beginning and the journey of black feminism can be traced to the post-Reconstruction era. The post-Reconstruction era was a time when African American women started redefining their roles in society. Cast as second rate citizens along with their male counterparts by whites who adhered to Victorian-era sexual standards, some of the black women reasoned that the freedom and progress of their race's image would come only through women assuming vanguard status for their race's liberation. Reed acknowledges, "While recent scholarship has questioned both the possibility and feasibility of cross-gender cooperation at a time when the exploitation of black women seemed to be in the combined interests of white males, white females, and sometimes black males, these women deliberately set out on a course of their own."²⁵

The story of African American women at the World's Columbian Exposition was in essence one of cooperation with their racial and gender counterparts. Reed described an advisory panel of seven men, including Dr. Daniel Hale Williams of Provident Hospital and lawyer-publicist Ferdinand L. Barnett, supported the Woman's Columbian Auxiliary Association. The aim of the Woman's Columbian Auxiliary Association was to subordinate gender to group advancement as it took a race first, gender second approach. With the advantage of living in and around the city, the women of Chicago proffered their agenda for inclusive representation and a Negro exhibit as early as November 1890.²⁶ Later that year under the leadership of Mrs. Lettie Trant, a school teacher, the Woman's Columbian Association was organized.

The Woman's Columbian Association seems to have been formed without any elite citizens. This group of African American women first sought inclusion on the Board of

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Weimann Jeanne, *The Fair Women* (Chicago: Academy Press, 1981), p. 103.

Lady Managers, a body organized in March 1890 after successful protest activities by white women against gender discrimination by white males. Along with a hand in policy making, black women pushed for an exhibit to demonstrate racial progress since emancipation. Lastly, they looked for African Americans in administrative or clerical positions at the women's headquarters on the fairgrounds. Around the same time, the Woman's Columbian Auxiliary Association, led by Mrs. R.D. Boone, came into existence, representing the second major group led by African American women. Unlike the Woman's Columbian Association the women under Boone had sufficient backing.

The African American women of the 1890's would eventually find a home at the fair but it was not a comfortable one. After pulling political strings, the Chicago group led by Bertha Honore Palmer, wife of the Chicago retail and hotel tycoon Potter Palmer, assumed complete control over the Board. "The Chicago Women's Department, under Palmer's control, virtually represented her kingdom, or queendom. Conceding the necessity for compromise, she agreed to expand Board membership to include two female delegates and two alternates from each state and territory, as well as from the District of Columbia, and eight members at large."²⁷ As president, Palmer quickly filled the board with nine prominent white women from the Chicago area, left of the list were Susan B. Anthony and Jane Addams.

At this point African American women approached Palmer and the Board for inclusion; however, they wanted to be recognized by race not gender. "Energized to advance as individuals with control over their domestic affairs, these white women regarded the matter of requests from a proscribed group very lightly."²⁸ The concerns of

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Cordato, "Representing the Expansion of Women's Sphere," p. 220

the African Americans for their race's advancement impressed the white women on the Board little; the social cost of ignoring the African American women was minimal during an era of racial ignorance.

The Chicago based African American women's groups lead by Boone and Trent were directly reflective of the personalities and status of their leaders, disagreements were regular. "Boone appeared to be the more acceptable culturally to Palmer and her friends. She was supported by an advisory panel of seven, including Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, Ferdinand L. Barnett, Mrs. J. C. Plummer, and an overall organizational membership of one hundred persons."²⁹ Less challenging than Trent, Boone appeared to be aware of exactly what kind of traits her race was supposed to display around the leadership of Palmer. Boone wished to have her race involved in the fair, but she was unwilling to challenge the stereotypes of the late 19th century.

The Woman's Columbian Auxiliary Association under Boone sought, "the earnest efforts of colored women who desire to secure for the coming World's Exposition the best possible representation of art, science, industry and various achievements of the colored race." The organization believed they needed to help themselves, "The race must work for itself: we must originate our own plans of action and depend upon no one else to make our exhibit...it cannot expect the American white people to expand their energy and tax their best efforts to help any one class of American citizens...[despite prejudice against us] we are most satisfied if we are allowed a fair field in which to direct our efforts."³⁰ On the question of whether or not to have a separate exhibit, Boone's organization was undoubtedly apposed to a separate exhibit.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Woman's Columbian Auxiliary Association, *Aim and Plan of Action*

Opposite to Boone, Trent was unwilling to waver from her stance on the role of African Americans at the fair, her tenacity may only be matched in the persona of a prominent visitor from Memphis in 1893, Ida B. Wells. Whites often viewed Trent as an unusual racial advocate. More importantly, Trent lacked the social standing and credentials to receive fair consideration from Palmer and her Board. Her base of institutional support seemed to lie with respectable members of the community but not ones with enough clout to secure white recognition. “The simple matter of failing to own a telephone in an age when status was conferred by such a possession, along with two undeliverable telegrams to her south side address, would also serve to irritate Mrs. Palmer and her staff.”³¹

The apparent confusion and lack of identity among the African American groups pushing for inclusion at the World’s fair provided Palmer and her Board the perfect excuse to exclude all the groups. Reed states, “There were now four African American women’s groups talking with Palmer.”³² In addition to Palmers suspicions that white women in opposition to her leadership were helping the black women, the chances of inclusion dwindled just as economic resources did.

After all the hard work and all the setbacks, African American women enjoyed but few successes in their efforts. Their hard work paid off when two African American women acquired positions of note; both were from the city of Chicago. Prior to being hired by the Board of Lady Managers, Mrs. A. M. Curtis served as solicitor for Provident Hospital where her husband was surgeon. With the Board of Lady Managers, she filled an office position, being assigned a desk in Mrs. Palmer’s office. Her responsibilities

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

included, “securing adequate space and locations for African American exhibits and communicating matters of interest to black citizens throughout the nation.” Described as a “woman of remarkable intelligence and energy,” she benefited from her reputation of providing civic leadership and humanitarian aid to the African American community.”³³ It is unknown why but after two months on the job under Palmer, Curtis left her position and was succeeded by Fannie Barrier Williams, whose tenure was also of brief duration. Described as a “handsome and refined colored woman,” Williams had a background similar to Curtis’s which associated her with Provident Hospital, and a marriage to a professional man, Attorney S. Laing Williams. The hard work by individuals and groups alike in the years prior to the fair laid the foundation for further African American involvement at the fair once it opened.

³³ Ibid.

Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition

On the eve of the fair in May 1893, a small group of African American journalists pushed for an international declaration sighting their grievances against the American nation. Ida. B. Wells and Fredrick Douglass proposed a publication of a pamphlet highlighting injustices called *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the Columbian World's Exposition*. Under the leadership of Wells and Douglass, men like I. Garland Penn and Ferdinand L. Barnett helped explain their racial complaints in the pamphlet. Years before the fair Fredrick Douglass used his gifts of speech and prose to show his disapproval of the African American situation. As expressed in the pamphlet, Douglass hoped to show the African American position on race relations in general and African American hopes in particular. The pamphlet was to be a benchmark for civil rights advocacy in the twentieth century. There were, however, opponents to the pamphlet, not all African Americans wanted to pamphlet to be published. Two groups disagreed with the emergence of the pamphlet, one headed by newspaper editors, the other by people that were content with their social position and did not want to offend northern whites. Reed gives examples,

One Pine Bluff, Arkansas, writer stated: The world likes heroism, and it appears to me that the proposed memorial would be too much upon the order of a whine to have the desired effect. Our condition and the wrongs that are imposed upon us cannot be altogether unknown to the masses of noted visitors expected at the World's Fair. He suggested instead showing the world the African American's ability to rise above segregation and discrimination through the presentation of impressive exhibits. The editor of the Indianapolis Freeman advised Douglass to use his national credentials to prepare a statement to the American people, which he was sure the Associated Press would carry. Or, he suggested, Douglass could write to the president and recapitulate the race's grievances. As opposition accompanied by disinterest mounted, fundraising for the pamphlet languished.³⁴

³⁴ Ibid.

Although it was not her fault, Ida B. Wells blamed herself for the pamphlet not being a success. She was out of the country prior to July 1893; her promotional efforts could have been a huge factor in the success of the pamphlet. It was not Wells fault, since to publish the pamphlet in several different languages, the group needed \$5,000. As of August, the team only had \$500 dollars; one version printed in English was all that could be managed.

Another topic of protest included different views on supporting a separate day on which African American progress could be demonstrated, a special tribute designated as “Colored American Day.” Everything from color, social standing, and leadership roles forced blacks to either support or oppose a separate day celebrating African American achievement. The possibility of a separate day or event produced comment and reaction, spanning from enthusiastic support to outright condemnation. Those who viewed the event in a positive light saw the designated day as conferring a long-sought recognition of their group in an activity that they would control. With full control over the event they possessed the ability to celebrate and show their peoples progress since the end of slavery in any way they saw fit. The identity of the event would be solely up to their leaders, Reed quotes the Chicago Inter Ocean, “It rests with the colored people alone whether this shall be a day that will properly represent them as they would stand before the public. It especially rests with the more intelligent colored people who too often are sensitive about criticism and the disposition of thoughtless white people to treat all gatherings of colored people as something of the minstrel order.”³⁵

Men like Fredrick Douglass recognized “that for a group engaged in perpetual struggle for its elevation and liberation, it was an opportunity that could not be

³⁵ Ibid.

squandered.”³⁶ Colored American Day was not an unusual event; there was a Norwegian Day, a Maine Day, an Irish Day, and many other special days. However, for some of the more educated and elite African Americans it was a deliberate racial attack. Within their own ranks, the successful African Americans fought for and against a separate day. Some warned that the existence of a separate day was not to be ignored. African Americans who were not as racially sensitive believed it would show how far socially and culturally their race had progressed since emancipation.

Leaders opposed to the separate day were Chicago’s Lettie Trent and Ida B. Wells of Memphis. They worked at local and national levels; they believed the day to be a slight to their race. Both Trent and Wells had earlier rejected a similar proposed day as a retreat from integration. Wells’ future husband took up the cause as well, Ferdinand L. Barnett wrote after Congress failed the diasporan cause, “in consideration of the color proof character of the Exposition Management it was the refinement of irony to set aside August 25 to be observed as “Colored People’s day...[The exclusion of Colored Americans from employment is near complete] and yet in spite of this fact, the Colored Americans were expected to observe a designated day as their day – to rejoice and be exceedingly glad.”³⁷

National condemnation among African Americans grew. The National Colored Peoples Protective Association of American, a broad based civil organization, rejected the opportunity to participate, both immediately and repeatedly. Gathered together on the fairgrounds on June 25 through June 27 for their annual convocation, one speaker after another denounced the separation of the races through observance of such a day.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Because the Chicago fair was supposed to commemorate human progress the fairs management went ahead with the scheduled Colored People's Day on August 25th. The Colored People's Day turned into a cruel joke, with free watermelons distributed to all African American visitors. The Indianapolis Freeman demanded that blacks stay away. "The Board of Directors have furnished the day, some members of the race have pledged to furnish the 'niggers,' (in our presence Negroes), and if some thoughtful and philanthropic white man is willing to furnish watermelons, why should we be gibbeted?"³⁸

Fredrick Douglass, one of the most prominent African Americans at Chicago's fair did participate on August 25th. When Douglass tried to read his prepared paper on "The Race Problem in America," he was "interrupted by 'jeers and catcalls' from white men in the rear of the crowd." As Paul Lawrence Dunbar remembers, Douglass responded to the hecklers by throwing down his prepared speech and roaring to the assembled crowd that there was "no Negro problem. The problem is whether the American people have loyalty enough, honor enough, patriotism enough, to live up to their own Constitution."³⁹

Another problem topic rested on the question of exhibits. Once again there were two opposite factions fighting for their separate causes. Some African Americans wanted their exhibits to be included in the mainstream event along with all the other exhibits. Other blacks saw separate exhibits as offering a greater opportunity for black visibility amid thousands of other exhibits. Proponents of inclusion into the mainstream exhibit section followed the principle that "merit knows no color line."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Supporters of placing exhibits outside the main hall feared that the lack of resources and their level of achievement over the last quarter century placed them in a bad position of appearing inferior or deficient. A Chicago newspaper in 1890 printed one black Chicagoan's argument,

[African American exhibitors] do not wish to be swallowed up in the great Exposition Buildings as would be the case were they to exhibit in common with the white exhibitors, but they are desirous of being afforded opportunity, by means of a separate apartment, to substantially and thoroughly display, in properly classified and installed shape, just what progress has been attained by their race...

The colored people are outspoken in their condemnation of any precipitation of race discrimination into the question and want their feelings in the matter clearly conceived on all sides.⁴⁰

It was impossible to answer the questions what was to be proven? Who was it to be proven to? Why did it need to be proven? What is clear is that these questions could not be answered along racial lines. Displaying their exhibit in either the mainstream hall or in a separate location placed African Americans in the predicament of being compared to the white world and all the stereotypes of America at the turn of the century. In a nation committed to racial hegemony, African Americans would once again have to pick up the cause and fight for their rights at the Buffalo Pan American Exposition of 1901.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Buffalo Pan American Exposition

“Buffalo Negroes think their Race Should Be Recognized at the Pan-American Exposition.” (Commercial, November 12, 1900.)

“Negro Exhibit at Pan-American: Colored people of Buffalo are Aroused in the Matter.” (Buffalo Evening Times, November 12, 1900).

On November 11, 1900, members of the Buffalo, New York Phyllis Wheatley Club and their supporters, gathered in the Michigan Street Baptist Church to discuss the role African Americans should have at the Pan-American Exposition. The Cleveland Gazette, an African American publication, brought attention to the meeting when they ran the headline, “Pan American Exposition Color Line”. The Gazette detailed the complaints of the Wheatley Club, “Thus far not a single representative of the race has been properly placed by the management of the Pan-American Exposition, either as director, superintendent of a department, honorary vice-president or even clerk in any of the departments. Our people here are indignant at this discrimination and held a meeting November 11th in one of our churches under the auspices of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, composed exclusively of women.”⁴¹ According to newspaper accounts of the meeting, the group of close to two hundred was in good spirits. The purpose of the meeting was double edged. First, to push for the inclusion of the “Negro Exhibit” at the Pan American Exposition. Second, to protest the exclusion of African Americans from sitting on the Expositions board.

The start of the 20th century had Buffalo’s black community numbered at 1,698 residents while the whole population of the city numbered 352,287. The small percent of

⁴¹ Nevergold, Barbara A. Seals, *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, “**Doing the Pan**”: The African-American Experience at the Pan-American Exposition 1901, 2004.

African Americans had a long history of civic and political activism. The Phyllis Wheatley Club was organized in 1899 and immediately began to influence Buffalonians. Author Barbara Nevergold described the early formation of the club, “Within two years of it’s founding, the Club’s membership had grown to more than 300, As an affiliate of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACW), the organization had dedicated itself to reaching back to help those less fortunate and less able, in accordance with its motto, “Lifting As We Climb.”⁴² Led by Mrs. John H. Dover and Mrs. Mary B. Talbert, the club established an Old Folks Home and established food and book drives. The club also donated books by African American authors to school libraries, and organized “mother clubs” to teach good parenting.

Mary Talbert, the Club’s corresponding secretary, future president of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs and a founder of the Niagara Movement, made her opinions known in her essay, “Why the Afro-American Should be Represented in the Pan American Exposition”. Copies of her essay have been lost but newspaper accounts provide the gist of Talbert’s remarks. She believed that the “Negro Exhibit” that was displayed at the Paris Exposition should be displayed in Buffalo. She also called on officials to appoint a Black commissioner to represent the interests of the African Americans in Buffalo.

Other members of the community called for black representation as well. James A. Ross, a well respected black member of Buffalo’s community, accused the officials of prejudice in not appointing an Afro-American commissioner. President of the Central Union of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Mrs. A.D. Wilson, also expressed her support for the group. The influence of Ross, Talbert, and others lead to a series of

⁴² Ibid.

resolutions, “immediate steps should be taken to inform the exposition officials of the desire of the colored people for a Negro exhibit and declaring that the Negroes of Buffalo were unanimous in demanding that a colored commissioner be appointed.”⁴³ Most agreed that Mrs. Talbert had all the makings to be a strong candidate for the commissioner post.

The unrest that the leaders and the black community showed towards the board was bold, but in no way the first of its kind. Drawing from the accounts of previous fairs, notably Chicago’s, the leaders knew about the economic and socio-political importance of world’s fairs and expositions. The benefits the black community could receive from a well displayed exhibit showing their progress since emancipation was not lost upon them. African Americans looked at the fair as a platform to show the world what their race had accomplished since the end of the Civil War. The fair also offered the African American community with a chance to share in the economic bounty derived from advertisements and commercial endeavors associated with the Exposition.

Looking for guidance from Chicago’s leaders, Talbert no doubt had Fredrick Douglass’ and Ida B. Wells’ “The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World’s Columbian Exposition” in mind when she wrote the essay she delivered at the Buffalo protest meeting. Talbert and the Phyllis Wheatley Club, a NACW affiliate, continued the tide of protests that began in Chicago and repeated itself at future fairs across the country.

The reports of the November 11th meeting seem to be the first significant effort by blacks to gain inclusion in the Pan American Exposition; however, this is not the case.

⁴³ “Negro Exhibit: Buffalo Negroes think their race should be recognized at the Pan-American Ezposition”. The Commercial, November 12, 1900

Nevergold states that, “there is some evidence that the rally probably resulted from the frustration of having earlier attempts ignored by Exposition officials. As early as December 1899 African Americans had voiced a desire to be represented at the Pan Am.”⁴⁴ A brief reference that supports this statement can be found in the Pan American Magazine. According to the author “Three classes of citizens are seeking especial recognition at the Pan American Exposition, the colored race, the workingmen and the clergy. All of them are entitled to the highest respect and the Exposition management will doubtless deal with each of them in a liberal spirit.”⁴⁵

It is reasonable to surmise that the years preceding the fair were filled with African American meetings, protests, and complaints about inclusion to the fair. No documentation has been found and little evidence points to African American activism but it was common for the exposition officials and white dominated journalists to look over black concerns. Nevergold believed there were three conclusions, “one) the exposition officials made no response to the requests of blacks or two) the response was unsatisfactory or three) the appointment of a black man, Gaius C. Bolin, as a member of the New York State Board of General Managers for the New York State Building in April 1899 was considered sufficient representation for Afro-Americans.”⁴⁶

It was clear after the Phyllis Wheatley Club protest meeting that the African American community of Buffalo was willing to fight for inclusion at the Pan American. On November 13, 1900 the Courier reported that, “the Phyllis Club of colored women of this city has begun active preparations for a Pan American exhibit which will be devoted entirely to the colored race. They will confer with the Pan American officials in regard to

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Pan American Magazine, vol. 1, no. 7, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

such an exhibit.”⁴⁷ On top of the protest meeting, Thomas J. Calloway, identified as a special agent of the United States commission to the Paris Exposition arrived in Buffalo to propose that the Negro Exhibit be installed at the Pan American. With the 15,000 appropriation from congress the Negro Exhibit won world acclaim at the Paris Exposition. Mr. Calloway was quoted in the Times as saying he’d come to Buffalo “to present the management of the Pan American Exposition the proposition of utilizing and installing the Negro exhibit shown at Paris...”⁴⁸

Like others, Calloway envisioned many uses for the Negro exhibit. The educational and motivational aspects of the exhibit were clear. Calloway, having experienced the success of the Paris Exposition knew there was revenue to be made at Buffalo’s Pan American Exposition. Calloway said, “There are two reasons why this exhibit ought to be emphasized here. One is that it will serve as an encouragement to the colored people throughout the country, thousands of whom would come and pay admission to the exposition to see it.”⁴⁹ The second reason was to show the whites that had given their money to help educate the blacks that it was well used.

In an interview weeks after Calloway’s trip to Buffalo, Dr Selim H. Peabody, director of the Liberal Arts division of the exposition stated that the Negro Exhibit from the Paris Exposition “will be transferred to the Pan-American Exposition and here is an item of news for you – it has been decided to place it under the supervision of some person, not yet designated by the Exposition company of the Negro race.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ “Contracts for more buildings: Rhode Island commissioners report on the outlook for Pan Am and recommend a building.” Courier, November 13, 1900.

⁴⁸ “Negro Exhibit at exposition. Special agent Calloway’s mission. Wants the Pan-American to take the Paris exhibit, and enlarge it.” Times, December 14, 1900.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

In the end the work of the Phyllis Wheatley club, Mr. Calloway, and Dr Peabody paid off. The exhibit depicting the development of the Negro race since the date of the Emancipation Proclamation of President Abraham Lincoln was shown in Buffalo. Unfortunately for everyone involved the Exhibit was displayed in the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building, where it received little to no attention.

The acquisition of the Negro Exhibit was a success but not everything the Phyllis Wheatley Club and other influential members of the black community pushed for. Like Ross, Buffalo's blacks were aware of the possible economic gains from the Fair. Names of several black citizens are found on the ledger books in which the sale of Pan American Exposition stock is recorded. "Albert M. Thomas, an attorney and appointee of the Bureau of Information, purchased twenty shares of stock. Nelson Fairbush and Mrs. Ida Fairbush purchased ten shares each."⁵¹ At ten dollars a share, it was no small investment for white or blacks during the turn of the century.

Other ventures to lure money into Buffalo were conducted by Ross. As early as June, 1900, African Americans were showing the Exposition and city officials that their community could be key in attracting other African American dollars to the city. Ross and other African American business men anticipated the need for housing during the fair. Their group formed a company to establish a hotel for Negroes. According to an article in the Buffalo Express, "the Pan American Exposition is expected to furnish a large amount of fairgoers, but it is the intention to make the hotel a permanent institution and not one merely to last during the exposition."⁵² Described as "editor of the Globe", Ross was named as the secretary and treasurer of the new company. Other key members

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

of the company included, D.A. Butler, a janitor at the Marine Bank who was president of the Hotel Company and H.F. Hamilton of the Buffalo Electric Company, who was named as hotel manager. The proposed “Wormley Hotel” was set to open its doors for the fall of 1900. It appears the business venture collapsed, no evidence or record exist of the Womley Hotel opening.

The lack of a hotel available to African American prompted another group to welcome blacks to the queen city. In April 1901, W.D. Thayer, Superintendent of the Bureau of Information, wrote the Indianapolis Freeman. Thayer was pushed to write the letter by information received, he stated, “from many sources that the colored people were to be well represented during this summer in attendance at our Exposition.”⁵³ The sources that Thayer mentioned were most likely local African Americans.

He continued, “After consulting with a number of representative colored citizens of Buffalo, we learned that the colored people throughout the country felt that this city was not very hospitable toward them.” Thayer went on to announce the appointment of Mr. A.M. Thomas, “a colored lawyer, to look after the interest of the colored visitors of this city.” It is believed that the appointment was upon the recommendation of the “representatives of the colored people.” The appointment of Thomas was noted by the Buffalo Times on April 7, 1901, “the Negroes of this city will be interested in the announcement of the appointment of Albert M. Jones to be a member of the Bureau Information and it is requested that those among them who expect to open their homes during the exposition for the reception of members of their race make the fact know to him.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Buffalo Times, April 7, 1901

Thayer ended his letter requesting that the Freeman convey to its readers that African American guests would find respectful treatment and available accommodations. Thayer also wanted the Freeman to print the letter so that African Americans know that, “the Exposition does not purpose to slight in any manner this portion of our country men and visiting strangers.”⁵⁵ Because of the interest of the African American community, James Ross also believed thousands of African Americans would visit the exposition, he even guaranteed it. Ross drafted an article announcing that various African American clubs in the city were planning to entertain visitors. He also urged the Citizen’s Committee to be contacted for “literature and particulars of any description pertaining to the Pan-American or accommodations during the Exposition free of charge by applying to Secretary of Colored Citizen Committee at the above address.”⁵⁶ Interesting enough, Mr. Ross was the Committee’s secretary.

Appointed by the Exposition’s Bureau of Information, the group was named the Committee of Comfort. Mary B. Talbert, Rev J.C. Ayler, James A. Ross, and A.M. Thomas were just a few of the Committee’s members. The task of the Committee of Comfort was to look out for African American travelers who needed accommodations in Buffalo during the fair’s run. To accomplish this goal, the Committee sought individuals in the community who were willing to open their doors to visitors. “The Freeman printed a notice in its July 13th edition that listed the names and addresses of the members of the Committee of Public Comfort advising perspective exposition visitors to communicate with any of the members for assignment to suitable places.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ross, James A. “Buffalo and the Pan American Exposition.” *Colored American Magazine*. Vol. 2, no. 5, March 1901, p. 327

⁵⁷ Ibid.

At the turn of the century suitable housing and African American inclusion into the world's fair was not the only thing happening in Buffalo's African American community. Three national conventions were held in Buffalo during the time of the fair. The previously mentioned Colored Masons, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs and the National Labor Federation (colored) scheduled conventions in Buffalo on July 7 – 11 and August 6th respectively. Evident and documentations if lacking on some of the conventions, however, the NACW convention received major coverage by the press of the day.

At the invitation of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, the NACW met for its Third Biennial gathering in 1901. Reports show that over three hundred and fifty guests attended the meeting at the Women's Educational & Industrial Union Building on Delaware Avenue. Nevergold includes a list of prominent African American women that attended the meeting: "Mary Church Terrell, NACW President, Mrs. Booker T. Washington, Mrs. Rosetta Douglass Sprague, daughter of Fredrick Douglass, and Mrs. B.K. Bruce, widow of Senator B.K. Bruce, registrar of the U.S. Treasury."⁵⁸

The NACW was organized in 1896 under the motto that they preached, "Lifting as we climb." Under the order of self help and advancement the women that traveled to Buffalo took care of the meeting and their business before they enjoyed the festivities of the fair. Taken to the extreme it was reported that, "the delegates, so strongly interested in the serious side of the gathering that they have planned no time to be taken off even for a visit to the exposition...delegates urged to stay away from the fair until after final adjournment..."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "Colored women", Courier, July 11, 1901.

Mary Church Terrell speech on the work done by the organization since its inception and the work that still needs to be done was a highlight of the meeting. Terrell urged white women to support black women in their endeavors. Mrs. Terrell was reaching out to all organizations, earlier in the week, prior to the convention; she spoke at a special meeting of the Phyllis Wheatley Club held at the Michigan Street Baptist Church. According to the newspaper account she gave an interesting address in “which she spoke of the work being done by the organizations of Negro women throughout the United States.”⁶⁰

“Reasons for placing correct literature before our children” was the title of the paper Mary B. Talbert delivered during one of the convention sessions. In her paper she stressed that children make companions of their books, live in them, act in them, and make them their ideals, it was important to pay strict attention to the models of their heroes. She went on to praise books that have stood the test of time, she felt standard literature was good literature. The sessions also included reports, papers and discussions on such topics as: temperance, kindergarten education, literature by black authors, proper parenting, and the condition of the black woman.

The Phyllis Wheatley Club was not the only NACW affiliate present at the conference, there were two other local affiliates: the Women’s Loyal Union and the Amity Club. Not much is known about these organizations. On the contrary, the Phyllis Wheatley Club, survived well into the 1970’s. Election of new officers was also a topic of discussion in 1901. The group elected Mrs. Josephine Silone Yates as its second president. Fifteen years later, Mary Burnett Talbert would be elected sixth president in 1916.

⁶⁰ “Bright Negro women: interesting convention at the woman’s union” Express, July 8, 1901.

As stated before the delegates at the 1901 convention came to work, however, other exciting opportunities were happening during those summer months. At the opening session, several prominent Buffalo citizens, including Mayor Kennedy, personally welcomed the women to the city. Following meetings there were socials and galas at the Lyric Hall that concluded at 10 pm. Nevergold described another important event, “The delegates were also treated to a visit from the man who was described as the leader among the colored citizens of the United States, Booker T. Washington. Washington was also characterized as an example to them [Blacks] and many of them are filled with earnest endeavor to attain to his standard.”⁶¹

Washington was a busy man during his visit to Buffalo in 1901. He visited the NACW meeting, delivered a speech to the 20th Century Club and toured the Pan American Exposition before leaving for Washington D.C. African Americans also welcomed visits to the exposition and the city by other prominent American citizens. Described as an organization of “representative Negroes in Buffalo”, the Progressive Club organized and hosted a party for over one hundred visitors. The club’s reception was followed by a luncheon and dance. The guests included visitors from the West Indies, New York City, Niagara Falls, Memphis, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and Windsor, Ontario. Members of the Progressive Club’s organizing committee included local residents, Nelson Fairbush, Homer Bow, Clara Paine, Maud Davis and Mabel Leggett.⁶²

The party was described as extravagant, five Cuban musicians, who were members of the Cuban Band at the Expositions, were among the guests at the party. Different colored

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

ribbons were given to the guests to discern what part of the country they hailed from. Those who were from the South wore blue ribbons: Easterners wore blue and white, Northerners had red and white, and Westerners were given red, white and blue ribbons. Those from foreign lands wore the colors of their native flags. Following the fair, the Express reported that the party was “one of the most notable Negro social functions ever held in the city.”⁶³ It is clear that from the African American activity surrounding Buffalo during the turn of the century that it was of up most importance to display the ‘Negro Exhibit’ at the fair.

⁶³ “Noted Negroes there: Progressive Club’s reception successful affair.” Express, August 27, 1901.

'The Negro Exhibit'

Lost for over 100 years, the 'Negro Exhibit' pamphlet was found by the staff of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library in the Pan American Exposition scrapbook. Prior to the discovery, the exhibit was thought to have only been on display at the Paris Exposition of 1900. Buffalo could now lay claim to housing the exhibit as well. Lost to history and ignored by the contemporary press, the 'Negro Exhibit' can now be seen by generations that never knew it existed.

The Buffalo exhibit appears to have been curated by James Ross of Buffalo, in actualities the exhibit is a reconstruction of the work W.E.B. DuBois created at the Paris Exposition of 1900. The original exhibit housed hundreds of pamphlets, books, assorted documents, and thousands of photographs. The man behind the exhibit, W. E. B. DuBois, had received graduate training at Harvard and the University of Berlin in history, economics and sociology. DuBois initially focused on empirical sociology, committing himself to the study of black culture in the United States. He then moved on to teaching classics at Wilberforce University in Ohio for two years. Later he was hired in 1896 by the University of Pennsylvania to conduct a sociological study of blacks in Philadelphia. 'The results of his research were published in 1899 under the title *The Philadelphia Negro*. In 1897, he accepted a position in history and economics at Atlanta University, where he took over the responsibility for the Atlanta Conferences.'⁶⁴

At the Atlanta Conferences DuBois and his colleagues devoted their time to study the systematic sociological conditions of blacks in the United States. 'The results from these studies, edited by DuBois, were published in sixteen annual reports (1898-1914) and

⁶⁴ E. Provenzo, "Paris 1900 The Exhibit of American Negroes," n.d., <http://www.education.miami.edu/ep/paris/home.htm>

represent the most systematic sociological research from the period dealing with blacks in America.⁶⁵ For DuBois, the "careful exhaustive study of the isolated group"⁶⁶ was ideal. From an extensive study of such groups it would be possible to develop "cautious generalization and formulation."⁶⁷ For DuBois American blacks were the greatest possible subject to study. Dubois goes on to state, "I think it may safely be asserted that never in the history of the modern world has there been presented to men of a great nation so rare an opportunity to observe and measure and study the evolution of a great branch of the human race as is given to Americans in the study of the American Negro. Here is a crucial test on a scale that is astounding and under circumstances peculiarly fortunate."⁶⁸

Black Americans had been shunned from white America because of their race and race prejudice. Because of their isolation African American society, as a whole can be interpreted and measured by the social forces that affect their society. By focusing in on the black experience and the African American social condition Dubois believed that he could answer questions such as: "What is human progress and how is it emphasized?" "How do nations rise and fall?" "What is the meaning and value of certain human actions?" "Is there rhythm and law in the mass of the deeds of men--and if so how can it best be measured and stated?"⁶⁹

Being a sociologist, 'DuBois was motivated to understand the consequences of "eight million persons of African descent" living in the United States. He felt that the African American experience had been neglected because of the sensitivity--both black and

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

white--over color-mixing.’⁷⁰ In 1897, in front of the American Negro Academy (an early black scholarly organization), DuBois delivered an address entitled “The Conservation of Races”. In this speech, DuBois called for black Americans to act as the “advance guard” in black racial development throughout the world. According to him, “the advance guard of the Negro people--the 8,000,000 people of Negro blood in the United States of America--must soon come to realize that if they are to take their just place in the van of Pan-Negroism, then their destiny is not absorption by the white Americans. That if in America it is to be proven for the first time in the modern world that not only Negroes are capable of evolving individual men like Toussaint, the Saviour, but are a nation stored with wonderful possibilities of culture, then their destiny is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals.”⁷¹

DuBois saw blacks separate from their American experience but he also believed American blacks were Americans by their citizenship and birth, as well as their religion, political views, and language. He goes on to state, “Members of a vast historic race that from the very dawn of creation has slept, but half awakening in the dark forests of its African fatherland. We are the first fruits of this new nation, the harbinger of that black to-morrow which is yet destined to soften the whiteness of the Teutonic to-day.”⁷²

DuBois understood that black Americans were much more than American citizens, they were African American citizens. DuBois felt that in order for American blacks to become a vanguard of this "new nation they would need to establish race organizations, black colleges, black newspapers, black business organizations, black schools of literature and

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

art and an intellectual clearing house for all of these activities--a black or "Negro Academy."⁷³

The Exhibit of American Negroes at the Paris 1900 Exposition provided DuBois with an important showcase to not only advance the sociological study of blacks, but to begin to hone in on the intellectual and social accomplishments of black Americans, as well as their social, cultural and political experience. The exhibit in Paris is important for a number of reasons. For contemporary historians and sociologists, it provides a look into the conditions of black culture and society in the United States at the turn of the 19th century. The famous exhibit at the Paris Exposition and the forgotten exhibit at Buffalo's Pan-American Exposition contain the social, literary, political and cultural experience of African Americans from the colonial period to the year 1900.

The idea of black inferiority and the threat that African Americans posed to the white status quo became more and more evident at the turn of the 20th century. Subsequently, African Americans had to endure increased violence at the hands of whites, and lynching was at an all time high. This posed a problem for blacks at Buffalo's Pan American Exposition. African Americans believed the images at the event would highlight the racism they had experienced and that had relegated them to second class citizens. Mary Burnett Talbert of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, for one, was not willing to stand idle when the board of directors of the Pan American Exposition failed to include an exhibit that accurately portrayed African Americans. Along with Talbert, James Ross and others from the Buffalo black community launched a protest to get the intransigent board to redress its decision.

⁷³ Ibid.

The hard work and influence these reformers were able to exert is finally realized in the existence of the “Negro Exhibit” pamphlet. Author Lillian S. Williams goes on to state, “But the catalogue also demonstrates the culmination of African Americans’ long-term efforts to promote accurate portrayals of their race and to document their history. Since the 18th century, African Americans were involved in several intellectual movements to do this.”⁷⁴ African Americans used every available outlet to instruct their constituents and the bigger community about the history of blacks in the United States and Africa. They founded literary societies and libraries and used their churches, benevolent organizations and other institutions to inform the black masses. The Debating Society and the Literary Society were two Buffalo black literary organizations founded before 1837. These organizations were key in collecting books and other publications on blacks, especially those that blacks had written. Williams goes on, “The Phyllis Wheatley Club collected the works of the famous 18th century poet whose name it bore and provided a well-publicized forum to celebrate the publication of W.E.B. DuBois’s *The African Slave Trade*, the first volume to be published in a prestigious Harvard University history series.”⁷⁵ Such efforts to preserve and reclaim their past not only demonstrated black’s ability to work for their own improvement, but also to provide a foundation upon which future generations could build. To deal with contemporary issues that confronted blacks several college-educated and other progressive African American women founded the National Association of Colored Women in 1896.

Williams goes on to document other African Americans efforts to sustain and correct African American stereotypes:

⁷⁴ Lillian S. Williams, “The Forgotten Negro Exhibit,” *African American Involvement In Buffalo’s Pan-American Exposition, 1901*

⁷⁵ Ibid.

During this same period, several bibliophiles emerged. Philadelphians were prominent among them. They built personal collections of books on blacks and they helped to build organizational collections. Robert Adger was one of them. In 1894, he published a Catalogue of Rare Books and Pamphlets collected by R.M. Adger, Philadelphia-upon Subjects Relating to the Past Condition of the Colored Race and the Slavery Agitation in this Country. The catalogue contained over 65 titles of books, prints and other artifacts that documented black history. Philadelphia bibliophiles were instrumental in founding the American Negro Historical Society of Philadelphia that provided and institutional framework within which to preserve works written by or about blacks.⁷⁶

Daniel Albert Murray, an assistant librarian at the Library of Congress, served countless years on a huge six-volume collection known as Murray's Historical and Biographical Encyclopedia of the Colored Race Throughout the World...; it held over 25,000 biographical sketches of men and women. Murray had curated the African American collection that had been displayed at the Paris Exhibition of 1893. African Americans on the grass roots and national levels recognized the importance of documenting their heritage.

At the Chicago Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Fredrick Douglass perceived international fairs as an opportunity to display their culture and accomplishments. They wrote a pamphlet *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the Columbian Exposition of 1893*. The pamphlet highlighted the accomplishments of blacks at the time and documented the racism of the Expositions planners. Wells-Barnett and Douglass distributed the pamphlets on-site. Understanding what had happened at the Chicago exposition made the efforts of the Buffalo reformers of greater importance, it was understood that the exhibits had the power to change and form people's racial attitudes. Many major black organizations brought their conventions to Buffalo during the exhibition for this reason. "The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs held its

⁷⁶ Ibid.

biennial meeting in Buffalo during the exhibit. With the prospect of some eight million foreign and American visitors to the city during this period, they welcomed the positive press coverage that they received. The Colored Masons also held their convention in the city.”⁷⁷ Despite the decisions of the Pan-American committees, African Americans found their voice through the white print media. Blacks were able to influence the white media to take notice of them and to publish non-biased articles about their contemporary status.

The uncovering of the Pan American “Negro Exhibit” pamphlet is not only an important research tool for scholars but highlights the work black and white reformers did to bring the exhibit to Buffalo. It further details the important roles African Americans played at the Exposition. The pamphlet also sheds light upon the nature of race relations on the eve of the 20th century. Evidence points to a distinctive African American community that was well poised to face the new century, despite the history of racism.

The 1901 Pan American Exposition, which attracted eight million visitors to Buffalo, New York, between May and November looked no different from prior Expositions. The development of the Exposition was dominated by white males promoting their ideals while casting others in a less favorable light. This perception of the Exposition would have persisted if it were not for the discovery of the expositions scrapbook (which contained the “Negro Exhibit” pamphlet) by the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library. On the centennial of, arguably, the greatest event to occur in the City of Buffalo’s history, the B&ECPL shared its knowledge of the “Negro Exhibit” and the involvement of African Americans in the Pan American Exposition.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Surrounding the displays, entertainment, architecture and electric lights, was an underlying theme of the Pan American Exposition. The decorative scheme of the buildings reflected a racially encoded hierarchical plan. “Darker, so-called cruder colors at the perimeter gave way to gradually lighter, finer shades in the center of the site. The buildings and exhibits were placed to help coordinate the colors and to be consistent with the clear message that the darker colors represented those people deemed the darker, more primitive races, whereas the lighter colors symbolized those people considered the more advanced, light skinned races.”⁷⁸

The Electric Tower standing at the center of the grounds stood 375 feet high, representing the pinnacle of civilization. “This organization symbolized progression to a higher plane and advocated the notion that Western, modern, industrial principles were superior, while all else was simplistic, deficient and underdeveloped.”⁷⁹ Bolstering still negative prejudices toward people of color were the exhibits representing the different populations. On the Midway were living spectacles of Egyptian, Filipino, Inuit, Cuban, Mexican, Hawaiian and Native American people.

The Midway Pamphlet described the scene in exciting terms, “For diversion, rather than education, every exposition must have its Midway. The Pan-American Midway occupies nearly a third of the whole space and has nearly a mile of streets. The very large area lying in the northwestern end of the grounds has been allotted to the concessionaires whose business it is to amuse, and at the same time instruct the visitors.” The introductory goes on, “Here are found foreign villages with picturesque types of

⁷⁸ Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984

⁷⁹ William H. Loos, Ami M. Savigny and Robert M. Gurn. *The Forgotten “Negro Exhibit”: African American Involvement In Buffalo's Pan American Exposition, 1901*

architecture and the curious and interesting evidences of civilization, so different from our own. In modern expositions, the Midway has come to be a fixture, and without it the Exposition would lose much of its charm. Visitors to all of the great National and International shows carry away with them the most pleasant recollections of scenes in the amusement section.”⁸⁰

Among others the Midway was home to the “Darkest Africa” exhibit. The pamphlet described the exhibit, “A collection of some 35 different African native tribes with their supremely ancient weapons, household gods and primitive handicraft. Native workmen show their skill in working of gold and silver. The enclosure contains section of large villages in their primitive state, with a theater in which are given at times free exhibitions of native dances and entertainment.”⁸¹ Buffalo had transported 62 people representing a variety of African Tribes. Once in Buffalo they demonstrated their weaponry, handicrafts, songs and dances. “The African village inhabitants were promoted as peculiar, childish in both habit and custom, and dangerous. Cannibalism, witchcraft and savagery were purported, while the true skills and knowledge expressed in the compound were simply ignored or overlooked.”⁸² On top of the simplistic characterization of the inhabitants, Exposition officials gave their well being little consideration as weather became harsh with autumn approaching. Ill prepared and unaccustomed to such weather, Exposition officials neglected to give provisions for warmth. “At length, complicated gas stoves were introduced into the compound; however, no instructions were provided, and the residents were forbidden to use the stoves without the presence of a white official.”⁸³

⁸⁰ www.buffalohistoryworks.com The Midway section.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

Reinforcing the spectators' perception of them being bizarre and absurd the Africans kept themselves warm with cast off clothing. It is telling that the Exposition pamphlet described the "African Village" as an enclosure, a term used to describe captive animals.

Across from Darkest Africa was the "Old Plantation," this exhibit was supposed to be a representation of African Americans in the Deep South. The Exposition pamphlet described the exhibit, "Reproducing a veritable old plantation in its minutest detail, and giving the visitor an interesting glimpse of the sunny South. The slave quarters and log cabins were brought from the South, and are occupied by genuine darkey families and their pickaninnies. Dancing and other pastimes dear to the old Negro are given at the theater, included in the attraction."⁸⁴ Most of the people chosen to take part in the exhibit had attended a performance school run by a midway showman in Charleston. The rehearsed, exaggerated acting was a corrupt display of African Americans in bondage. "The Plantation freely depicted Black American life in a stereotypical and disrespectful manner. Captured best by "Laughing Ben," the people were promoted as jovial, contented and careless."⁸⁵ The attributes on display were intended to show the spectators how a "good Negro" could endure tough times and survive despite their racial limitations. More absurd yet, miniature cotton bales were sold as souvenirs, reminding all fairgoers of the social status available to blacks.

The overwhelming theme of both exhibits was the domination of intellectually and socially superior whites. Blacks were shown as inept, carefree, and ignorant. These exhibits were showcased, headlined, photographed, and documented at Buffalo's Pan American Exposition. Never were the groups real talents, attributes or achievements

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

highlighted. Instead, the individuals and the groups they represented were cast in the harsh light of racism and bigotry. Unfortunately, these slanted depictions are what has survived through books, Pan American records, and peoples memories and letters. What has been forgotten, most likely due to the attitudes and trends of the era and the lack of promotional efforts and location of the exhibit is that African Americans were involved and depicted in the proper light at the “Negro Exhibit”.

Unlike the racist attitudes surrounding the “Old Plantation”, and “Black Africa” exhibits at Buffalo’s Pan American Exposition, the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle offered a different view point on African American culture. In the Palace of Social Economy on the banks of the Seine was a small section devoted to the United States of America. Placed in the right hand corner of this section was the Negro Exhibit. “The Negro Exhibit presented a collection of materials to illustrate the progress if the Negro race in the United States since emancipation from slavery in 1863.”⁸⁶ The appropriation of \$15,000 from the Federal government gave African Americans the leeway to plan and execute the Exhibit to their preference. As stated earlier the Negro Exhibit was created by W.E.B. Dubois and installed under the direction of Thomas J. Calloway.

Consuming one alcove of nine units, the Exhibit portrayed “the history, present condition, education and literature of African Americans through a series of thirty-two charts, five hundred photographs, numerous maps and plans that illustrated such facts as population growth, decreasing illiteracy rates, emancipation progress, school enrollment, occupations, land ownership and housing conditions.”⁸⁷ African American educational

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

institutions of the United States were represented through the work of Fisk, Atlanta and Howard Universities and Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes.

At that time African American literature was largely unknown, however, one of the most impressive elements of the Negro Exhibit was the display of their literature collection. With the \$15,000 appropriation and the Federal governments support of the exhibit, Daniel Murray tackled the task of assembling a collection of books by African American authors to be part of the exhibition. Son of a freed slave, Murray, was the second African American appointed as a professional at the Library of Congress. Included in Murray's A Preliminary List of Books for the Negro Exhibition was a plea to readers to submit titles and, if possible, send copies of books to include at the Paris Exposition. Murray's collection on African American literature is the first known list of its kind. "The bibliography presented at the Negro Exhibit in Paris contained more than 1,400 titles of books and other writings by African Americans. Two hundred of the physical copies were exhibited on the shelves."⁸⁸

In an article written for the American Monthly Review of Reviews in 1900, Dubois described the Exhibit as "an honest, straightforward exhibit of a small nation of people, picturing their life and development without apology or gloss, and above all made by themselves."⁸⁹ The Negro Exhibit did very well at the Paris Exposition receiving a Grand Prize, while several components were recognized with gold, silver and bronze medals, as well as honorable mentions.

Equipped with the knowledge of exhibits, such as Booker T. Washington's in the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States Centennial and Calloway's Negro Exhibit in Paris, Buffalo's

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt. "The American Negro at Paris." American Monthly Review of Reviews. Vol. 22, No. 5, November, 1900, p.575-577

African American citizens called for a similar exhibition at the Pan American devoted to black achievements and advancement. Several local newspaper articles from November 1900, detailed the local African American citizens wish to have a Negro Exhibit at the Exposition. The *Commercial Advertiser and Journal*, recorded a meeting held on this issue.

NEGRO EXHIBIT:

Buffalo Negroes Think their Race should be Recognized at the Pan American Exposition

A well attended and enthusiastic meeting of the Phyllis Club, {i.e. the Phyllis Wheatley Club of Colored Women,} was held yesterday afternoon in the Michigan Street Baptist Church. The club was organized over a year ago for the advancement of the race. It has taken up the matter of a Negro Exhibit at the Pan American Exposition and the meeting was held for the purpose of taking action regarding the matter.

Mrs. John Dover, vice-president of the club, called the meeting to order. About two hundred members were present, also many others interested in the subject, including Mrs. A.B. Wilson, president of the Central Union of the W.C.T.U. (Women's Christian Temperance Union)

James A. Ross, the well-known colored politician, addressed the Club. He spoke of the apparent prejudice against colored people and declared that the exposition officials had made a great mistake in not appointing a colored commissioner to represent the race.

Mrs. William H. Talbert, corresponding secretary read an essay on "Why the American Negro should be represented at the Pan American Exposition." She said that the Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exposition had attracted the notice of the world and that the exhibit should be brought to the Pan American Exposition. Our Exposition, she said, was the only one that had not made early provisions for a Negro Exhibit. The meeting closed after resolutions were passed to the effect that immediate steps should be taken to inform the expositions officials of the desire of the colored people for a negro exhibit, and declaring that the negroes of Buffalo were unanimous in demanding that a colored commissioner be appointed.

Many whites including Mrs. Wilson have pledged their support of the movement.

Several colored persons have been spoken of as being fitted to be exposition commissioner, but Mrs. Talbert has the strongest following. She is, undoubtedly, one of the most capable colored women in Buffalo, being a graduate of Oberlin University, and having probably more degrees than any other colored women in the State. She has always been an active worker in the interests of the race, and as commissioner would, undoubtedly, fulfill the expectations of her supporters and secure a fitting and satisfactory Negro Exhibit at the Exposition.⁹⁰

In the final article of Contributions of Blacks in Western New York at the Turn of the Century, a series edited by James R. Heck III, Director of the Department of School Integration of the Buffalo Public School System. The article, named “The Pan American Exposition of 1901: Lessons in Irony,” was written by Lum Smith, a schoolteacher and later a school principal in the City of Buffalo. A stellar short summary of the Pan American Exposition, it details the meeting of the Phyllis Wheatley Club of Colored Women in 1900, where James Ross and Wheatley called for an exhibition at the Pan American that would correctly depict the progress African Americans had made since the Civil War. “Specifically, the exhibit would display the extraordinary things African Americans had achieved since emancipation. The article concludes that, Blacks in Buffalo had strongly urged officials at the Exposition to develop and exhibit that depicted them realistically. Unfortunately, that exhibit was never established.”⁹¹

We now know with the discovery of the Negro Exhibit pamphlet that there was an exhibit dedicated to the advancement of blacks at the Pan American Exposition. The misfortune is that the exhibit was displayed in a hot convention center where the public rarely knew it existed. It is possible that the exhibit was subverted due to the fact that it did not stay consistent with the Expositions theme of an empire of light skin color. Fair

⁹⁰ “Negro Exhibit at Pan-American. “Buffalo Negroes think their race should be recognized at the Pan American Exposition.” Nov, 1900.

⁹¹ Ibid.

goers were more concerned with the Philippines, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Guam to pay much attention to an educational portrayal of the strides African Americans made since the Civil War. More likely still, is that the exhibit was forgotten in time because of the lack of attention and promotion given to it by the Exposition.

Evidence Supporting Buffalo's claim to the 'Negro Exhibit'

Having knowledge and relationships with all parties involved, Selim Hobart Peabody was, perhaps, the sole direct link among Expositions and the only man who knew precisely what had occurred in relation to the various Negro Exhibits. Having a background in education, Dr. Peabody began his career in Expositions in 1891 and was connected with Chicago in 1893, Paris in 1900, Buffalo in 1901, Charleston in 1901-1902, until his death in St. Louis in 1903. "Peabody was appointed editor and statistician for the United States at the Paris Exposition and Chief of the Liberal Arts Division at the Pan American Exposition, thereby directly overseeing the installation of the Negro Exhibits."⁹²

An article entitled "Liberal Arts Exhibits Superintendent Peabody Planning to Overcome Lack of Space" printed in the Buffalo Express on January 6, 1901, identifies Dr. Peabody's role with the Negro Exhibit. It describes the lack of floor space available leaving Peabody with nothing left but his ingenuity to make the exhibit work. The following paragraph alludes to the arrival of the Negro Exhibit.

At the Paris Exposition there was a special exhibit showing the development of the Negro race in America since emancipation for which there was a federal appropriation of \$15,000. That exhibit will be transferred to the Pan American Exposition and here is an item of news for you. It has been decided to place it under the supervision of some person, not yet designated by the Exposition Company, of the Negro race.⁹³

A couple of months later, Peabody himself wrote an article in *The Pan American Magazine* discussing the Exposition's Liberal Arts Exhibition, which Peabody described

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "Liberal Arts Exhibits Superintendent Peabody Planning to Overcome Lack of Space" Buffalo Express, 6 January, 1901

as “the marvelous and magical achievements of the nineteenth century.”⁹⁴ Peabody goes on to detail the Negro Exhibit in his *Advance of the Negro* article. He calls for the large body of Americans who look down upon the Negro and his progress to take in the Negro Exhibit. He believes that the Negro Exhibit installed in the Liberal Arts building will open up the ignorant eyes of most Americans. With the millions of Africans added to America’s population in the 19th century the best statesmanship possible is proper assimilation. Peabody believes the wisest of statesmanship is the study of the African American experience from slavery to freedom. Therefore the Negro Exhibit should garner the most attention at the Pan American Exposition.

Peabody describes the exhibit as a social study; the different features constituting supplementary chapters, the entire collection becoming a book on Negro progress and present conditions. The exhibit was designed to show the freedman, his history, present condition, his literature, education, and miscellaneous matters of interest. Peabody goes into detail, “To carry out this scheme, there have been arranged about 65 statistical charts, in which the figures given are supplemented by graphics in striking colors, and about 600 charts of photographs and miscellaneous material which are so arranged as to present to the eye a realistic view of life among Negroes in various parts of the country.”⁹⁵ Over 300 books by Negro authors; and a series of nine models, which typify the evolution of the Negro from emancipation to the present time, are arranged at the exhibit.

⁹⁴ Peabody, Selim H. “The Liberal Arts: Worlds Progress in Elevating Educational Standards.” *The Pan American Magazine*. Vol. 3, No. 3., March 1901

⁹⁵ Peabody, Selim H. “Advance of the Negro.” 1901

Peabody goes on to discuss the most popular features of the Negro Exhibit. Made by Prof. Hunster and contributed by the Washington Public School, nine models of life existed. Dramatic depictions of real life, they speak to the most ignorant visitor.

No. 1 shows a family of former slaves, just emancipated. Behind them are woods representing the darkness of slavery, and before them is a winding path leading into an unknown future. Despair rests upon the face of the father, in close embrace the mother hugs a boy child, her first joy of freedom, since no cruel master can snatch it away. The enterprising, bare legged boy, whose development we shall trace in subsequent models, presents an apple to his hungry father. Model 2 shows a different scene. The father, aided by his son, is constructing the first rude house. The mother has upon a forked crossbeam a pot boiling with food. In scene 3, the Northern school ma'am has a group of children under the friendly shade of an oak tree, and the father stands enchanted by the scene. He leaves, and in scene 4 you behold him beside his weary horse talking to his neighbors whom he here finds cutting wood. Axes are at rest, and the father pleads with his neighbors to come together and build a schoolhouse for the teacher. In model 5, he is welcoming the teacher to the first schoolhouse, which is an old cabin, chimney of sticks, and fresh mud in the cracks. Seven years pass away, and in scene 6, the small farm, wagon, horse and neat home tell the story of the farmers struggle and success. Seven years pass away, and in model 7, a neat white schoolhouse, with glass windows and brick chimney, and cheerful children are presided over by the young man, who was the barefoot boy in the first group. A generation passes away, and 35 years after slavery. We behold the three cadets and three young women pupils, with the principal and the large commodious building of the Washington Colored High School, represented in models 8 and 9.⁹⁶

The exhibit brings to light that the African Americans have been making progress since emancipation.

Another important figure in the Negro Exhibit chronicle is James A. Ross. Already stated, Ross, an active member of Buffalo's African American community, was involved in petitioning for the Negro Exhibit installation in Buffalo and was a member of the Committee of Public Comfort, assisting African American visitors with their accommodations. Making Buffalo his home in the mid-1890's, Ross was a man with his

⁹⁶ Peabody, Selim H. "Advance of the Negro." 1901

foot in many doors. The City of Buffalo Directories and in census records show Ross as lawyer, publisher, journalist, news dealer, editor, tobacconist and magazine publisher in a short 8 year span., from 1896 through 1903. Ross is also listed among the African American publishers of periodicals in the Negro Exhibit pamphlet for producing the publication, *Globe and Freeman Informant*, in Buffalo. Remaining active in the Democratic party Ross stayed in Buffalo until the mid 1930's acquiring several more careers.

In the March 1901 issue of *Colored American Magazine* Ross contributed an article titled, "Buffalo and the Pan American Exposition." The article highlighted Buffalos beautiful scenery and the uniqueness of the Exposition's buildings and displays, touting the Pan American as "the greatest of all American Expositions to date."⁹⁷ Concerning this publication Ross' mention of the Negro Exhibit, stating, "The feature that will precede all others, from a racial standpoint, will be the Negro Exhibit which was seen at the Paris Exposition, under the directorate of Prof. T.J. Calloway. Much more could be said concerning this exhibit, but it must be seen to be appreciated."⁹⁸

Aside from the recent discovery of the souvenir pamphlet, all other evidence of the exhibits existence in Buffalo's Pan American Exposition precedes the opening of the fair. Other evidence does point to the exhibits existence; Frank H. Severance retained the title of managing editor of Buffalo's *Illustrated Sunday Express* during the time of the Exposition. Interested in local history and Buffalo's Pan Am, Dr. Severance was appointed Secretary-Treasurer of the Buffalo Historical Society in 1902, a position he retained until his death in 1931.

⁹⁷ Ross, James A. "Buffalo and the Pan American Exposition." *Colored American Magazine*. Vol.II, No 5, March 1901

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Discovered among Severance's papers at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society was a 20-page unpublished manuscript review of the books in the Negro Exhibit at Buffalo's Pan American Exposition. The manuscript starts, "Some 300 books written by American negroes from a part of the Negro Exhibit at the Pan American Exposition. The collection contains the best work of the race in the field of authorship, and is unique. Examination of these books furnishes new data by which to rate the civilization of the negro."⁹⁹ The importance of the review is evident, Dr. Severance viewed and handled many of the books listed in the Murray bibliography and reproduced in the Negro Exhibit pamphlet, he also organized them into literary types, such as fiction, textbooks, theology and poetry.

The discovery of the Negro Exhibit pamphlet led to many surprises as well as contradictions. Researchers had to discern evidence that pointed to two men as the exhibits curator, James A. Ross and Thomas J. Calloway. James A. Ross was undoubtedly involved in the Pan American Exposition with several sources indicating that he was in charge of the Negro Exhibit. "While the first volume of *Who's Who in Colored America* (New York, 1927) produced no entry for Ross, there are four later biographical entries for him, and all four report that he was curator of the Negro Exhibit at Buffalo's Pan American Exposition in 1901."¹⁰⁰ In correlation, the first and only edition of *Who's Who of the Colored Race* (Chicago, 1915) contains an entry for Ross, identifying him as in charge of the Exhibit. Lastly, a story relayed in *The Forgotten "Negro Exhibit"* explains that after randomly opening a volume of the correspondence of Booker T. Washington, a B&ECPL employee happened upon a letter written by Ross

⁹⁹ Severance, Frank H. "American Negro Authorship." Unpublished. Found among Severance's papers in the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, Buffalo, NY.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

requesting permission to issue a cigar carrying Washington's name. More important was the biographical information the editors of the volume included on Ross. They listed Ross' place of birth, education and the fact that he was curator of the Negro Exhibit in Buffalo.

Evidence points to Ross. It appears that Mr. Ross, a member of the Order of the Masons, was instrumental in bringing that group to Buffalo for its annual convention during the Exposition. Holding sufficient influence over the group, Ross was the Sovereign Grand Inspector General, thirty third Degree. The United Supreme Council of the Ancient Arabic Order Scottish Rite Masons held their convention from August 1-6, 1901. The local press documented many of the masons activities, in one article its noted, "The council members will visit the Exposition and Niagara Falls. Sovereign Grand Inspector Ross is in charge of the Negro educational exhibit at the exposition and there the colored Masons will have much to interest them."¹⁰¹

The clearest evidence to support Ross as the Negro Exhibit curator lies within the pamphlet itself. Upon looking at the cover, Ross' involvement is clear. He is photographed in the Exhibit, examining part of the display. In the left hand corner of the cover is the phrase, "Compliments of Globe and Freeman," the Negro periodical published by Ross. Inside the pamphlet Ross signed the dedicatory and the essay, "Advance of the Negro," with his name and title, Assistant in Charge Negro Exhibit, Pan American Exposition. A photograph of Ross contains a caption with the same title. There is also Ross' signature on the first inner page suggesting that Ross himself gave the pamphlet to the library. However, researchers have found that often times the librarian at

¹⁰¹ "Council of Colored Masons: annual meeting nobles of the mystic shrine opens first session in Buffalo today." Courier, August 1, 1901.

the time would write the donors name on the inner portion of pamphlets or scrapbooks. It is not known if it is truly Ross' signature or that of the librarian but it does seem to point to Ross donating the pamphlet.

To be conclusive, the validity and source of the evidence had to be carefully evaluated and subjected to alternate interpretations. Unfortunately for the researchers and the employees of the B&ECPL upon close examination, all evidence that points to Ross as the curator can be traced back to Ross himself. *The Forgotten "Negro Exhibit"* explains, "For example, it is likely that Ross supplied his own biographical information to the two different *Who's Who* volumes and might have taken liberties with the facts. The editors of the Booker T. Washington book of correspondence likely would have received their information from these volumes."¹⁰² Ross wielded great power as publisher of the pamphlet; he exercised editorial control, thereby having the option to present himself in any light he preferred.

There are other instances where Ross' character can be called into question, "The pamphlet's essay, "Advance of the Negro," appears in identical form with one minor difference in Buffalo's *Illustrated Sunday Express* on May 5, 1901. This version also includes a short paragraph referring to an *Express* article from the previous year regarding the collection of books from Negro authors. This piece was signed by Thomas Calloway, in charge of the Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exposition."¹⁰³ Falsely identifying himself as the author Ross intended to profit from the reproduced article in his pamphlet.

Along with Calloway's "Advance of the Negro" article, more evidence points to Calloway as the Exhibit's curator. Researchers and employees at the B&ECPL found

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

that Elizabeth C. Sholes, local historian and co-author of the book, *Images of American: Buffalo's Pan-American Exposition*, names Calloway as the Commissioner of the Exhibit in an article written for a fellow historian. In addition, an article from *Voice of the Negro* on the Negro Exhibit at the 1901-1902 Charleston Exhibit names Calloway as the person in charge at both the Paris and Pan American Expositions.

The Negro exhibit from the Paris Exposition was also installed here. This exhibit showed the development and progress of the Negro in America, reproduced in miniature, explaining his evolution from the one room log hut to the commodious residence. There were also extensive statistics which had attracted a great deal of attention and interest in Paris and at Buffalo, where it had been in charge of Prof. T.J. Calloway.¹⁰⁴

Like Ross, involvement questions remain over Calloway's role in Buffalo's Negro Exhibit. Calloway is listed as the Special Commissioner to the Paris Exposition in the *Who's Who in Colored America* biography but no mention of Buffalo's Pan American Exposition is included. His documented position as secretary of the Negro Exposition in the South Carolina Inter-State and West Indies Exposition is also left out of the *Who's Who in Colored America* biography. Researchers of The Forgotten "Negro Exhibit" bring to attention that the dates he was involved in the Paris Exposition were printed as 1899-1901. Since the Paris Exposition ended in 1900, some of the time might have included his possible association with the Buffalo Negro Exhibit.

The roles of both Calloway and Ross have yet to be defined clearly. It is possible that Calloway installed the exhibit and Ross took over as curator, or Ross was the souvenir pamphlet's publisher and Calloway was its curator. The exact responsibilities of the key members of the Negro Exhibit are as blurred as the exhibit itself.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

The story of the Negro Exhibit could not have been told if it were not for the hard work of researchers and the employees at the B&ECPL. In 1906, an immense, 90-page scrapbook was assembled at the Buffalo Public Library. The two-by three-foot, 25 pound compilation contained a large collection of Pan American Exposition memorabilia, including more than 300 pamphlets, maps, official forms and press releases. The scrapbook became part of the Central Library's Rare Book Collection in 1954 when the Buffalo Public and Grosvenor Libraries merged to form the Erie County Public Library. Researchers had a hard time sifting through the scrapbook with the pages brittle over time, nearly to the point of disintegration. Examination of the volume would have caused irreparable damage to the individual pages. In the early 1990's efforts were made to correctly record and preserve the material in the scrapbook, which had been in storage since the 1970's. In order to examine the individual leaves the book itself was disassembled. The leaves were then color photographed in order for the general public to see the content.

While examining the scrapbook, the major primary source documentation that there had been a Negro Exhibit was discovered. A paragraph in *The Forgotten "Negro Exhibit"* states, "About halfway through the volume were a number of leaves with small pamphlets mounted on them, all relating to specific Pan American exhibits. Inconspicuous among them was a 24-page pamphlet, "Souvenir of the Negro Exhibit".¹⁰⁵

The pamphlet sheds light onto the lost Negro Exhibit. Researchers found an essay entitled "Advance of the Negro: As Shown in the Negro Exhibit at the Pan American." The essay refers to the Exhibit as "a social study...the entire collection becoming a book in Negro progress and present conditions." The essay goes on to depict elements of the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Exhibit, such as photographs, models and Negro achievements, such as patenting notable inventions, and statistical charts. The souvenir pamphlet also contains a partial listing of Murray's bibliography with the heading, "Some Leading Publications by Colored Authors." It is accompanied by a list of nationally distributed African American periodical publications. In addition, the pamphlet contains reproductions of several photographs and a list of Buffalo's more influential African American residents.

The most unusual characteristic of the Negro exhibits pamphlet is the existence of advertising on each page; this is contrary to all the other Pan American Exposition pamphlets. More than 40 local companies marketed their products and services for such items as hotel accommodations, beer, liquor, shoes, paints, housewares, food and catering. It begs the question, why was advertising needed? Perhaps the Exposition did not support an official pamphlet for the Negro Exhibit. Therefore, prominent members of Buffalo, both white and black, garnered funds to underwrite a publication through the sale of advertising.

With the pamphlet in capable hands, the B&ECPL staff embarked on a research journey to verify and expand knowledge revolving around the Negro Exhibit. After more than two years the researcher's uncovered bits and pieces of genuine evidence, contradictions, and an interesting cast of characters. Without the dedicated efforts of the employees at the B&ECPL the Negro Exhibit could still be suppressed like it was over 100 years ago.

It is no secret that the images presented of non-white people in Buffalo's 1901 Pan American Exposition were negative and stereotypical. Corrupted images are what grabbed Exposition officials' promotional efforts and visitors' attention. These images

are what survived through time and the public's awareness. African Americans were depicted as childish and ignorant in "Darkest Africa" and "Old Plantation", stationed where everyone could see them at the midway. Sad but true the depictions of Africans at Buffalo's Pan American Exposition were a product of the times. The discriminatory and demeaning views of Africans undoubtedly lasted in the memories of many fair goers.

The Forgotten "Negro Exhibit" represents a different view point, "What remains prominent in memories, photographs and printed text may not always be an accurate, complete or objective presentation of history and its events, however. Not until nearly 100 years later was it realized that these biased representations did not present a comprehensive picture of the Pan American Exposition and its treatment of African Americans."¹⁰⁶ The discovery and ensuing research done on the Negro Exhibit topic is therefore, remarkable. The 24 page souvenir essay describes the Pan American's "Negro Exhibit," a stark contrast to the midway displays because of its authentic and informative presentation of African American life. As stated in The Forgotten "Negro Exhibit", "The exhibit's charts, statistics, books, photographs and models represented the dreams, struggled and achievements of a persecuted race spanning nearly 40-years. These elements had the potential to inspire hope and motivation among its African American visitors and to educate and alter the opinions of others."¹⁰⁷

The discovery of the pamphlet has shed new light upon the Pan American Exposition and the role African Americans played. Despite its treatment and status, Buffalo's African American community fought for the Negro Exhibit's inclusion at the fair. They hoped that the masses could enjoy what millions saw at the Paris Exposition. It is finally

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

understood that collectively Buffalo's African Americans were able to achieve success in bringing the exhibit to the fair. The existence of the Negro Exhibit and what it represents to both blacks and whites gives reason to celebrate the Pan American Exposition and its legacy.

*The African Americans role in Buffalo's Pan American Exposition transcends
time*

Gaining the title of an international world power after the Spanish American War, the United States was on the cusp of a new age. Victory over Spain had thrust America into the world's spotlight. Advancements in technology, science, manufacturing and industry opened new opportunities for every American citizen. Furthermore, American culture blossomed with the acknowledgment of other world cultures; its literary and artistic accomplishments were universally recognized.

With 352,000 residents, Buffalo, New York was the 8th largest city in the nation at the turn of the century; the rainbow city was also the first to use electricity to light its streets and the largest railroad hub in the country. At the turn of the century Buffalo was named as the host city for the world's fair. The whole world would be watching Buffalo, it was where the United States of America could show off her new cultural and technological advancements. Promoters of the Pan-American Exposition envisioned the fair as the perfect vehicle to showcase "the marvelous developments of the Western Hemisphere...by a display of the arts, industries, manufactures, and the products of soil, mines and sea."¹⁰⁸

At the turn of the century, the story for the African American was different. It had been thirty-five years since Abraham Lincoln delivered the Emancipation Proclamation, yet blacks still experienced the racist ideology of American society dominated by whites. The slave system and the indignities of Jim Crow laws still existed. Although the discrimination was less hostile in the North, the Jim Crow laws in the South functioned as a different form of slavery to the African Americans. Author, Barbara A. Seals

¹⁰⁸ Pan American Magazine, December, 1899.

Nevergold believes that against this backdrop, “we can develop a better understanding of and appreciation for the activities of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, the Progressive Club and individuals like James A. Ross, Mary B. Talbert, Albert Thomas, Rev. J. Edward Nash and the many others who adamantly refused to allow the Darkest Africa and Old Plantation Exhibits to stand as representative of their accomplishments and achievements.”¹⁰⁹ 100 years after the Pan American Exposition, the activities of Buffalo blacks are finally beginning to be documented.

It was not just the men and women in Buffalo that fought for African American inclusion at the world’s fairs. In Paris, Chicago, and cities across the nation African Americans fought for a realistic, educational exhibit that displayed their advancements since the Civil War. With much acclaim the ‘Negro Exhibit’ was displayed in Paris backed by federal money. Recently it has been discovered that the exhibit was also displayed at Buffalo’s Pan American Exposition. This news gives black and white Buffalonians the right to be proud that an exhibit of African American advancement was indeed shown at an event that was previously figured to be exclusively white.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

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Appendix

Tragedy Hits the United States

While the Negro Exhibit received little attention at the Pan American Exposition, the assassination of the twenty fifth President of the United States, William McKinley, certainly made headlines. Once again African Americans were represented in the headlines following the assassination. As early as July the people of Buffalo were planning for President McKinley, “President Going to Buffalo” were the headlines, “President McKinley will come to the Exposition in September. There will be a President’s Day in honor of his presence. The exact day has not been settled, but correspondence on the subject has been exchanged, and it is certain the President will be here some day during that month.”¹¹⁰

On September 6, 1901, U.S. President William McKinley spent the morning visiting Niagara Falls with his wife before returning to the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, in the afternoon to spend a few moments greeting the public. Around 3.30 p.m., inside the Temple of Music building at the Exposition, McKinley prepared to greet visitors with a hand shake. The visitors had been waiting hours in the scorching heat to catch a glimpse of the President. Standing inauspiciously in the crowd was 28-year-old anarchist, Leon Czolgosz, who planned on killing the President.

At 4 p.m. the doors to the building were opened and the mobs of people entered the Temple of Music building in single file. The people who entered the building had just enough time to greet and shake the hand of the President before they were ushered out the other side of the building. At the time, the twenty fifth President was popular, he had just

¹¹⁰ *The New York Times*, July 8, 1901

started his second term of office and people jumped at the chance to meet him. At 4:07 p.m. Leon Czolgosz got his chance to meet the President.

Concealed and wrapped in a handkerchief, Czolgosz fashioned a .32 caliber Iver-Johnson revolver. Witnesses at the scene remembered seeing the handkerchief around the anarchists hand but excused it as a bandage. Also, due to the heat, many of the visitors carried some sort of handkerchief to wipe the sweat from their brows. Noticing the wrap around Czolgosz right hand, McKinley went to shake with his left hand, at that moment Czolgosz lifted his right hand and fired two shots into President McKinley's chest.

The reports noted, "One of the Bullets didn't enter the president – some say it bounced off of a button or off the president's sternum and then got tucked into his clothing. The other bullet, however, entered the presidents' abdomen, tearing through his stomach, pancreas, and kidney. Shocked at being shot, President McKinley began to sag as blood stained his white shirt. He then told those around him, 'Be careful how you tell my wife.'"¹¹¹

Those in line behind Czolgosz and the Presidents guards immediately jumped the shooter and began to beat him. Noticing that the mob was about to kill Czolgosz, President McKinley whispered either, "Don't let them hurt him" or "Go easy on him, boys."¹¹² President McKinley was then rushed from the scene in an electric ambulance to the hospital at the Exposition. The hospital was ill equipped for such a surgery and the distinguished doctor was out of town performing another surgery. Several doctors

¹¹¹ 1901-U.S. President William McKinley Assassinated, <http://history1900s.about.com>

¹¹² Ibid.

offered their services but the man chosen was Dr. Mathew Mann, a gynecologist. The surgery began at 5:20 p.m.

While operating, the doctors searched for the remains of the bullet that had entered the President's abdomen without luck. Concerned about the President's weakened stage, the doctors decided to give up the search and sew up the wound. The surgery was completed just before 7 p.m.

The following days brought good news; the President's condition seemed to be improving. After the shock of the shooting, the citizens of the United States welcomed the good news. However, what the doctors were not aware of was that without drainage, an infection had built up inside the President. By September 13 the President had taken a turn for the worse. At 2:15 a.m. on September 14, 1901, President William McKinley died of gangrene. That afternoon, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt was sworn in as President of the United States.

After the shooting Leon Czolgosz was almost lynched by the angry crowds outside the Temple of Music building. Before the crowds could reach him the police arrested and escorted Czolgosz to police headquarters. Without an ounce of guilt, Leon Czolgosz readily acknowledged he was the one that shot President McKinley. In his written confession, Czolgosz stated, "I killed President McKinley because I done my duty. I didn't believe one man should have so much service and another man should have none."¹¹³ Czolgosz was brought to trial on September 23, 1901. He was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. On October 29, 1901, Leon Czolgosz was electrocuted.

When McKinley was shot on September 6, 1901, blacks reacted with the same dismay and anger as other Americans. But they also had reason to feel pride in one of their own.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Some reports say that while in line to shake hands with the President in the Temple of Music building, James B. Parker, an African American, was first to grab Leon Czolgosz. Parker claimed that he stopped Czolgosz from firing another shot into McKinley's chest. A waiter in on of the Midway restaurants, Parker was immediately glorified as a hero. According to Daryl Rasuli, Parker was "besieged by souvenir hunters" who wanted to buy buttons and other pieces of his garments soon after the incident."¹¹⁴ Unheard of at the turn in the early 20th century, Parker was inducted into the all white fraternal organization, the *Don't Knock Society*. Parker's fame did not last long, the validity of his story quickly came under intense scrutiny. James Quakenbush, a well respected Buffalo attorney, accused Parker of making false claims. Quakenbush claimed he was at the shooting and never saw Parker grapple with Czolgosz. Further, Parker was never called to testify at Leon Czolgosz's trial.

Angered at the attempt to discredit Parker, local African Americans called a protest meeting on September 27th at the Vine Street African Methodist Church. The protesters put together a five member committee to examine Parker's account of the story that very evening. Parker was in attendance at the meeting but for reasons unknown refused to address the crowd. Following the meeting, the committee issued a resolution that states the colored citizens regretted the "clash of statements" regarding Parker's role in foiling the gunman's attempt to fire a third time, but believed that the evidence supported Parker's version of the events.¹¹⁵

Parker was not a Buffalonian, in fact he had only recently arrived in Western New York. His job as a waiter was temporary; he was scheduled to start a new job, in

¹¹⁴ Rasuli, Daryl. "James B. Parker Revisited" *Western New York Heritage Magazine*, Vol. 5, no 1, Winter 2002, pp 22-23

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

November 1901, as a traveling agent for the *Gazetteer and Guide*. Prominent members of the black community supported Parker, including James Ross. He wrote a letter to the Editor of the *Buffalo Express*, dated September 26th to rebuff the attacks on Parker's credibility. Evidently, Ross and Parker's attorney, Mr. Thomas, had contacted the District Attorney, the Honorable Mr. Penny and expressed concern that Parker was not called as a witness at Czolgosz's trial. Using his sense of humor, Ross' letter states, "I also stated to Parker when his claim was disputed that I thought he should make an affidavit as to the correctness of his statement, but others stated this was unnecessary. I then insisted that it should be done and if it was proven that it was incorrect there should be but one alternative ad that was to go over the Niagara Falls."¹¹⁶

Ross also wrote a letter in the *Brockton Times*, Brockton, Massachusetts, in defense of Parker. The letter provided other eyewitness statements confirming that Parker was the man to bring down the assassin. Ross also stated, "others concurring with this statement can be shown from those who are disinterested parties."¹¹⁷ Clearly Ross felt that the African American community cared much more about Parker's role than did the average white American.

A newspaper that had earlier supported Parker retracted their statements after James Quakenbush discredited Parker. Under the heading, "The Case of J.B. Parker", the paper blamed its failure to check and confirm its sources as the reason why it initially backed Parker. The paper urged the black citizens to let go of the issue as it was not one of race prejudice, but of the simple facts of the event. They asked the African American

¹¹⁶ "Parker's Claims" Letter to Editor Buffalo Express, September 26, 1901.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

community to look at all of the relevant facts and after doing so they would realize Parker's version was blurred with inaccuracies.

Further information about James Parker, an African American "hero" is not known. Nothing is known regarding his whereabouts or activities after the meeting at the Vine Street Church. After his claims were thoroughly dismissed, J.B. Parker drifted out of history as fast as he was pushed into it.

