

“LIFE WAS DOING SOMETHING NEW”: THE MAKING OF THE AMERICAN
METROPOLIS, 1870-1920

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ABSTRACT

GRAHAM CULBERTSON: “Life Was Doing Something New”: The Making of the
American Metropolis, 1870-1920

(Under the direction of John McGowan and Jane F. Thraillkill)

This dissertation seeks to shed new light on the moment in American history when the U.S. became an urban nation. To that end, it marshals a diverse range of thinkers – including Henry Adams, Frederick Douglass, Daniel Burnham, Edith Wharton, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jacob Riis, William Dean Howells, Theodore Dreiser, and Jane Addams – all of whom investigated the processes which shaped the cities in this era. The central conflict that emerges is the tension between rational planning and unpredictable evolutionary forces. Many of those who wrote about American cities in the Gilded and Progressive Ages chose to emphasize one isolated extreme – either the controllable nature of cities or the chaotic manner of their growth – while others sought to synthesize them. In each of the three major American cities that I have chosen to survey – Washington, D.C.; New York; and Chicago – this tension exists: the interplay between the unregulated flows of economic, political, and social capital and the various attempts to impose order on them. Expanding upon such historicist work as Walter Benn Michaels’s *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* and Jennifer Fleissner’s *Women, Compulsion, Modernity*, “Life Was Doing Something New” provides an interdisciplinary account of the birth of the American city, one that reveals the hitherto unrecognized ways realism and naturalism participated in larger debates about the new, industrial America and the forces shaping it.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The city is not, in other words, merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is the product of nature, and particularly of human nature.”

- Robert E. Park, 1925

As Theodore Dreiser put it in his 1914 novel *The Titan*, life was doing something new in the American cities of the Gilded and Progressive Ages. But if there is a single point of agreement shared by every thinker about every city in this work, it's that the process had gone wrong. Those were transforming America and creating enormous wealth in the process, but they also created enormous suffering. Compared to the agrarian ideal that was embraced in the previous century, industrial cities were seen as filthy, dehumanizing spaces. And crucially, although the last century has seen amazing social and technological developments, the problems that cities faced from 1870 through 1920 remain similar to the problems we are facing today. In fact, the urban problems and solutions of that period are more relevant now than they had been since at least the end of World War II. As Richard White said in his 2011 book *Railroaded*, “The present seems so nineteenth century” (xxxiv). To put it a different way, nineteenth-century urban innovations, such as streetcars and city parks, are once again at the forefront of American urban planning. I belong to a generation that was not only largely raised in the suburbs and exurbs, but also was raised by a generation brought up in the same way. Three generations now – the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials – experienced America as a suburban nation. That particular story – the Great

Migration, White Flight, the GI Bill, the Eisenhower Interstates, Drive Till You Qualify, Subprime Mortgage Derivatives, etc – will not be rehashed here. What is interesting about that story, for my purposes, is the ending. For the first time in more than fifty years, the city has become the focus of the American way of life.¹ Many of the most important questions of the twenty-first century have become about our cities: How tall should their buildings be? What should be their dominant mode of transportation? How can we integrate pedestrians and cyclists into our car-dominated landscape, and where can we eliminate cars altogether? How much should it cost to live in the city – and is there any way to make rent less damn high? What do we do with the wealth that cities create, and how much of that prosperity can and should be spread throughout the population? Most importantly, who or what – the market, the citizens, technocrats, bureaucrats, politicians, or some combination – will get to make all of these decisions? And lurking behind that last question: will any of these decisions even matter? Or will cities always resist humanity's attempts to transform them through long-term planning? To distill it into the two most important issues: First, what do we want our cities to do, and how must they be organized to achieve that? Second, what can we do to bring about the cities that we desire? We must both choose the cities we want and find a way to make those cities into reality. These are the challenges facing urban theorists today, but these same challenges arose in the urban spaces of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

To shed new light on these questions, I have assembled a counter-history, or at least an addendum, to the traditional narrative of American urban planning. To that end, I marshal

¹ Although it is too early to fully tell, it does seem that, as the demographer William H. Frey puts it, the decrease in exurban growth “raises the prospect that we may be reaching a ‘new normal’ about where people decide to locate.” Whereas the past three generations preferred the suburbs to the city, there is a distinct possibility that economic, environmental, and social forces acting on future generations “will change perceptions of where to find their version of the American Dream.”

a diverse range of thinkers – including Henry Adams, Frederick Douglass, Daniel Burnham, Edith Wharton, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jacob Riis, William Dean Howells, Theodore Dreiser, and Jane Addams – all of whom have something to tell us about the shaping of cities in the Progressive Era. Some of them, like Burnham or Olmsted, are obvious parts of any narrative about American urban planning. Others, like Riis and Addams, are fellow travelers to the urban planning movement, and have garnered plenty of attention in the work done on cities in this era. To these primary and secondary figures in the story of American planning, I have added a number of American writers whose work illuminates or challenges the projects of urban reformers. As journalists, novelists, and memoirists, Adams, Douglass, Wharton, Howells and Dreiser were experiencing the same cities at the same time as the reformers, and they provide invaluable narratives about reform (and the lack thereof) in American cities. With a few exceptions, these men and women of letters tend to be more skeptical of rapid social change and human reason, and more likely to emphasize the organic roles that human nature and customs played in the formation of the city. For that reason, their accounts of these cities (both in their fictional and nonfictional works) are particularly useful for my purposes.

My ultimate aim in this project is to show that Progressive Era thinkers theorized a vision of the city that could replace the older, agrarian ideal of America. Such a new ideal was vital because previous social observers had argued that an agrarian society, in which all citizens tilled the land and income inequality was negligible, was necessary for American democracy to work. Since America was becoming an urban and industrial country, multiplicitious in its languages, ethnicities, and religions, either the democratic project had to be given up or a new vision of society had to be articulated. Thomas Jefferson, the most

famous proponent of the agrarian ideal, thought it was the former, writing in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781): “The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body” (171). J. Hector Crevecoeur, writing in 1781, concurred: “we are the most perfect society now existing in the world,” he said, largely because “[t]he rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe. Some few towns excepted, we are all tillers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to West Florida” (67). In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville correctly foresaw that the rise of industry would produce an American aristocracy, with the industrial worker becoming “a brute” and the captain of industry coming “to resemble the administrator of a vast empire” (650). Like Jefferson, Tocqueville believed that “friends of democracy” must be vigilant against the new aristocracy, because its coming could mean the end of the American experiment. A half century after Tocqueville, and a full century after Jefferson and Crevecoeur, Crevecoeur’s “few towns” had become sprawling cities, Tocqueville’s industrial aristocrats roamed the Earth in the form of robber barons, and the mobs of the cities – Jefferson’s “sores” on democracy – outnumbered the yeoman farmers. The reactionary preacher Josiah Strong, writing in 1885, saw the city as “a serious menace to our civilization,” a “storm center” where “[t]he rich are richer, and the poor are poorer” than elsewhere and the party boss “sells his ten thousand or fifty thousand voters as if they were so many cattle” (129, 128, 130, 141). Strong’s solution – an imperial version of Christianity – wasn’t widely embraced, but his diagnosis was: a general consensus emerged that America’s urban areas were inimical to the egalitarian, democracy society which Jefferson and Crevecoeur observed in agrarian America. Instead of choosing, like Jefferson, to view the democratic project as impossible in

an urban nation, the writers studied in this dissertation theorized ways to transform cities so that they could sustain democracy.

Each of the chapters in this dissertation focuses on a paradigmatic city of this period and the way that city's story contributed to the emerging urban ideal. Each of these cities struggled to become a true city or, as Alan Trachtenberg puts it, a "metropolis."

Trachtenberg:

The term "metropolis" signified a commanding position within a region that included hinterland [...] smaller cities, such as Bridgeport, Trenton, Fall River, Evanston, remain[ed] relatively backward, less diverse and dense than nearby metropolises. Often mill cities or government centers, subordinate places, performed clear-cut specialized functions within their regions. Distinctly cities, yet hardly metropolitan, they served as vehicles of urban influence on large numbers of people: intermediary places, in some ways trapped by their specializations in limbo between the cosmopolitanism of the big city and the provincialism of the small town. (113)

Creating a true metropolis, and not just a conurbation, was the challenge. Each city surveyed in this project contributed something to the idea of the metropolis. D.C., the first chapter's subject, provides the concept of the great and beautiful plan; Pierre-Charles L'Enfant gave Washington a perfect unity on paper, but it was a unity that could not be realized in the face of the city's lackluster growth. From D.C., we can see both the value of a coherent plan and the necessity of dense urban development in the becoming of a city; having one without the other, as D.C. did for more than a century, turned L'Enfant's plan into an international joke, a city plan without a city. By contrast, New York City very much had the economic growth and corresponding density that any metropolis needs, but that growth created winners and losers who shared no social connections. Despite the best efforts of many reformers to make the horrors of the slums visible to rich, the lack of social communion between rich and poor made Manhattan not a vibrant metropolis but a series of divided urban spaces engaging in (sometimes almost literal) class warfare. Finally, the Chicago chapter introduces the

necessity of flow to the ideal of the metropolis; Chicago was (and, in fact, remains) the transit hub of the continent, but its greatest asset was the flow of people within its community. This flow – both as literal transit via streetcars and elevated railroads and as a metaphor for social intercourse – was the crucial ingredient which, when added to a coherent plan and a baseline level of dense development, would transform America’s dysfunctional urban spaces into workable metropolises which could be governed democratically.

But even when various thinkers agreed on what America’s cities needed, a deep philosophical divide existed between those who thought reforms could be brought about by rational/artificial/governmental forces and those who favored organic/unregulated/market processes. In the Park quote that serves as the project’s epigraph, he establishes this central duality about cities. Every city is an artificial construct that “strikes one at first blush as so little a product of the artless processes of nature and growth, that it is difficult to recognize it as a living entity” (4). But every city *is* also a living entity; whereas the physical form of the city can be controlled and regulated, “the inevitable processes of human nature proceed to give these regions and these buildings a character which it is less easy to control” (4-5). Although Park emphasizes the ultimate unity of this system (“Structure and tradition are but different aspects of a single cultural complex” (4)), many of those who wrote about American cities in the Gilded and Progressive Ages chose to emphasize one isolated extreme – either the artificial, controllable nature of cities or the organic, chaotic manner of their growth – while others sought to synthesize them. In each of the three major American cities that I have chosen to survey this tension exists: the interplay between the unregulated flows of economic, political, and social capital and the conscious attempts to regulate them. This project will show that in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American cities, a

whole host of thinkers had to come to terms (or failed to come to terms) with the way that cities were both shaping and shaped by a set of choices being made in American society.

The thinkers who favored unregulated processes were, following a Spencerian version of evolution, dedicated to a conception of the city as a “natural” product, a creation of human nature that would work best with no governmental hand attempting to impose a false order on it. Writers such as Theodore Dreiser and Henry Adams were dedicated evolutionists, finding the processes of the natural world acting as surely and relentlessly in the designing of a city as in the creation of a jungle or the actions of the cosmos. But although these ideas were couched in new, evolutionary terms, the writers that this project surveys were joining a debate long raging in modern philosophy: the degree to which reason, rather than nature, was responsible for the shaping of human society. The American city planners, such as Daniel Burnham and Frederick Law Olmsted, fit clearly in the reason-based tradition of Bentham and Kant (not to mention Plato’s *Republic*), believing that cities could and would be changed by new plans for the organization of society, and trusting reason to produce those plans. Other writers, such as Edith Wharton and Henry Adams, took positions more in line with the philosophies of Edmund Burke and David Hume, looking askance at rapid social change, and viewing custom and emotion as more powerful determiners of a city’s character than reason and human agency. And others, particularly Jane Addams, did the very difficult work of theorizing a dialectical synthesis of the two modes, in which custom and reason, and evolution and revolution, shape and re-shape each other in the way that Park is gesturing toward in the quotes with which I opened.

As you can already see, “literary” writers such as Wharton and Adams form a substantial portion of this project. Their usefulness in this project is two-fold. In the first and

more conventional place, novels provide a laboratory for seeing the practical outcome of ideas. Whereas Riis photographed and described the plight of the poor in the slums of New York, writers like Howells gave some of those same poor names as well as personalities and hopes and dreams, and then introduced them to the New York milieu. The result is a series of narratives that do not show an isolated snapshot of poverty and suffering, but rather embed poverty in a human life that experiences suffering in urban spaces and through the passage of time. Furthermore, Howells also places upper- and middle-class figures in that same urban milieu, thereby giving his readers a new perspective on the lives of the urban poor and modeling the ways that those readers could and should respond to urban suffering. For these reasons, among others, the fictional works in this dissertation – the novels of Dreiser, Howells, and Wharton in particular – are the most grounded and fully fleshed out accounts of cities in this period, filled with details whose accretion gives the reader a tangible sense of the city that nonfictional writing has not matched. As Park puts it: “We are mainly indebted to writers of fiction for our more intimate knowledge of contemporary urban life.” (3). The ideas about cities that emerge in these novels are not abstract or schematic, but contextual and grounded, enmeshed in the culture of the cities as well as in their geography, in the particularities of psychologically compelling characters and narratively plausible stories. In short, whereas Olmsted and Burnham give a birds-eye view of the city, and Addams and Riis give a ground-level view from the eye of the reformer, the novels of the city go inside the lives of the urban residents, thus providing the most human engagement with the challenges that cities pose and the multiplicity of outcomes that stems from engaging with them.

Secondly, although Theodore Dreiser is the only writer in this project who is generally accounted as a “pure” naturalist, the novelists in this project (Dreiser, Adams,

Wharton, and Howells) were all to a certain extent adherents of what Ronald E. Martin has called “force-thinking,” the particularly naturalist view that human society was largely shaped by the same forces that shaped the natural world. Whereas the very existence of city planning testifies to a faith in the ability of the human agent to alter the geographical landscape, novels with naturalist inflections are much more likely to highlight humanity’s inability to overcome heredity and environment, economic and political trends, and the rapid growth of new technologies. As exemplified in the two completed books of Frank Norris’ Trilogy of Wheat, *The Octopus* (1901) and *The Pit* (1902), the naturalist perspective suggests that railroads and wheat crops have lives of their own – they are enormous organisms, driven by processes too complex for humans to understand, which destroy any individuals who think they can use intellect and planning to harness them. What was true for railroads and wheat crops was also true for cities. Henry James describes New York City in the same way that Norris described the railroad, as a mechanical monster with its own agenda:

One has a sense that the monster grows and grows, flinging abroad its loose limbs even as some unmannered young giant at his “larks,” and that the binding stitches must forever fly further and faster and draw harder; the future complexity of the web, all under the sky and over the sea, becoming thus that of some colossal set of clockworks, some steel-souled machine-room of brandished arms and hammering fists and opening and closing jaws. (*American* 418)

The city is a machine but also a living being; more importantly, it is a cybernetic set of self-correcting processes which seem to be operating at both a level of complexity and a scale that will render human intervention moot. Since the novels in this project are largely inflected by such a view of the city, they serve as correctives to the works of the progressive urban planners. If the Progressive Era urban planner *par excellence* is Daniel Burnham, whose singular vision and executive direction commanded titanic forces and masses of men to create the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, the archetypal naturalist protagonist is Norris’

McTeague, an unintelligent brute completely at the mercy of his heredity and his environment. Although none of the novels treated in this project feature a character who so perfectly fits the naturalist ideal as McTeague, all of them (*Democracy* (1880), *The Custom of the Country* (1913), *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), *The Financier* (1912), and *The Titan* (1914)) are more concerned with the conservation of forces, and the way that forces and organic processes shape humans and their cities, than they are with the way humans can wield forces. The only possible exception is Dreiser's Frank Cowperwood, but, as we shall see, he in fact proves the rule, as he is not so much a human being as force made flesh. Just as the novels represent a more grounded and intimate view of these cities than we can find in the works of city planning and urban reform, they also provide a more cautious and organic view of urban transformation than we get from urban planning.

It is the introduction of these novelists and their naturalist view of cities that is the most salient feature of this project in terms of its contribution to the narrative of urban planning. By adding their voices to the narrative of the city, I aim to complicate the origin story of modern American urban planning. Writing in 1969, Mel Scott begins his landmark study of American city planning with this sentence: "In that painful decade now ironically called the Gay Nineties there were few urban Americans who would have subscribed to the belief, or hope, that entire cities and metropolitan regions can be developed and renewed by a continuous process of decision-making based on long-range planning, and there were no men who professed to be city planners" (1). Although Scott goes on to chronicle the figures of the 1890s who invented the position of "city planner" by building on the work of pioneering landscape architects such as Fredrick Law Olmsted, Sr., the message is clear: prior to the turn of the century, there was no long-term, coherent plan for the development of any American

city and no one who professed to be able to formulate such a plan. Lewis Mumford argues persuasively, however, that it would be a mistake to assume that just because no plan had been formulated and no planners as such existed, urban America wasn't planned. In Mumford's 1961 book *The City in History* – which is one of the fullest and most optimistic defenses of humanity's ability to consciously plan its cities – he explains that the nineteenth-century urban landscape was supposed to be planned, but by unregulated forces, not humans. Whatever you wish to call this process – free market competition, evolution, social Darwinism – it was meant to be a nonhuman but nevertheless comprehensive city planner in America in the late nineteenth century. Just as social Darwinists such as William Sumner argued that society itself “does not need any care or supervision” (103), the best designed cities would be those no one meddled with. No single entity was asked to take up the monumental task of foreseeing the needs of a city and formulating a plan that satisfied those needs; neoclassical city planning of the Haussmann variety, attempted only once with only marginal success in the U.S., was replaced with a faith in the workings of market forces. Any attempt to meddle in that process could only end in failure.

To put it another way: late-nineteenth-century American cities were not meant to be free of design. They were instead meant to be designed by the same forces that had blindly designed human and natural society. William Graham Sumner, writing in 1883 not about cities specifically but about society at large, explains this particular method of design:

Society, therefore, does not need any care or supervision [...] we may hope to gain some ground slowly toward the elimination of old errors and the re-establishment of a sound and natural social order. Whatever we gain that way will be by growth, never in the world by any reconstruction of society on the plan of some enthusiastic social architect. (103-104)

Whereas a social architect looks at society and sees so many things that need to be supervised, a *laissez-faire* thinker like Sumner thinks that what society really needs is the elimination of the old errors of previous generations of social architects. Without meddling reformers, the “natural social order” will reassert itself. Nature is the best designer of society. We could restate this maxim for city planning to say something like: nature is the best designer of cities, and it is meddling city planners who will disrupt order. Although this era saw a number of European cities – most notably Baron Haussmann's Paris and Ildefons Cerdà's Barcelona – redesigned by the minds of a few men, city planning in America was left in the hands of natural processes.

Mumford, who was the most consistent and vocal critic of this faith in evolutionary "design" and the urban landscapes it produced, argues that the complete lack of checks on buying, selling, and developing plots of land in this era was not accidental. Instead the free flow of forces was by deliberate design; those who believed that cities could design themselves ("utilitarians," as Mumford labels them) did not just step back and let things take their course. Instead, as Sumner called for, they worked forcefully to destroy any pre-existing barriers to the flow of capital: "Hence the utilitarians sought to reduce governmental functions to a minimum: they wished a free hand in making investments, in building up industries, in buying land, in hiring and firing workers" (453). As Trachtenberg puts it: "Cities did not expand and change mindlessly, by mere entropy. If they lacked democratic planning, they submitted to corporate planning – which is to say, the overlapping, planned evolution of many private competitive enterprises." (117). But Mumford argues that overlapping, corporate agendas produced nothing but disorder: "Unfortunately, the pre-ordained harmony of the economic order turned out to be a superstition: the scramble for

power remained a sordid scramble, and individual competition for ever-greater profits led the more successful to the unscrupulous practice of monopoly at the public expense. But design did not emerge" (453). In Mumford's telling, in direct opposition to Sumner's conception, design will only emerge when a reformer intervenes with a comprehensive plan – a social architect is needed to redesign the city. Although he is not a major figure in my project, Ebenezer Howard, founder of the Garden City concept, exemplifies Mumford's idea of a planner.

Mumford describes Howard as embracing "a more organic kind of city" (515),² but Howard's vision has subsequently become code for a top-down, non-organic mode of developing (several experts describe Howard this way in Gary Hustwit's 2011 documentary film *Urbanized*). We see this in Mumford's description; Howard's ideal city is "limited from the beginning in numbers and in density of habitation, organized to carry on all the essential functions of an urban community [...] To achieve and express this reunion of city and country, Howard surrounded his new city with a permanent agricultural greenbelt" (Mumford 515-516). In Mumford's vision, the best way to design a city is to start from scratch and predetermine its size, all of its important functions, the locations of its parks and the permanence of its borders. This is the apotheosis of the top-down, rational mode of city planning: the best way to reform a city is to leave previous cities alone, start from scratch, get the perfect blueprint, and only then start building. Howard's plan in particular will do what very few American cities managed to do: integrate the city with nature. Only top-down

² When Mumford describes Howard's plans as organic, he means that they create cities which mimic natural life. He decidedly does not mean that they will come about as the result of natural processes, the push and pull of a large variety of actors and forces. They are not organic outgrowths but artificially planned communities.

planning, it would seem, such as a Garden City or a monumental Central Park or National Mall, will ensure green space within a city.

Although the two men had very different visions of what a city should look like, Robert Moses is the figure who most fully instantiated the Mumfordian idea that urban planning means having a single person devise the right plan, and damn whatever is already there. This was the dominant paradigm in American city planning in the mid-twentieth century, the “urban renewal” model in which pre-existing neighborhoods are destroyed in favor of whatever the planner thinks would work better in that space. Moses, most famously, used this model to build enormous highways that transformed (most would say, deformed) the landscape of New York City. Moses had a free hand to shape New York City for decades, before Jane Jacobs stood up for organic neighborhoods and defeated him. Jacobs, paraphrasing the tenant of a housing project, in defense of a natural order of cities, said: “There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and to be served” (15).

Jacobs’ view has been the orthodoxy for the last half-century, and shows no sign of abating. The prominent urban theorist Witold Rybczynski, writing in *Slate Magazine*, responded with dismay to the announcement that President Obama was appointing Adolfo Carrion Jr. as his “urban czar,” responsible for directing the growth of America’s cities. Rybczynski suggests that Obama and Carrion’s plan for a newly centralized federal master urban plan is doomed to failure for the simple reason that centralized urban planning simply hasn’t worked. In Rybczynski’s words:

The forces shaping our cities today are not municipal agencies but private organizations such as park conservancies, downtown associations,

historic-preservation societies, arts councils, advocacy groups, and urban universities. Entrepreneurship also plays an important role. In projects large and small, real estate developers have replaced city planners and bureaucrats as the chief players on the urban scene, restoring neighborhoods, attracting residents to downtowns, helping to create the amenities that keep them there.

The important lesson is not that city planning is unimportant but, rather, that urban development should not be implemented by the public sector alone and that in a democracy, a vision of the future city will best emerge from the marketplace. (That it may turn out to be a messy vision, lacking a grand aesthetic, Jane Jacobs long ago acknowledged.)

In short, Rybczynski argues that the marketplace, not Howardian technocrats or Mosesian bureaucrats, offers the best way to design the twenty-first century city. Private organizations, from conservation groups to universities, provide certain checks, but real estate developers and other entrepreneurs lead the way. The master planner, first seen in the modern American city in the form of Daniel H. Burnham, had his (and it was always a he) last gasp in the 1960s, and that gasp was, according to Rybczynski, disastrous: “The last binge of planning in the 1960s produced urban renewal, city expressways, and acres of housing projects from which many cities are still only partially recovered. Urban renewal destroyed rather than repaired inner-city neighborhoods, expressways promoted urban blight, and the projects proved environmentally and socially dysfunctional.” In short, cities are too important and the future too difficult to predict to leave urban planning in a few, government-appointed hands. Instead, citizens, institutions, and corporations will generate the “best” future city, although that city will lack the grand aesthetic which was the primary feature of Burnham’s greatest achievement, the 1892-1893 Chicago World’s Fair. Rybczynski closes his article by rebutting Burnham’s most famous (albeit apocryphal) statement: “The lessons of the last 50 years should not be forgotten. To rephrase that great city planner, Daniel H. Burnham, make no big plans, only many small ones.”

My intervention in the history of urban planning aims to produce a more detailed and nuanced picture of the emergence of large-scale urban planning in the decades following Reconstruction. Although I shall repeatedly show the limitations of the large-scale plans (Burnham's National Mall, Olmsted's Central Park, and Charles T. Yerkes' Union Loop) in each of the three cities I am writing about, I will also demonstrate the ways that large-scale planning – planning which is macro and revolutionary, not micro and evolutionary – made it possible for these urban spaces to match the new ideals emerging in this era. At the same time, I will show that what hindered these plans was often an insufficient sense of the organic and the cultural, and the way that inequities in the social landscape often resisted planning in a way that the features of the geographic landscape did not. My goal in this project is thus to lay out the struggles and the triumphs, the problems and the solutions, and above all the philosophies and theories of the era in which Americans grappled with how to make functional, democratic cities. My goal is a usable past, at different times monumental, antiquarian, and critical, in which the practicality of both grandiose and modest forms of urban planning can be newly considered. It is not, of course, my contention that the turn of this century and the turn of the last century are one and the same. But as we devise ways to become an urban nation, rather than a suburban one, it is vitally important for us to remember the time when we first became an urban society, rather than a rural one. The suburbs were meant to have the best aspects of both town and country; they turned out to have the worst aspects of both. As we re-urbanize, we should remember not just the good wrought by Jacob's vision, but also the good done by the counter-tradition that produced not only Moses' transgressions but also Manhattan's Central Park and Washington, D.C.'s National Mall.

Chapter Summaries

This project's narrative begins with the prehistory of American city planning by examining Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 plan for Washington, D.C. L'Enfant's plan represents the first time that an American city was planned in a wholesale, comprehensive way by a single individual. It also illustrates all the many ways such a comprehensive plan can be stymied by the messy reality of urban life. While the beauty of L'Enfant's plan shows the value of a unified vision of the city, the failure of L'Enfant's plan encapsulates the collision between a coherent, artificially imposed vision and the workings of a democratic marketplace. Just as Rybcynski describes twenty-first century American cities as scarred by failed urban renewal schemes, Washington, D.C. was scarred for decades by L'Enfant's failed plan, with observers such as Charles Dickens seeing the city's landscape as proof of the futility of great plans – D.C. had a paper unity, but its haphazard development showed that a mere paper unity was not enough. Furthermore, the grandiose vision and correspondingly grandiose failure of L'Enfant's plan encompassed the culture of the city as well as its geography; L'Enfant hoped that D.C. would be a true national city, populated by people from all over the country who would overcome their sectional differences.

The D.C. chapter shows that L'Enfant's plan of a cosmopolitan, non-sectional city was scuttled by the same canker that scuttled the national dream of a non-sectional country: slavery. As Henry Adams describes in the third chapter of *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918), antebellum D.C. was a slave-holding city that had taken on the characteristics of the slave-holding South. The chapter analyzes how several thinkers – Henry Adams, Frederick Douglass, and Daniel Burnham alongside the rest of the McMillan Commission – sought to imagine a better D.C. that took into account the city's regional mixing, racial injustice, and

coercive government. Shockingly, although Henry Adams was an adamant abolitionist in the antebellum years, slaves in the early chapters of his *Education* are treated as exotic scenery, not as oppressed humans. His 1880 novel *Democracy* likewise ignores the plight of the freed blacks, focusing instead on the corruption that stems from the use of the coercive power of the federal government. In Adams' novel, the Capitol becomes a symbol of untrustworthy men attempting to wield powerful historic forces that they have neither the right nor the ability to wield. Furthermore, these corrupt men, particularly the villainous Senator Silas P. Ratcliffe, are strongly associated with Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party. Adams contrasts the crude power of a Northern, Republican city with a nostalgic vision of agrarian Virginia, as exemplified by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. In *Democracy*, Virginia represents a more natural and less coercive way of living, one that doesn't require a powerful center to hold. In Adams's novel, the wielding of centralized power is always corrupting, even when it is wielded to end the coercive slavery of human beings. The novel's solution is a withdrawing from the urban center to a place where the lines of power are less densely packed.

From Adams, the chapter looks at two visions for D.C. which are much more optimistic about the possibility of using the power of the federal government to improve the District. Frederick Douglass' vision, as it emerges in a number of his pieces, most prominently the 1877 speech "Our National Capital," paints antebellum, slave-holding D.C. as a tragic example of the federal government staying its hand when it could have moved to end slavery much sooner. Douglass blames the failings of D.C. on a culture that made governmental action impossible; the racist ethos and cultural practices of the South contaminated the District, making it inhospitable to abolitionists and their ideas. In Douglass'

vision for the future, the newly freed black laborers will be able to transform both the culture and the geography of D.C. through their willingness to perform hard labor. Douglass imagines a newly cosmopolitan and urban D.C., built on freed labor, in which the federal government no longer needs to stand for coercive intervention but can instead represent collective, democratic enterprise open to all citizens irrespective of race, region, or gender. Tragically, although Douglass himself worked to make this vision a reality by serving as an example of a hard-working member of an urban, African American elite, Republican reluctance to coerce Southerners to go along with this vision meant that blacks in D.C. made only limited gains in the decades following Douglass' speech.

In contrast to Douglass' failed vision of a united D.C., Burnham and his fellow planners actually managed to achieve their vision of a coherent city conforming to a paper plan (in this case, the famous McMillan Commission Plan of 1902). But their plan and its realization is again a lesson in the triumph of entrenched culture over sweeping government change. The Commissioners did manage to radically reshape D.C.; our currently existing National Mall, anchored by the Lincoln Monument on one end and a memorial to Grant on the other, was the product of their vision. But unlike Douglass's dream – recalling L'Enfant's – of cosmopolitan unity, the figures the McMillan Commission memorialized (Lincoln, Grant, and Sherman) all represent the military triumph of the North over the South. Although the plan purports to embrace the unity of an entire country, it makes it clear that the unity is political, not cultural, and reminds all visitors that it took naked force to resolve the country's differences. As one of the first, if not the first, large-scale reworkings of the geography of an American city in service of a coherent plan, the McMillan Commission represents a high-water mark in the power of centralized urban planning. As a measure of urban planning's

ability to reshape the cultural practices of the city and realize the sort of cosmopolitan, non-coercive unity that Douglass dreamed of, it was a failure, leaving both the suffering of blacks and the existence of regional differences out of its vision of unity.

Whereas the D.C. chapter focuses on the urban manifestations of racial inequality, sectional differences, and political power, my work on New York examines the tricky interrelationships of social and economic class in America's wealthiest and most socially conscious city. New York had the density and development that D.C. lacked, but it had neither social nor economic unity. I specifically focus on the way that social and economic class combine to determine who is visible in the city and who becomes the invisible underclass. I begin by using Max Weber's famous distinction between economic class, social status, and political power to show how social status is frequently a question of style. In Weber's formulation, the key to belonging to a certain social group is to retain honor, and the key to retaining honor is to adhere to a prescribed social aesthetic. Social status is thus performative – it depends less on wealth than on correct behavior. To succeed in New York high society, one must live on the correct street, wear the right clothes, patronize this artist and not that one. You must be seen with the right people, in the right places, doing the right things, and you must not be seen doing anything else. Most importantly, if your performance is wrong, you will simply not be seen; you will vanish from the society pages and be cut by your former cohort if you meet them on the street. In Edith Wharton's 1913 novel *The Custom of the Country*, Wharton shows what happens when two different social aesthetics come into conflict. In the novel, Undine Spragg, the daughter of a moderately wealthy Midwesterner, comes to New York to enter society. She is quickly torn between Ralph Marvell, a member of old New York, and Peter Van Degen, the scion of a robber baron. In

the Marvell universe, wealth should be concealed, as should the members of the community themselves; the system thrives on exclusiveness and invisibility. In the Van Degen set (Marvell describes them as “The Invaders”), conspicuous consumption is the way to social prominence, and thus they view visibility as desirable. In the novel, Undine tries to live both the Marvell and the Invader ways, among others, and finally comes to an inescapable conclusion: in social life, and especially urban social life, visibility is just another form of power, one which can be managed and altered, but never escaped.

Having established, using Weber and Wharton, the way that visibility shapes the city’s social interactions, the chapter examines different perspectives on how visibility can be channeled to create connections across economic divides. Whereas Undine pursued visibility for her own sake, Frederick Law Olmsted’s macro-level intervention – Central Park – and Jacob A. Riis’ micro-level intervention – the exposure of the tenement – are both attempts to manage Manhattan’s uniquely robust culture of visibility in order to effect social change. In his famous statement of principles, “Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns” (1870), Olmsted identifies urban spaces as having too much visibility. On the streets of Manhattan, everyone must constantly watch one another, and in *laissez-faire* capitalism the same vigilance applies to the business world. Olmsted’s solution is a massive public park, placed in the center of the city, which shifts the visual environment. In lieu of the powerful vistas of Manhattan, which intensify and channel visibility in a dangerous manner, the Park is made up of a diffuse set of idyllic Ruskinian places that soften the gaze. In Central Park, people must no longer look at each other with suspicion; visibility can bring about class mixing, and in particular the poor will have a chance to observe the splendor and the habits of the wealthy and find in them traits to emulate. Jacob A. Riis’ *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), by

contrast, argues that visibility must flow the other way. Its focus is not on the visibility of the rich in a pristine place but on the invisibility of the poor in their wretched tenements. Riis' solution to the problem of poverty, while technocratic like Olmsted's, operates not on the grand scale of the entire city landscape but on the intimate scale of individual tenement buildings. Riis coupled his claim that tenement living was dehumanizing with the claim that it was allowed to go on because slum dwellers were invisible to the powerful. Before laws and public opinion would embrace the technological change of improved mid-rise architecture, Riis thought that there had to be a change in ethos. The wealthy had to start caring about the poor, and the only way to do that was to make them see the poor. For that reason, Riis pioneered flash photojournalism which, combined with his textual descriptions, rendered the suffering of the poor visible to the wealthy. Once the wealthier half could see the impoverished half, their sympathies would be engaged and they would begin to take action to right the social crime that was tenement dwelling. Riis was thus working to make the well-off expand their vision of "society" by showing them the suffering underclass that they were failing to see.

Although Riis' book did spur a great deal of talk and action, the effect was nowhere near as immediate or dramatic as he would have hoped. William Dean Howells' 1889 novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* provides a possible explanation why; the novel's narrative mirrors the conditions of Riis' project. In *Hazard*, a middle-class couple, Basil and Isabel March, are repeatedly confronted with highly visible (and even olfactory) urban poverty, yet they never take action to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Howells, like Riis a journalist who hoped to bring about social change, thus gives us a cautionary tale, in which the mere visibility of poverty is not enough to alleviate it. The Marches are sympathetic to Lindau, a

poor immigrant who is personally known to them, and they manage to help him in some small ways. But their involvement in social issues stops where their personal social circle ends. Rather than helping the poor that they see, Basil and Isabel romanticize them, turning the visibility of poverty into spectacle, not provocation. In one particularly telling scene, the Marches draw the curtains of their carriage so they don't see the poverty of a particular street; in another, Mrs. March declares that riding on the El and looking into the homes of working-class families is "better than the theater." Howells' novel thus tempers hopes for rapid social change by reminding us that simply making poverty visible is not enough – a corresponding reorganization of the social ethos that places the classes in social contact with one another is also necessary.

The Chicago chapter shows how Chicago had the dynamism necessary to turn a dense space into a thriving city. Although the two writers in the dissertation's final chapter, Theodore Dreiser and Jane Addams, have radically different visions of how Chicago's energy should be harnessed, they each articulate a compelling synthesis of the opposition between organic and artificial methods of reforming the city. Frank Cowperwood, the hero of Dreiser's novel *The Titan* (1914), achieves an act of large-scale transformation that, unlike the self-contained Central Park and National Mall, knits the entire city of Chicago together. That transformation is the unification of all of the city's streetcar and elevated railroad lines into a single system that unites downtown in the famous Loop. But Cowperwood is not a technocratic public servant like Burnham, Olmsted, or Moses – instead, he is an amoral and rapacious robber baron. In Dreiser's novel, the official keepers of the public trust are hopelessly corrupt, and they conspire with the city's business leaders to keep the city's rich and powerful that way. Cowperwood is as corrupt as any figure, but his use of city

government is productive, not static. Dreiser thus embraces what Henry Adams feared: the wielding of coercive power, in the hands of a thoroughly unenlightened individual, whose practical effects outweigh his ethical deficiencies. In the novel, Dreiser shows that Cowperwood's enrichment via public monopoly and the city's spatial organization can go hand in hand. Thus Cowperwood is the embodiment of both all the forces that are supposed to make urban planning difficult (capital, corruption, greed, etc.) and a critically important source of urban order. By coupling a blind drive for wealth and power with a shrewd mind for organization, Cowperwood improves Chicago and enriches himself simultaneously. And as Dreiser takes great pains to show, Cowperwood's actions do benefit the city and its many residents, including the poor – the ability to move rapidly and cheaply through a city was and remains an absolute requirement for a functional urban space. Cowperwood thus serves as a symbol of both force and reason, order and chaos. His lust for power and mind for planning, operating in the free market, bring the entire Chicago area into a unity that endures to this day.

Jane Addams represents a much more humane type of organization, one which depends on cooperation rather than competition. Addams, working at the level of the neighborhood rather than the entire city, likewise tried to create unity by upsetting the static distinctions between neighborhoods and moving people into new spaces, but her goals were communitarian. In *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902) and *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910), Addams describes her efforts to create useful social bonds and a new ethos of care in a neighborhood full of immigrants who have only the most tenuous bonds of social connection. Like Dreiser, Addams articulates a synthesis between rational and organic reform; while she wholeheartedly believes in technocratic efforts, like Riis', to improve the

living conditions of the poor, she knows that they will fail unless they are grafted onto the customs and traditions that already exist in immigrant communities. To that end, her project uses pragmatist reasoning to create continuity between an ancient ethic of face-to-face care and the more expansive ethic that modern urban living requires. Whereas other reformers have failed because their reforms emphasized only abstract ideals, Addams' Hull-House integrated abstract reasoning with lived experience. The result of Hull-House is an integrated neighborhood in which progressive improvements of the city will not have to come from a top-down reformer, but rather can arise as part of a grassroots, democratic process. In Addams' vision, reform is only possible when a large swathe of the population cooperatively embraces it, and Hull-House encourages cooperation by encouraging community residents to consider themselves part of an interconnected social organism, not as atomistic free agents engaged in a struggle. When this ethical evolution occurs, the distinction between artificially reasoned and naturally arising processes loses much of its force, as the community has the unique ability, impossible for the individual planner, to use human reason to make changes to the city that flow from its organic nature.

CHAPTER 2

WASHINGTON, D.C.

"Ha, ha, my fine fellow! We are all kings here; royalty breathes in the common air. But come on, come on. Let us show you our great Temple of Freedom."

And so saying, irreverently grasping his sacred arm, they conducted us toward a lofty structure, planted upon a bold hill, and supported by thirty pillars of palm; four quite green; as if recently added; and beyond these, an almost interminable vacancy, as if all the palms in Mardi, were at some future time, to aid in upholding that fabric.

Upon the summit of the temple was a staff; and as we drew nigh, a man with a collar round his neck, and the red marks of stripes upon his back, was just in the act of hoisting a tappa standard – correspondingly striped. Other collared menials were going in and out of the temple.

- Herman Melville, from *Mardi*

Melville's 1849 novel thus satirizes Washington, D.C.'s blatant hypocrisy. All men in Vivenza, the novel's stand-in for the United States, are kings, and they have built a great Temple of Freedom in honor of themselves, not some divine monarch. But the kings of Vivenza are not the real builders of the temple; that task fell to the "collared menials" who bear bloody marks from floggings that ironically match the stripes on the U.S. flag. In the antebellum period, D.C. was a festering sore for anti-slavery activists: it was a monument to the freedom of all mankind, built and staffed by slaves. In the decades following the Civil War, various figures attempted to create a capital city for the U.S. that could truly live up to the country's ideals. But the schism between the goals of the American experiment and the tragic history of American slavery was not easily overcome. As the capital of the United States during the war, D.C. was the power center of the anti-slavery North. It was in D.C. that the Emancipation Proclamation was drafted and published; it was from D.C. that the

Union armies marched; it was in D.C. that the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments were passed. In these respects, D.C. was not a mere Northern city but the pre-eminent one, the site of the Union government. On the other hand, just as in the slave states that sided with the Union, the Emancipation Proclamation did not apply to D.C. The District was historically a slave-holding and even a slave-market city. Its market serviced Maryland, a slave-holding Union state, and Virginia, the state that produced, among many others, Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee, and where Jefferson Davis located the capital of the Confederacy. Therein lays the dilemma: D.C. was the center from which slavery was abolished, but was itself a slave-holding city founded by a pair of Virginians. D.C. was the capital of the Union North, but it was also created from land drawn from the state that held the capital of the Confederate South. The contradiction becomes more apparent, not less, the further one looks into the past; although many of the most prominent founding fathers were Northerners (such as Adams, Franklin, Hamilton, and Jay), Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and above all George Washington were Virginians. The first great monument of D.C., the Washington monument, was dedicated to a Southern slaveholder; the building of that monument was interrupted by a war between the government that Washington had presided over and an alternate government headquartered in Washington's home state. The monument itself was not completed until 1885, which means that Radical Reconstruction of Virginia and a monument to Virginia's favorite son were simultaneous federal projects, with the monument, in the end, taking up a great deal more time. Washington, D.C. was thus a potent symbol of the industrial, urban, abolitionist North and of the agrarian, rural, slave-holding South. As Christopher Sten explains, this permanently bifurcated the identity of the city:

As the nation's capital, situated near the northern rim of the slave states that made up the old South, Washington has always had a complex, conflicted character, split along several related fault lines – national/local, northern/southern, slave/free, white/black, urban/rural, conservative/liberal. (*Literary* 3)

This chapter will explore how all of those issues played into the struggle for D.C.'s soul in the years during and following the Civil War. The crucial question at that time was: Could the city become Northern, or would it remain Southern? Or to put it a different way, could L'Enfant's plan to engineer a new city with a national outlook ever overcome the organic Southern culture that D.C. absorbed from its surrounding states?

This chapter will begin with L'Enfant's plan because D.C. was the only major American city to have an aesthetically beautiful plan in the neoclassical style. L'Enfant's plan was not just the only great American city plan of the eighteenth century; it was also the model for the new plans of the twentieth century. Daniel Burnham, whose 1909 Plan of Chicago is often regarded as the first modern American city plan, was inspired by L'Enfant's vision, and even updated L'Enfant's plan for D.C. in his 1901 McMillan Commission Plan. Other American cities, such as Manhattan, were based on the grid and plot system: a rigid grid was imposed on the city with no consideration for geography, then the rectangles created by that grid were chopped up and sold with no consideration for the best uses of those plots. L'Enfant's plan was D.C.'s contribution to the American ideal of a metropolis; it inspired the architects and city planners of the Progressive Era to see the value in a great big beautiful plan of the city, an aesthetically brilliant and carefully unified vision for a grandiose metropolis. However, D.C. also symbolized everything that was wrong about such grand plans; L'Enfant's vision and the reality of Washington didn't come close to meeting one another for more than a century. This failure gets at the heart of one of the central questions of my larger project: how much can the growth of a city, and its culture and identity, be

controlled? As we shall see, L'Enfant designed the city to be everything that Southern communities were not – centralized, organized, grandiose, and cosmopolitan. That grand design, however, immediately met the local reality: most of those who lived in D.C. were Southerners, and the organic culture that grew up in the city thwarted L'Enfant's design.³ D.C. was, as Frederick Douglass will show so persuasively, a Virginian city even after the Civil War. It was ragged, provincial, disorganized, and slave-holding. And each of the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century writers who this chapter considers – Henry Adams, Frederick Douglass, and Daniel Burnham and the rest of the McMillan Commissioners – had to grapple with the question of whether human design and effort could overcome the city's organic culture (as Douglass and Burnham argue) or whether such an effort was either hopeless or hopelessly corrupt or both (as Adams argues). Finally, this question has a particular inflection in Washington, as the question of whether or not human agency can reshape the city becomes in part a referendum on whether massive federal governmental action can be effective or valid. In short, L'Enfant's plan had a chance to give D.C. the social, aesthetic, and spatial unity that a metropolis needs, but the South's agrarian culture and American resistance to centralized, imperial authority called into question the very possibility of an American metropolis.

Furthermore, the question of D.C.'s Southern culture links to all of the issues that Sten raises in important ways. The first and most obvious of these is the role of the African American community. Despite the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, the

³ Even in 1880, after the massive expansion of the Federal Government and the increase in the size of the city to 178,000 people (from 75,000 in 1860), the population remained Southern. Leaving out the foreign-born population of the city in 1880: "of the Americans, 53.9 percent had been born in the District, another 25 percent came from Southern states (almost all from Maryland and Virginia), and only 20.9 percent came from the rest of the United States" (O'Brien 51-52). If we count those born in the District in the mid-nineteenth century as Southerners, then 80% of D.C.'s population in 1880 had Southern roots.

fact remained that life was considerably worse for Southern blacks in the post-Reconstruction South than for their Northern counterparts. If D.C. were to remain a Southern city, then the role of blacks in the city would be severely curtailed. As we shall see, Frederick Douglass feared this eventuality, and articulated a muscular, masculine vision of D.C. as a city that would only go as far as its freed black labor would take it. Labor, of course, was the central issue in the divide between the North and the South, and it was unclear whether D.C. could adopt Northern labor practices. In contrast to Douglass's city of big black shoulders, Henry Adams was nostalgic for D.C. as a site of Southern indolence. He felt that the warm climate of the city made it the perfect place to escape from the harsh, Puritan work ethic of New England. By contrast, Douglass, as well as the members 1902 McMillan Commission which designed the modern-day National Mall, imagined D.C. as a newly efficient city with a Northern ethic of work. Corresponding to this efficiency is an expression of coherence or unity; whereas Pierre L'Enfant's original plan envisioned a mammoth city tightly wrapped around clear foci, the early nineteenth-century D.C. was instead a ragged and incoherent mass, international shorthand for a city with neither identity nor order. A newly Northern version of D.C. would have to realize unity and order, and the McMillan Plan articulates a future vision of D.C. that returns to a semi-mythical version of L'Enfant's plan. Finally, from L'Enfant's plan onwards, D.C. has always been thought of as a repository for national memory, in the form of statuary, memorials, and monuments, and in the wake of armed conflict between the North and the South, the memories inscribed in D.C.'s landscape would have to be altered if the city named after a Virginia planter were to become a Northern metropolis.

Although this chapter is primarily concerned with these issues as they arise in the years surrounding the Civil War and the decades after, it will begin with a brief consideration of L'Enfant's plan and the engineer's vision for a city that would not only reflect but also shape the newly-born country's patriotic national character. From the late eighteenth century, the narrative will briefly analyze accounts of the city in the following decades before shifting to an analysis of Civil War era D.C, using Eastman Johnson's famous 1859 painting *Negro Life at the South* (also known as *Old Kentucky Home*) to show how D.C. was, in a reversal of L'Enfant's vision, a profoundly Southern city which had failed to achieve the coherence which L'Enfant imagined for it. From there, I will show how the failures of L'Enfant's plans and D.C.'s ragged Southernness impressed themselves very differently on a pair of American writers who otherwise had a number of things in common. The abolitionist, memoirist, and ambassador Frederick Douglass (who was friends with Charles Sumner and loathed James G. Blaine) viewed D.C.'s Southernness and raggedness as painful legacies of the slavery years that could be overcome by the hard work of the newly freed slaves. By contrast, the abolitionist, memoirist, and ambassador Henry Adams (who was friends with Charles Sumner and loathed James G. Blaine) was appalled by slavery but nevertheless found the raggedness of Southern life appealing, and thus preferred the Southern version of D.C. to the Northern incarnation that Douglass believed in. Furthermore, while Douglass held out hope till the end of his life that concerted federal action, particularly coming from the executive branch, could reshape the city, Adams argued for the primacy of mindless forces over mindful action. Finally, the McMillan Commission of 1902, made up of some of America's most prestigious architects and planners, attempted to return to L'Enfant's vision by harnessing federal power to create a version of D.C. which would be neither Northern nor

Southern but simply Union. However, the commission's use of a nearly entirely Northern vocabulary means that its version of unity necessarily excluded a large portion of the country and thus re-inscribed a regional character to the city – Northern rather than Southern.

In each of the major texts in this chapter (L'Enfant's 1791 plan, Douglass' speech "Our National Capital" (1877), Adams' *Democracy* (1880) and *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918), and the McMillan Commission report), it becomes clear that D.C.'s Southern culture stood in the way of a truly national city. Each writer had to answer the question: could that culture be overcome? For L'Enfant the answer is an unqualified yes; L'Enfant believed that the full realization of his plan would shape the very culture of the country. Writing in the years immediately after the ratification of the Constitution, he imagined D.C. as a neutral ground where Northerners would come to the South and, after mutually beneficial interaction, Northerners and Southerners would realize that they shared a common destiny. After the sectional divisions of the country culminated in the Civil War, later observers of D.C. articulated the impossibility of this dream. Frederick Douglass's strident 1877 speech shows D.C. to have been doubly corrupted by slavery and by federal largesse. Douglass sees the only hope for the city in the repudiation of Southernness and a transformation to an honest, Northern economy built on the free labor of blacks. In Douglass's conception, a Northern city and a national, cosmopolitan metropolis are synonymous. Henry Adams, who describes the allure of the antebellum Southern D.C. in his *Education*, depicts the Northernification of D.C. in his novel *Democracy*, but, unlike Douglass, he sees the process as ruining D.C. rather than reviving it. Finally, the McMillan Plan of 1902 purportedly offers a plan to reunify D.C. and re-link North and South, but the plan manages to fail both sides as it emphasizes the military triumph of the North while

leaving out the role of slavery and the plight of African Americans. Throughout all of these accounts, this chapter traces the extent to which a city, buffeted as it is by enormous social, economic, and political forces, be shaped by human planning. As D.C. was the first U.S. city to be consciously planned for greatness, it was the test case for whether or not American cities could realize the urban ideal of unity.

L'Enfant's Plan: Building Unity out of Sectional Diversity

As a deliberately pre-planned metropolis, D.C. was designed to go from more or less uninhabited⁴ to a major city by adherence to a single coherent vision. The visionary was Pierre Charles L'Enfant, an architect and civil engineer who served as an army engineer with George Washington in the Revolutionary War and was selected by Washington to design the capital city of the new country in 1791. L'Enfant was relieved of his duties as city planner in 1792, following a feud with his superiors, the commissioners of the city; both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson sought to defuse the conflict between L'Enfant and the commissioners, to no avail. Even with his dismissal, and the subsequent changes and revisions which were made to his plan for the next century, L'Enfant's design for the city – particularly his “Grand Avenue” (the future National Mall) and the spatial relationship between what would be known as the Capitol and the White House – nevertheless provided the underlying basis and structure for D.C. L'Enfant's plan (Figure 1.1) for a gridded city, interrupted by avenues at 45 degree angles, and an L-shaped corridor of Federal buildings,

⁴ The settlement of Georgetown did already exist, but it was a “[r]ed brick” town in which “public buildings and churches were, as yet, few” and even the mansions of the rich were “built on a small scale and with rudimentary taste” (National Capital 21-22). This is nothing like L'Enfant's vision for D.C., and he wanted many of Georgetown's distinct characteristics to disappear as “its whole district became part of the session” and even wanted the name Georgetown itself to be “suppressed” in order to not to interfere with his plan (qtd in Kite, 16).

anchored by the Capitol and the White House, did endure (although the Mall was later expanded into a cruciform⁵). Although L'Enfant's plan was modified by his successor, Andrew Ellicott, and never truly realized, the idea of the plan endured in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. At first, the plan was remembered as a failure, a skeleton which was laughable by virtue of having never been given flesh. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, it had become a beautiful vision that had gone tragically unrealized.

L'Enfant's plan for D.C. had two animating ideals that made it so impressive: grandeur and unifying coherence. The city was to reflect both the nation's majesty and its harmony. L'Enfant wanted the city to be an overwhelming, even sublime testament to the greatness of the United States – his original design for the White House, which he referred to as the “Presidential Palace,” called for it to be five times larger than the building that was actually built. His other goal was that the city be unified, a coherent entity which adapted itself to its river surroundings but was deliberately centered on the Capitol building. Indeed, L'Enfant went so far as to designate the longitude of the Capitol to be 0:0. The D.C. of L'Enfant's plan was thus forward-looking, reflecting the U.S. future, rather than its present.

⁵ The actually existing National Mall in the twentieth-century (Figure 2) is a cruciform shape with one arm thrown slightly off by the Tidal Basin. In the McMillan Commission plan (Figure 3) the idea was for Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues to give the cross wings, creating a “polygonal, or kite-shaped, figure” (Burnham 36). In certain respects the kite-shape does exist, insofar as the areas bounded by Pennsylvania and Maryland are almost completely dominated by federal that are architecturally integrated with the buildings of the Mall. In other respects, however, the lack of green space and reduced importance of monuments in these “wings” mean they are not generally regarded as truly part of the Mall. As a final technical note, the Park Service currently officially defines the Mall as running from the Capitol to the Washington Monument; this makes the monuments to Lincoln, Vietnam Veterans, Jefferson, FDR, WWII Veterans, etc all not officially part of the Mall. To get around this definition, what I am referring to as the National Mall is often referred to as “the Monumental Core,” but I think National Mall is a fair vernacular term for the space from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capital, and I would be willing to add the Tidal Basin and its surroundings as well.

As L'Enfant wrote in the conclusion to the memoir which accompanied the plan when he presented it to President Washington and assorted cabinet members:

It was my wish to delineate a plan wholly new and which combined on a grand scale will require more than ordinary exertions but not more than is within your power to procure. And as I remain assured you will conceive it essential to pursue with dignity an undertaking of a magnitude so worthy of the concern of a grand empire, I have not hesitated to express myself freely, realizing that the nation's honor is bound up in its complete achievement and that over its progress the nations of the world, watching with eyes of envy, themselves having been denied the opportunity, will stand as judge. (qtd in Kite, 71)

L'Enfant here envisions an international system of honor, in which the building of a capital city of extraordinary grandeur and magnitude is required for the United States to take its place in the world as a rising "grand empire." Since the U.S. is starting from scratch, both as a country and in the form of its capital city, this is its first chance to impress the international community with its grand accomplishments; L'Enfant leaves unsaid the potential alternative, that if his monumental plan is not followed, the other nations of the world will have the right to judge America harshly (as we shall see, in the first half of the nineteenth century this unmentioned possibility became a reality). L'Enfant's plan links the honor and success of the U.S. to its achievement of his plan; if the country wants to be acknowledged as a unified and grand empire, it should begin by building a unified and grand capital city.⁶

But for my purposes, the grandeur of L'Enfant's dream is less important than its emphasis on unity, coherence, and proximity. L'Enfant wanted to create a city that was simultaneously grand and tightly knit, like his famous example, Versailles. In a report to President Washington, L'Enfant wrote:

⁶ As you can see, this vision of the capital fits clearly in the Hamiltonian Federalist tradition, but it was deeply at odds the vision of L'Enfant's direct superior: the Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson. In keeping with his distaste for the denizens of cities, Jefferson's original survey for D.C. clearly envisioned a much, much smaller city. That survey (figure), merely placed all the necessary federal buildings in a row, surrounded by a relatively small chunk of land to be further developed. For Jefferson, the less urban the American capital was, the better.

Having determined some principal points to which I wished to make the others subordinate, I made the distribution regular with every street at right angles, North and South, east and west, and afterwards opened some in different directions, as avenues to and from every principal place, wishing thereby not merely to contract with the general regularity, nor to afford a greater variety of seats with pleasant prospects, which will be obtained from the advantageous ground over which these avenues are chiefly directed, but principally to connect each part of the city, if I may so express it, by making the real distance less from place to place, by giving to them reciprocity of sight and by making thus seemingly connected, promote a rapid settlement over the whole extent, rendering those even of the most remote parts an addition to the principal, which without the help of these, were any such settlement attempted, it would be languid, and lost in the extent, and become detrimental to the establishment. (qtd in Kite, 53)

L'Enfant's first goal was to establish "principal points" in the city to which all other points would be subordinate. Just as he imagined the nation's capital to be the center of the country, he wanted D.C.'s Capitol building and Presidential Palace to be a pair of central points around which the rest of the design would be filled in. In the L'Enfant plan, the Capitol and the President's House are established, as I have mentioned, in an L-shaped corridor which is the ancestor of our present cruciform mall, and the city's grid is built around those pre-eminent edifices.

The true genius of the plan, however, was the radiating avenues that L'Enfant used to create and connect the most important points of his city. If only the Capitol, President's House, and the "Grand Avenue" (the future National Mall) had broken the grid, the result would have been a densely gridded city situated around a largely inaccessible center. L'Enfant's radiating avenues not only added variation and beauty to the city plan by "contract[ing] with the general regularity" and affording "pleasant prospects," they "connect each part of the city." In L'Enfant's plan (Figure 1.1), the radiating avenues not only establish a line of sight between the President's House and the Capitol – as in Pennsylvania Avenue – but also various lines of sight between those two buildings and the Potomac, the

outskirts of the city, and even the other squares and circles which the avenues create when they intersect one another. The result is a city that combines the structure of a grid with the openness of avenues; L'Enfant's belief is that these avenues would "make the real distance" between these points "seem less from place to place." D.C., in L'Enfant's plan, is thus a city of connected nodes, oriented around the buildings that house Federal power. In this way the city would reflect the nation, encouraging each area of the city to think of itself as part of the larger whole and imagine itself as closer to the center than it actually was. In the plan, as in the nation, even "the most remote parts" of the city are part of the whole, an "addition to the principal" – each piece of the city is wholly and fully a part of the larger metropolis, even if it is subordinated to the central powers. L'Enfant also thought that this trick of reducing distance and uniting the outskirts with the center would lead the plan to be realized faster, as a rigid grid would have made the outskirts of the city seem like hinterlands, but the feeling of proximity and unity granted by the avenues would make the outer areas as desirable for settlement as the center. Again, this turns the capital into a microcosm of L'Enfant's vision of a republican empire, in which even the outermost states conceive of themselves as fully part of the empire centered on D.C.

Unfortunately for L'Enfant, not even local residents of the area that was to become D.C. felt beholden to his sweeping, centralized vision. L'Enfant was dismissed because of his battles with the commissioners supervising his plan; he believed that there should be no intermediaries between himself and the effectuation of his plan, save George Washington himself. But the beginning of the conflict with the commissioners is even more telling. Although there was no major settlement in the way of L'Enfant's plan, it did require some destruction: "roads, farms, houses, slave shacks, woods, and fences all over the territory

would have to vanish so that the city might appear” (Berg 141). The sticking point was a partially completed mansion being built by Daniel Carroll of Duddington, one of the largest landholders of the area. According to Scott W. Berg:

The line of the future New Jersey Avenue apparently hit Duddington’s house by a negligible amount, but an adjustment of even a few feet in this spot would have necessitated an adjustment of nearly a hundred feet by the time the road met the Eastern Branch, and that kind of alteration would have wreaked havoc with the whole plan. (141)

L’Enfant’s plan was the painstaking conciliation of “the landscape and his complex street pattern” and the unity of the project hinged on every single piece of it fitting together precisely (Berg 141). When someone such as Carroll interrupted that order, L’Enfant felt that he was perfectly right in using force as a response; L’Enfant had Carroll’s partially completed house razed without receiving authorization to do so from either the commissioners or George Washington (Berg 143). Here, as early as 1791, we can find the battle being fought over how much power centralized authority had to transform the currently existing landscape – L’Enfant vs. Carroll was just the first of many such clashes, leading up to Moses vs. Jacobs and beyond. L’Enfant, representing (or so he asserted) George Washington, made the executive move of destroying the Carroll house because it interfered with unity. The commissioners, and their ally, Secretary of State Jefferson, eventually succeeded in forcing L’Enfant’s resignation and sending his vision of executive urban planning into hibernation for a century. As we shall see, the glorification of L’Enfant’s sweeping plan didn’t take place until the late nineteenth century, after the power of the federal government had expanded during the Civil War and centralized urban planning was experiencing its U.S. heyday. In his own time, L’Enfant was fired for insisting on the supremacy of his grandiose and singular vision (authorized by George Washington, symbol

of executive power and namesake of a mighty city) in the face of the resistance of the actual residents of the area and the diffuse power of a committee (supported by Thomas Jefferson, symbol of republicanism and champion of agrarianism). The grand and unified D.C. that L'Enfant's famous plan represents, the plan that today decorates restaurant menus and bar walls all over the city, was scuttled from the start by grassroots dissent.⁷

L'Enfant's plan proved equal parts inspiring and ineffectual in his other main goal for the city. L'Enfant didn't just want the city to resemble the United States in its grandeur and unity; he wanted the city to actually shape the character of the nation. In a letter to Alexander Hamilton, L'Enfant wrote:

I earnestly wish all that the Eastern States can spare may come this way, and believe it would answer as good a purpose as that of their emigration to the West. It would deface that line of markation which will ever oppose the South against the East, for when objects are seen at a distance the idea we form of them is apt to mislead us...and we fancy monstrous that object which, from a nearer view, would charm us...Hence arises a natural though unwarrantable prejudice of nations against nations, of States against States, and so down to individuals, who often mistrust one another for want of being sufficiently acquainted with each other. (qtd in Jusserand, 16).

Prophetically, L'Enfant suggests that the same prejudices that operate between nations will come to operate in the United States. The North (which he describes as "the East") and the South will, he fears, eventually accept a caricatured view of one another due to their lack of proximity, and the result will be a generalized mistrust. L'Enfant's solution to this problem is Washington, D.C. as a transformative melting pot. Instead of leaving the established states to settle in the uninhabited wilderness to the west, L'Enfant believes that the surplus population of the Northeastern states should move south to D.C. and settle the wilderness that he is

⁷ In fact, the plan that decorates D.C. is Andrew Ellicott's revision of the L'Enfant plan, not L'Enfant's original plan. As Berg tells us of the Ellicott plan: "The plan was published in newspapers and magazines, displayed in statehouses, and printed onto handkerchiefs, but not a single copy bore the name of Peter Charles L'Enfant. No printing of the plan in the next ninety-five years ever would." (191)

transforming into a capital city. By doing so, those residents will bring their Northeastern habits and attitudes with them, and, when they interact with the Southern residents of Virginia and Maryland who will make up the rest of the capital population, both groups will be able to move past their mistaken prejudices. D.C. would thus serve as a point of union and communion for the country, radiating inter-regional understanding to the different portions of the country that might otherwise find themselves locked in enmity or conflict.

The Civil War showed L'Enfant's grandiose belief that D.C. could forestall regional prejudices to be utterly mistaken. But, although I find it unlikely that a unified D.C. with a large Northern population would have done much to alleviate sectional prejudice, we will never know. In fact, L'Enfant's dream of a grandiose and coherent city was not realized in his lifetime, and was not even substantially realized until the second half of the nineteenth century at the earliest. A series of foreign observers bore witness to the fact that the grand city rapidly springing from nothing into a coherent unity was not to be. Writing in 1797 about the Grand Avenue connecting the Capitol and the Presidential House, the French Duke de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt wrote "The plan is fine, cleverly and grandly designed, but it is its very grandeur, its magnificence, which causes it to be nothing but a dream" (qtd in Jusserand, 28). In the Duke's reading, L'Enfant's mistake was designing such harmonious grandeur; any deviations from the plan that L'Enfant drew up are immediately obvious when a less grand plan might have been more flexible. Charles Dickens praised aspects of Washington during his 1842 U.S. trip, writing that he "had upon the way a beautiful view of the Capitol, which is a fine building of the Corinthian order, placed upon a noble and commanding eminence" (128). Once inside the city, however, Dickens realized that the

Capitol was an exception. He famously described D.C. as a “monument to a deceased project” and painted this image for his European audience:

Take the worst parts of the City Road and Pentonville, preserving all their oddities, but especially the small shops and dwellings, occupied there (but not in Washington) by furniture-brokers, keepers of poor eating-houses, and fanciers of birds. Burn the whole down; build it up again in wood and plaster; widen it a little; throw in part of St. John's Wood; put green blinds outside all the private houses, with a red curtain and a white one in every window; plough up all the roads; plant a great deal of coarse turf in every place where it ought *not* to be; erect three handsome buildings in stone and marble, anywhere, but the more entirely out of everybody's way the better; call one the Post Office; one the Patent Office, and one the Treasury; make it scorching hot in the morning, and freezing cold in the afternoon, with an occasional tornado of wind and dust; leave a brick-field without the bricks, in all central places where a street may naturally be expected: and that's Washington. (128)

In every way this is a reversal of L'Enfant's original vision. Dickens compares D.C. to the ragged outskirts of the world's major metropolises, not the great centers which L'Enfant studied. But more importantly, whereas L'Enfant wanted to create a unified plan in which a series of avenues linked the city into a whole, Dickens takes the defining feature of D.C. to be the way that nothing fits together the way it should. The private buildings look like poor London eating-houses that have been burnt down and then badly rebuilt with inferior materials, while the public buildings, made of handsome stone and marble, seem not only out of place with their surroundings but completely out of everybody's way. The governmental buildings might be out of the way, but the grass seems to be in the way, as there is coarse turf everywhere one might expect coarse turf not to be, and brick-fields without bricks everywhere a street should be, and what streets there are seem to have been plowed up and rendered unusable. Nothing could be further from L'Enfant's vision of a monumental city with no outskirts; in Dickens' reading, the city is nothing but outskirts. As with La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Dickens was struck by the utter incongruity between the actually existing D.C. and L'Enfant's grand plan:

It is sometimes called the City of Magnificent Distances, but it might with greater propriety be termed the City of Magnificent Intentions; for it is only on taking a bird's-eye view of it from the top of the Capitol, that one can at all comprehend the vast designs of its projector, an aspiring Frenchman. Spacious avenues, that begin in nothing, and lead nowhere; streets, mile-long, that only want houses, roads and inhabitants; public buildings that need but a public to be complete; and ornaments of great thoroughfares, which only lack great thoroughfares to ornament – are its leading features. (129)

Another French observer, Jean-Jacques Ampere, viewed the city a decade after Dickens and, despite the fact that D.C. had improved in the interim, described a similar situation to the one that confronted Dickens (“streets without houses and houses without streets”) and concluded that the mid-nineteenth-century state of D.C. was “a striking proof of this truth that one cannot create a great city at will” (qtd in Jusserand, 28). La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Dickens, and Ampere all agree that L’Enfant’s plan served as proof that cities cannot be planned in that manner, and that D.C. had no chance of becoming a metropolis worthy of a grand empire.

If antebellum D.C. failed to realize L’Enfant’s vision for an imposing and unified capital, it failed just as spectacularly to serve as a cosmopolitan meeting ground for America’s sectionally divided citizens. Both failures are particularly obvious when we turn to Eastman Johnson’s famous 1859 painting *Negro Life at the South. Negro Life* (Figure 1.5) depicts the back courtyard of a southern home, in which a number of slaves and one white woman are arranged around a black man playing the banjo. Whether or not the image depicts suffering is a matter of some debate; most of the figures listening to the banjo seem to have a slight smile or otherwise placid expression on their faces, but this indicates at best a lack of immediate, overt suffering. The banjo player himself has an inscrutable expression, onto which the viewer can project mild contentment or resigned suffering, among other emotional states. But although the debate about the inner state of mind of the figures is ongoing, there is

no denying the general dilapidation of the scene. The courtyard itself was clearly not originally intended to be a courtyard, but was in fact a part of the house which has subsequently been razed; portions of its walls remain where it shared those walls with the surrounding structures, but its back wall is gone and its roof is mostly absent, with ragged roof beams jutting out over the banjo player's head. A hatchet and a watering pot lie discarded on the ground, amidst other assorted bric-a-brac, and even the portions of the house that remain intact are in disrepair, with boards coming loose in the upper left hand corner of the painting. A house to the right of the courtyard seems to have a stucco finish in much better repair, and from this considerably more prosperous-looking home emerges the painting's only white figure. That woman's tasteful beige dress, with its exposed shoulders, fashionable bodice and ruffled petticoat, forms a clear contrast to the dress of the slaves in the scene, whose outfits are generally in primary colors and include features such as bandanas (as in the women taking care of the children in the bottom right and top left of the painting), aprons (as in the girl on top of the step ladder in the bottom right) or an exposed red petticoat (as in the woman in the bottom left of the painting). While the debate raged then and rages now as to whether *Negro Life at the South* depicts suffering,⁸ the painting does make clear the gap in living conditions between the black slaves and a white woman who seems to be at least middle-class, and also could be the owner of the slaves in question. The white woman emerges from her smooth stucco home in her fashionable dress, and observes the slaves at repose in their dilapidated conditions.

⁸ As John Davis puts it, the painting has a reputation for "its ability to be all things to all people" (67). Abolitionists saw the "moral degeneracy of the institution of slavery" in the "decrepit, tumbledown living conditions," while "slavery's defenders" saw "the careless leisure-time activities of several generations of slaves provided visual proof that forced servitude was neither physically onerous nor destructive of family life."

However, what is most striking in Johnson's depiction is that there is nothing particularly unexpected in his view of slave life in the South, save perhaps the range of skin tones that he chose to depict, from the very light yellow face of the girl with the exposed red petticoat to the dark brown, nearly charcoal face of the woman playing with the children in the foreground. The painting is masterfully composed and executed, but its portrait of slave life – a heterogeneous (male and female, young and old, light and dark) group of slaves taking a few small pleasures in music and each other amidst dilapidated surroundings and domesticated and farm animals – is quite conventional. As John Davis tells us, contemporary viewers of the painting immediately placed it with other depictions of southern slave life, “particularly Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (70). Davis continues: “The most enduring popular association, however, was with Stephen Foster's sentimental minstrel song ‘My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night!’” (70), and indeed the painting was almost immediately better known by the alternate title *Old Kentucky Home*, an association that continued well into the twentieth century. But in fact, the painting depicts not a slice of Kentucky but an urban space in the District of Columbia.

The issue of slavery in D.C. was particularly controversial because it brought a different element to the angle of states' rights and federalism that animated the battle over slavery elsewhere. Slavery in D.C. was particularly galling for antislavery abolitionists; it was a mark on the nation's honor that showed up more clearly for being in such a prominent place. Furthermore, as Davis explains: “Many Northerners who abhorred slavery were nevertheless of the opinion that the federal government had no constitutional power to interfere with the institution of slavery within the sovereign states of the South. The District of Columbia was another matter” (70). If the story of antebellum slavery is the story of

compromise, states' rights, nullification, and various other debates over the relative power of the federal and state governments, D.C, as a special federal space, should have been exempt from those debates. Or so went a certain line of thinking.⁹ Instead, D.C. remained a Southern space into the Civil War; the slave trade was finally abolished in 1850, but slavery itself was not abolished until Lincoln did so in 1862 with the first federal stroke against slavery. But although Johnson's painting was about this highly controversial subject of slavery in D.C, a naive viewer has no way of realizing that this is not a conventional depiction of southern life, and the painting thus became known by its alternate title.

Mark Twain, in *Life on the Mississippi*, observed that a painting of Stonewall Jackson's last interview with General Lee, "like many another historical picture, it means nothing without its label. and one label will fit it as well as another:

Jackson Accepting Lee's Invitation to Dinner.

Jackson Declining Lee's Invitation to Dinner--with Thanks.

Jackson Apologizing for a Heavy Defeat.

Jackson Reporting a Great Victory." (261)

Twain's point is that the viewer's reaction to the painting, if it were changed to "Jackson Accepting Lee's Invitation to Dinner," would be very much different than if the name were "Final Interview of Lee and Jackson." The painting shows Lee and Jackson on horseback; only the title can provide context and narrative. In the case of the Johnson painting, the two titles are more or less interchangeable; both instruct the viewer to experience the scene as a representative moment in slave life in the South. The real problem is that *My Old Kentucky Home* is profoundly misleading, since Johnson actually based his painting on a courtyard in

⁹ For more on these debates, see Davis's "Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* and Urban Slavery in Washington, D.C." (*Art Bulletin* 80.1 (1998)).

Washington, D.C. Whereas L'Enfant imagined his D.C. as a radically different kind of city, neither Northern nor Southern, Johnson's painting shows that 1859 D.C. was just another Southern city – indistinguishable from Kentucky, and equally capable of being held up as “the South.” An alternate title for Johnson's painting, one which tells the story I would like to tell, might be *The Failure of L'Enfant's Plan* or *The Treasury Clerk's Wife Observes the Congressman's Slaves*. On the eve of the civil war, just as D.C. was about to become the capital of the Union North, it was impossible to tell L'Enfant's D.C. from Jefferson Davis' Kentucky.

Henry Adams: In Praise of D.C.'s Southern Culture

In the pre-Civil War years, Henry Adams saw the profound Southern raggedness of D.C. and was, like the public in its response to *Negro Life at the South*, both attracted and horrified by the spectacle. As we shall see, Adams's horror was mostly predicated on his opposition to slavery, and once that obstacle was removed, post-Civil War D.C. became quite attractive, so long as it was able to retain its Southern guise. In the early chapters of *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918), antebellum D.C. is attractive to Henry for its Southernness but off-putting for its slavery. In the Reconstruction-era novel *Democracy* (1880), D.C. is still attractive for its Southernness, but the process of Northernization in D.C. makes Virginia, now free of slaves, a more attractive prospect. Virginia had always been very attractive to Adams as a historian; as Gary Wills puts it:

Most of the men he studied and admired were southerners, and especially Virginians, including his three principal heroes, Washington, Marshall, and Gallatin (the latter he treated as a Virginian, since Virginia is where Gallatin became an American citizen). The noblest character in his first novel is a Virginian, and the heroine of the tale is the widow of a Virginian. Adams's good friend at Harvard was a

Virginian – in fact, the son of Robert E. Lee – and he was visiting the Lee mansion at Arlington the night Lincoln reached Washington for his inauguration. (11-12)

Adams's narrative of how he eventually came to prefer the South (or at least Virginia) to New England is in many ways also the story of the transformation of D.C. into a metropolis. We have already begun the story of D.C.'s transformation; to pick up Henry Adams' thread of it, we must turn to Boston.

As Wills says, Adams's love for Virginia cannot "cancel the fact that Adams was affected by his own family background. But that was not a simple thing" (12). It was most certainly not a simple thing (and Wills emphasizes how, in Adams's own thinking, he was not just an Adams but "also a Boylston, a Quincy, a Brooks"). But one thing should have been simple – there was something the Adamses, the Boylstons, the Quincys, and the Brookses all had in common: Boston. Henry Adams should have been a Bostonian – that seems beyond dispute. Like John Adams, like John Quincy Adams, like Charles Francis Adams, like Peter Chardon Brooks, like Nathaniel Gorham, and like almost all of his ancestors,¹⁰ Henry should have been a Bostonian – and indeed opens *The Education* by announcing that by being born an Adams on Beacon Hill and christened by his Boston Unitarian uncle "he could scarcely have been more distinctly branded" if "he had been born in Jerusalem under the shadow of the Temple and circumcised in the Synagogue by his uncle the high priest, under the name of Israel Cohen" (3). Henry should have been a Bostonian,

¹⁰ It is a mark of Henry's essential Bostonness that he can claim in *The Education* that the "Adams connection was singularly small in Boston" – a claim that only makes sense if one considers that Boston, in *The Education*, is frequently opposed to the Adams family home of Quincy, a town less than 10 miles from Boston whose hills are, according to Henry, visible from Boston itself. To use Henry's own inside Boston terminology, I should say that Henry should have been a resident of Massachusetts Bay, but although we shall see that it is crucially important to Henry that Quincy is *not* Boston, to the non-Bostonian Quincy is very much Boston. This is the narcissism of minor differences; from an outsider's perspective, the distinction is hard to see indeed.

and indeed was both a Harvard undergraduate and a Harvard professor, but was ultimately no Bostonian, or was a Bostonian third at best. In many ways Henry was a diplomat and world-traveler with no fixed home, and in even more ways he was a Washingtonian. Henry, like his whole family, preferred “the national service” to state service (32) and this explains a certain amount of his Washingtonianness. *The Education* leans more strongly on his “taint of Maryland blood” that came from “The Madam,” his paternal grandmother and former First Lady of the U.S (19). Louisa Adams and Washington, D.C. would come to represent summer and tropical freedom to Henry, a boy who simultaneously accepted and rejected the formal constraints of Boston life. In order to understand how this scion of Boston became a non-Bostonian, we must confront his doubled self in the first three chapters of *The Education*, in which the young Henry unexpectedly meets a version of life that he prefers to Boston Brahminism.

In the first two chapters of *The Education*, “Quincy (1838-1948)” and “Boston (1848-1854),” Henry chooses his familial suburb of Quincy over the urban power center of Boston. As I have already stated, I am fairly suspicious of this distinction; Henry doesn’t actually prefer non-Bostonness, he just prefers suburban Boston to urban Boston. There are two main reasons he gives for this preference – a personal reason and a familial reason. The personal reason is as old as American schooling itself: summer vacation. Quincy is where the young Henry spends his summer breaks from school. Quincy was summer, “the multiplicity of nature,” “liberty, diversity, outlawry, the endless delight of mere sense impressions given by nature for nothing, and breathed by boys without knowing it” (9, 8). Boston, by contrast, was

“winter confinement, school,¹¹ rule, discipline; straight gloomy streets, piled with six feet of snow in the middle [...] above all else, winter represented the desire to escape and go free. Town was restraint, law, unity” (8-9). These are standard reactions to winters spent in Boston schools and summers spent in New England fields; it is hard to imagine a boy preferring winters spent trudging through snow to a classroom to summers spent living a Tom-and-Huck existence in the country. I wish to emphasize, however, the crucial phrases “multiplicity” and “unity.” We can see already that a boy like Henry would not be attracted to L’Enfant’s vision of a tightly unified country – the Federalist vision of his forebears. Instead, he prefers “multiplicity” – a variety of options for the individual and a great deal of heterogeneity in the population. Henry is not interested in unified duty; he much prefers multiplicitous freedom.

The familial reason that Henry preferred Quincy to Boston proper is also a national one: the opposition to slavery. As Henry tells us of his family in *The Education*: “They were anti-slavery by birth, as their name was Adams and their home was Quincy” (25). In the first years of Henry’s life, the dominant figure in Quincy was John Quincy Adams, who was famed as an anti-slavery crusader. Henry’s father, Charles Francis Adams, Sr., was an active member of the Free Soil party and its Vice Presidential Candidate in 1848; Henry “worshipped” Charles Sumner, the Free Soil Senator (30). In Quincy, antislavery reigned supreme, but “[t]he Free Soil Party fared ill in Beacon Street [...] Sumner was socially ostracized, and so, for that matter, were Palfrey, Dana, Russell, Adams, and all the other avowed anti-slavery leaders” (30). Indeed, one of the reasons that the Adamses preferred

¹¹ Nothing comes through as powerfully in these first few chapters of *The Education* as both young Henry’s and old Henry’s utter distaste for the formal school of his childhood: “If school helped, it was only by reaction. The dislike of school methods was almost a method in itself” (37).

national service to state service was that “the slave-power overshadowed all the great Boston interests” (25). Quincy was the seat of the Adamses, a site which “represented a moral principle – the principle of resistance to Boston” (21), and particularly a resistance to Boston’s involvement with pro-slavery politics.

The Education tells us that the influence of summers in Quincy and winters in Boston went beyond a schoolboy’s desire to escape school and snow for freedom and nature, and in fact this division of self became central to Henry’s life:

The bearing of these two seasons on the education of Henry Adams was no fancy; it was the most decisive force he ever knew; it ran through his life, and made the division between its perplexing, warring, irreconcilable problems, irreducible opposites, with growing emphasis to the last year of study. From earliest childhood the boy was accustomed to feel that, for him, life was double. (9)

But if life was double, the choice between the two lives seemed obvious in the New England context. Quincy was both personal freedom and moral duty; the Boston winters were personally and morally abhorrent. The two value systems were not in conflict, and it is unclear at this point in the narrative why the summer/winter conflict would be irreconcilable or irreducible. The reasons for the conflict only come into focus in the third of chapter of *The Education*: “Washington (1850-1854).”

On his first trip to Washington to visit his paternal grandmother Louisa Adams, Henry responds to the city precisely as an anti-slavery child of Quincy should:

Slavery struck him in the face; it was a nightmare; a horror; a crime; the sum of all wickedness! Contact made it only more repulsive. He wanted to escape, like the negroes, to free soil. Slave States were dirty, unkempt, poverty-stricken, ignorant, vicious! He had not a thought but repulsion for it...” (44)

Adams mentions that slavery is a horror/nightmare/crime/etc, but when he fills in the details of his repulsion to slavery, he does not focus on the plight of the slaves and free blacks.

Instead, he paints a picture of the lack of civic improvements which seem to accompany

slavery; although Quincy was “ragged” (without “[b]athrooms, water-supplies, lighting, heating, and the whole array of domestic comforts” (10)) and “even Boston had its ragged edges,” “Maryland was raggedness of a new kind” (43). As the Bostonian scion of the Adamses and Quincys, Henry saw Maryland in all its squalor:

The railway, about the size and character of a modern tram, rambled through unfenced fields and woods, or through village streets, among a haphazard variety of pigs, cows, and negro babies, who might all have used the cabins for pens and styes, had the Southern pig required styes, but who never showed a sign of care. (44)

The immoral practice of slavery and the immoral practice of poor infrastructure go hand in hand, and it is unclear which one struck the young Adams as worse. Certainly he spends no time dwelling on the practical evils of slavery; there are no descriptions of whippings, beatings, rape, forced familial separation, or any other cruel practice in his portrait of Washington. Instead, Adams dwells on the insufficiency of the train (a mere tram, by Boston standards), the unfenced nature of the farms, the intermingling of livestock and slave children, the practice of allowing hogs to forage freely, and even, in a stinging bit of wit, the hogs’ own lack of dignified preferences for pens and styes. Adams seems to forever dismiss Washington and its environs with a singular moral judgment: “To the New England mind, roads, schools, clothes, and a clean face were connected as part of the law of order or divine system. Bad roads meant bad morals” (47). Civic improvements are the measure of morality, and the Washington area has failed to measure up.

But Boston is creeping in here. Boston, with its straight streets and its civic improvements, represents opposition to Southern slovenliness, not Quincy and its raggedness. Quincy represents opposition to slavery, but Adams doesn’t dwell on the evils of slavery. Quincy also represents summer and freedom, freedom from straight gloomy streets and piles of snow. And Washington can certainly out-Quincy Quincy in the department of

tropical license, complete with warm weather and malarial swamps. Quincy was the demesne of the President, John Quincy Adams, a distant authority figure in *The Education* who emerges as a villain in Henry's letters:

[H]e (John Quincy Adams) was abominably selfish or absorbed in self, and incapable of feeling his duty to others. You have pointed at this trait so often that I did not need this last picture of Clay to make me alive to it. His neglect of his father for the sake of his damned weights and measures was almost worse, but his dragging his wife to Europe in 1809 and separating her from her children was demonic. (qtd in Wills, 14)

In contrast to the demonically selfish New England President is the Maryland Madam, grandmother Louisa Johnson Adams, who Henry liked in Quincy for her "refined figure; her gentle voice and manner; her vague effect of not belonging there, but to Washington or to Europe [...] Try as she might, the Madam could never be Bostonian, and it was her cross in life, but to the boy it was her charm" (*Education* 16). The Madam, despite being an Adams by marriage, belonged in Washington or Europe; the same words could be said about Henry. After the death of John Quincy Adams, the Madam returned to Washington, and Henry, who knew that he was through the Madam "not of pure New England stock" had not yet "dreamed that from her might come some of those doubts and self-questionings, those hesitations, those rebellions against law and discipline, which marked more than one of her descendants" (19). Adams has located, in his Johnson heritage with its faint Southern ties, an explanation for his preference for multiplicity over unity.¹²

In *The Education*, Henry's visit to Louisa in D.C. was the beginning of the new course of his life, away from Boston. He reacted to the South with repulsion, and yet, to

¹² Adams describes himself in *The Education* as having "inherited a quarter taint of Maryland blood" (19). As Wills points out, Louisa Johnson Adams was in fact only half Marylander herself, so it is Henry's father who is properly quarter-tainted, and Adams is in fact hanging the genealogical explanation for his preference for the South on one-eighth of his heritage which he "exaggerated [...] for his own emotional and symbolic purposes" (Wills 17).

complete an earlier quotation: “He had not a thought but repulsion for it; and yet the picture had another side” (44). Henry’s double-mindedness once again enters the picture. On one page the South is a picture of squalor, of a disgraceful lack of order in which even the livestock have poor etiquette, and on the very next page it is all of those same things but viewed from an inverted set of values:

The May sunshine and shadow had something to do with it; the thickness of foliage and the heavy smells had more; the sense of atmosphere, almost new, had perhaps as much again; and the brooding indolence of a warm climate and a negro population hung in the atmosphere heavier than catalpas. [...] The want of barriers, of pavements, of forms; the looseness, the laziness; the indolent Southern drawl; the pigs in the streets; the negro babies and their mothers with bandanas; the freedom, openness, swagger, of nature and man, soothed his Johnson blood. (45)

From the perspective of Adams/Town/Winter, Washington and the South are disreputable, immorally disheveled. From the Johnson/Country/Summer perspective, in which gloomy straight streets and snow represent the weight of duty, all of the signs of disorderly immorality are repurposed as the local color of a tropical society free from restraint. The pigs with no styes have become not squalid but picturesque; the “negro babies” have, in this new description, acquired mothers whose bandanas are reminiscent of Eastman Johnson’s painting. Although Henry will leave Washington with his antislavery ardor whipped into a Puritan abolitionist frenzy, his longing for freedom has led him to represent the Southern slaves as symbols of his own freedom – warm climate, catalpa trees, and blacks all represent a southern summer of personal pleasure-seeking.

The ultimate collision of the two value systems – the antislavery familial duty of Adams/Quincy/Boston and the longing for personal freedom of Johnson/Washington/Virginia – happens in Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon is the seat of pro-George Washington sentiment, and pro-George Washington sentiment is unimpeachable. In

Washington, as in Quincy and Boston, “Presidents, Senators, Congressmen, and such things were swarming in every street” and therefore “no sort of glory hedged Presidents as such” (47). George Washington is the only exception. Washington “was – to all appearances sincerely – respected. People made pilgrimages to Mount Vernon and made even an effort to build Washington a monument” (47). Henry makes such a pilgrimage with his father, and finds a paradox.

Mr. Adams took the boy there in a carriage and pair, over a road that gave him a complete Virginia education for use ten years afterward. To the New England mind, roads, schools, clothes, and a clean face were connected as part of the law of order or divine system. Bad roads meant bad morals. The moral of this Virginia road was clear, and the boy fully learned it. Slavery was wicked, and slavery was the cause of this road’s badness which amounted to social crime – and yet, at the end of the road and product of the crime stood Mount Vernon and George Washington. (47)

This obvious contradiction “that deduced George Washington from the sum of all wickedness” was “luckily” accepted by the young Henry, “or this boy might have become prematurely wise” (48, 49). (We have seen already George Washington, like Adams himself, will prove to be a difficult figure to place in the conflict over D.C.– Washington was a Southerner and also a symbol of the Union). But we can tell that, for Henry, the conflict is to a certain extent illusory. Slavery’s wickedness struck him, to be sure, and Henry spent the next decade in the mode of the seventeenth century, crusading with Puritan fervor against slavery “as though he were one of his own ancestors” (48). But as for the rest, the bad roads and schools that indicate moral decay, well, Henry’s biggest complaints about Boston are its roads and schools. Good roads are gloomy; good schools are stultifying; no roads and no schools is more the Quincy way. So although Henry becomes, like a good Adams, an anti-slavery crusader of puritanical fervor, his lifelong preference will be for D.C., the city that lacks urbanity, the seat of the North that is actually built on a Tidewater swamp.

Indeed, in his 1880 novel *Democracy*, Adams precisely stages the choice between North and South in the form of a pair of marriage proposals made to a New York socialite trying out D.C. society. The results are quite heavily in the favor of Virginia. As Wills points out, for all of his opposition to slavery and the Confederacy, Henry “harbored no hostility toward the South after the war ended. In fact, he would champion the South against Reconstruction, siding with President Andrew Johnson against the Adams family friend, Charles Sumner” (28-29). As a young abolitionist, Henry worshipped Sumner above all others, but with slavery eliminated in the South, he sided with the South and its President over a Boston Senator. The fact that racism and mistreatment of blacks still raged in the South seems to have found no purchase in Henry’s mind.¹³ The same situation that applied to the South at large applied to D.C. Post-Civil War, the city is no longer contaminated by the presence of active slavery. And with the problem of slavery dealt with by, of all people, a country lawyer from Illinois, a Bostonian like Henry who longs to be un-Bostonian can become a Washingtonian without dealing with the taint of slavery. The warm weather and negro population endure, but the most overt crimes against humanity have been expunged. The only problem is the Yankees. *Democracy* is traditionally understood a sort of extended shoulder angel play, with the corrupt Silas P. Ratcliffe and the noble John Carrington engaging in a lengthy tug-of-war for the sympathies and hand of the Philadelphia-born, Virginian-by-marriage, and New Yorker-by-society widow, Madeline Lee. Mrs. Lee, raised in Philadelphia and bored by all three of the great Northeastern cities, comes to Washington

¹³ For all his anti-slavery ardor, Henry did not display a great deal of concern for African Americans beyond that single and singular institution. As Michael O’Brien tells us, although Adams was quite sympathetic to his black servant, Maggie Wade, “This sympathy was personal, not generic. Adams was a man who could write casually, as he did in 1892, that when out riding near Rock Creek Church, ‘my horse shied at a nigger’” (54).

to see the forces driving the country – like “a passenger on an ocean steamer whose mind will not give him rest until he has been in the engine-room and talked with the engineer” (8).

In Madeline’s mind, this is a fact-finding mission into the nature of democratic government, its inner workings and drives, as described in the novel’s most famous passage:

What she wished to see, she thought, was the clash of interests, the interests of forty millions of people and a whole continent, centering at Washington; guided, restrained, controlled, or unrestrained and uncontrollable, by men of ordinary mould; the tremendous forces of government, and the machinery of society, at work. What she wanted, was POWER. (8-9)

Here we find the question of order and organization arising again: is the power that flows into D.C. “guided, restrained and controlled” by men, via government and society, or is power “unrestrained and uncontrollable,” flowing down through government and society before acting on the men who are purportedly its masters. The novel doesn’t address these questions directly, but rather embeds them in a pair of suitors for Madeline; for Madeline, “the force of the engine was a little confused in her mind with that of the engineer, the power with the men who wielded it” (9). Madeline Lee, widow of a Yankified branch of the family that produced Robert E. Lee, is going to Washington, D.C. to meet the men who run the country and to find out if one of them is suitable for her. Along the way, Adams produces witty cuts at the workings of Washington that are worthy of Mark Twain,¹⁴ but the real story is Madeline’s second marriage. Her choice between them will be her choice between two visions of the country (and of D.C.): Northern, corrupt, and wielder of powerful forces, or Southern, noble, and pawn of history. Which suitor will she choose: the powerful Yankee from the state of Lincoln or the penniless Southerner from the state of Washington and Lee?

¹⁴ Such as “To her mind the Senate was a place where people went to recite speeches, and she naively assumed that the speeches were useful and had a purpose, but as they did not interest her she never went again. This is a very common conception of Congress; many Congressmen share it” (13).

Mrs. Lee seems to be the perfect person to make this choice; she is “given a mixed regional identity” and it is this “embodiment, but also this transcendence of regionalism, that in Adams’s account earns her the right in the novel to be the moral arbiter of American politics and life” (O’Brien 86). Madeline’s choice of Ratcliffe or Carrington will represent her choice of D.C. as the Northern power center that it is becoming or as the Virginian backwater it once was, and that choice is made by someone shaped by New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

Of course, it is never much of a choice; Adams has weighted the scales far too heavily in Carrington’s favor. The Virginian is from the start a figure of inordinate sympathy and moral uprightness:

he was one whom life had treated hardly. He was of that unfortunate generation in the south which began existence with civil war, and he was perhaps the more unfortunate because, like most educated Virginians of the old Washington school, he had seen from the first that, whatever issue the war took, Virginia and he must be ruined. At twenty-two he had gone into the rebel army as a private and carried his musket modestly through a campaign of two, after which he slowly rose to the rank of senior captain in his regiment [...] always scrupulously doing what he conceived to be his duty, and never doing it with enthusiasm. (14)

Who can imagine a more perfect specimen of Virginia than this John L. Carrington?

Certainly he is more sinned against than sinning; as a twenty-two year old near the beginning of the war, he is too young to have been a force behind the South’s crimes or Virginia’s secession. He was perceptive enough to see that his fortunes would be destroyed by the war, and honorable enough to go to war for his beloved state regardless. And although even Robert E. Lee famously said, “It is well that war is so terrible, otherwise we should grow too fond of it” (Bedwell 19), our Carrington worked as dutifully as any Lee without enthusiasm or fondness. After the war, Carrington immediately studied law in order to support his mother and sisters, since the family plantation was ruined. Like the Southern Louisa Adams

but against the demonically selfish John Quincy Adams, “His great attraction was that he never talked or seemed to think of himself” (15). And in case the reader could have possibly missed the import of this Virginian’s actions, Mrs. Lee supplies us the key: “‘He is a type!’ said she; ‘he is my idea of George Washington at thirty’” (15).

If Carrington is obviously George Washington (with a bit of Robert E. Lee thrown in), his opponent, Silas P. Ratcliffe, is heavily associated with Abraham Lincoln. Although the real-life analogue for Ratcliffe is the charismatic Republican James G. Blaine, Adams adds more than a bit of Lincoln to his fictional statesman. Whereas Blaine was from Maine, Ratcliffe is the “the Prairie Giant of Peonia, the Favourite Son of Illinois” (15). Ratcliffe is the book’s most forceful character, but by far its most odious. While Carrington is buffeted to and fro by the power flowing through D.C., Ratcliffe is its acknowledged master. In general, Senators are mistrusted in the novel, which characterizes democracy from the Senate perspective as “government of the people, by the people, for the benefit of Senators” (19), and Ratcliffe is the ruler of the Senate. But he is personally repellent, as well, utterly without morals or even doctrines beyond personal and party loyalty: “He had very little sympathy for thin moralising, and a statesman-like contempt for philosophical politics. He loved power, and he meant to be President. That was enough” (49).¹⁵ This odious figure not only hails from Lincoln’s Illinois but is directly associated with him; he lives in Illinois in a house whose only decoration is “one large engraving of Abraham Lincoln in the parlour” and tells

¹⁵ As we shall see in Chapter 3, Theodore Dreiser will take a similarly power-hungry and morality-free figure, Frank Cowperwood, and argue that his corrupt and self-interested actions can do a great deal of good for society in spite of their amorality. In the more genteel milieu of Adams, however, amorality can be charming in the hands of someone like Baron Jacobi, the Bulgarian minister whose European ways are exotic, but it begets a frightening monstrosity when embodied in an American of power.

“the story of Lincoln’s death-bed with a degree of feeling that brought tears” to the eyes of his listeners (23, 35).¹⁶

So in the D.C. of *Democracy*, an analogue for George Washington stands as the most ethical and disinterested man imaginable, while an associate of Lincoln is utterly amoral and power-hungry. But Adams is not content to merely associate his villain with Lincoln, but also makes Ratcliffe’s most villainous act a service to both Lincoln and national unity. Although Carrington stops Mrs. Lee from marrying Ratcliffe by revealing to her that Ratcliffe has taken \$100,000 of graft in a steamship subsidy deal, the graft is far from Ratcliffe’s greatest crime. The Senator is responsible for an action “less defensible” than graft: “Did I not tell you then that I had even violated the sanctity of a great popular election and reversed its result?” (199). In 1864, when Lincoln was running for a second term in office, Ratcliffe tells Mrs. Lee:

there was almost a certainty that my State would be carried by the peace party, by fraud, as we thought, although, fraud or not, we were bound to save it...when we had received the votes of all the southern counties and learned the precise number of votes we needed to give us a majority, we telegraphed to our northern returning officers to make the vote of their district such and such, thereby overbalancing the adverse returns and giving the State to us. (61)

Ratcliffe defends this action to Mrs. Lee successfully at an early point in the novel, stating, “I would do it again, and worse than that, if I thought it would save this country from disunion” (61). The abuse of power is justified by the necessity of its wielding by the “right” side.

Adams has thus designed a scenario in which national unity – of the type embraced by

¹⁶ If there is anything good to be said about Ratcliffe, and his association with Lincoln, Carrington says it early in the novel. As a native New Englander who went West after college, Ratcliffe was ““young and fresh from that hotbed of abolition [New England]”” and ““he threw himself into the anti-slavery movement in Illinois”” (16). But that was before he became corrupted by Washington; as Carrington goes on to tell Mrs. Lee, ““[Ratcliffe] would not do the same thing now [...] He is older, more experienced, and not so wise”” (16). With D.C. experience comes a slow abandonment of principles.

Washington, L'Enfant, the Federalists, and Lincoln – can only be achieved by the brute workings of power. *Democracy* thus shares with *The Education* a distaste for the naked wielding of power, for individuals who insert themselves into the narrative of history with strokes of force. As opposed to these unifiers, Adams sides with Jefferson, Lee, and the fictional Carrington against this sort of unifying power, and in doing so creates a scenario in which the saving of the Union is won by virtue of the greatest crime in a democracy, the “violat[ion] of the sanctity of a great popular election” (199). Silas P. Ratcliffe, “who talked about virtue and vice as a man who is colour-blind talks about red and green,” represents the “democracy” of Lincoln and the triumph of the North. Despite being on the right side of the slavery debate, Ratcliffe has won his victories through corrupt and undemocratic methods, and the D.C. of Lincoln is revealed to be a diseased parody of democratic practices which values enforced unity over democracy and liberty.

Northrop Frye famously identified a “green world” in many of Shakespeare’s plays, a rural and idyllic place where the lovers can escape the problems of the city and overcome their conflicts. In *Democracy*, Virginia serves as just such a green world, the idyllic alternative to D.C. It is in Virginia that Carrington convinces Sybil Ross, Madeline’s sister, to champion his cause over Ratcliffe’s, and it is in Virginia where the plan is hatched which ultimately defeats Ratcliffe. From Arlington, Washington is revealed to be a nightmare of a place:

From the heavy brick porch they looked across the superb river to the raw and incoherent ugliness of the city, idealised into dreamy beauty by the atmosphere, and the soft background of purple hills behind. Opposite them, with its crude “thus saith the law” stamped on white dome and fortress-like walls, rose the Capitol (122).

Whatever beauty there is in the city comes from nature, the landscape of Virginia and Maryland – purple hills and a superb river – which idealize the man-made landscape. The

city itself is incoherent and ugly, and the Capitol, meant to express the will of the people, is instead a crude and fortress-like expression of power, the throne for the Ratcliffes of the world. And although Arlington has been turned into the National Cemetery, the resting place for American soldiers struck down by Carrington and his fellow soldiers, Carrington looks better rather than worse at this particular scene of national memory. Although his shallow companion Sybil is horrified that Robert E. Lee and his family were turned out of their home and that home was turned into a national monument for a “horde of coarse invaders” (123), the more serious Carrington reveals himself once again to be a paragon of ethical resignation:

“The last time I sat here, it was with [the Lees]. We were wild about disunion and talked of nothing else. I was trying to recall what was said then. We never thought there would be war, and as for coercion, it was nonsense. Coercion, indeed! The idea was ridiculous. I thought so too, though I was *a Union man and did not want the State to go out*. But though I felt that Virginia must suffer, I never thought we could be beaten. Yet now I am sitting her a pardoned rebel, and the poor Lees are driven away and their place is a grave-yard.” (123, my emphasis)

So Carrington is revealed to have opposed secession (and to have ““never tried to kill”” anyone, in his words (124)) but merely done his duty for his suffering state.¹⁷ The problem, once again, is “coercion,” the naked exercise of power in the service of unity. The evidence that many Virginians, less ethical than Carrington, did try to kill is right in front of them, but Adams has repurposed a monument to the sacrifices of Union soldiers into an elegiac meditation on the loss of the Southern way of life in the face of the coercive efforts of

¹⁷ Adams himself might be said to have done the same thing. As Sarah Luria points out, whereas Madeline Lee moves outside of the city to be away from this corrupting power, Adams himself moved to the very spot that Madeline lived, in order to be closer to the centers of power. But Luria argues that Adams did this in direct opposition to the Capitol; both *Democracy* and *Esther* (1884) “historicize the collaborative efforts of Adams’s salon to offer a counteraesthetic to the nation” (113). This was not a case of if you can’t beat ‘em join ‘em, but rather keep your enemies closer: “Adams has now established two axes in his novel whereby he directly opposes a moral, refined domestic politics to the brutish politics of a national edifice” (Luria 116-117). Whereas Madeline opts to establish her domestic sphere outside of the city, Adams is wants to keep a close eye on the source of coercion, and thus places his salon across from the capital.

Lincoln. Even Arlington Cemetery can be used to support this narrative; perhaps especially Arlington Cemetery, seeing as General Montgomery C. Meigs, the quartermaster in charge of burying the first troops in the cemetery, made certain to “cluster graves around the Lee mansion” as an act of “vengeance” against the Lee family (Poole 62, 58). As represented by such crude, vindictive, and federally authorized behavior, D.C. is the source of ugliness, of coercion, of, in the form of the Capitol, an overwrought monument to federal power. In *Democracy*, the National Cemetery becomes neither a symbol of Union sacrifice nor of Confederate treachery, but of federal overreach.

And, of course, there is no mention of slavery! The word itself is used only three times in the novel: Ratcliffe’s early anti-slavery efforts (16), the belief that Civil Service Reform is as controversial a topic of conversation at the time of the novel as slavery was before the War (36), and Ratcliffe’s internal decision to abandon politics if he can win Mrs. Lee’s hand because “He would not submit to this slavery longer” (85) (this thought is directly spurred because Ratcliffe is tired of dealing with newspaper men – being forced to talk to the press is the slavery referred to). The harsh crimes of slavery which are absent in *The Education* are brought up exactly once in *Democracy*: Ratcliffe, arguing against the doctrine of Darwinism, tells Mrs. Lee: ““Mr. Carrington, of course, would approve those ideas; he believes in the divine doctrine of flogging negroes” (58). This is the only mention of the crimes of slavery in *Democracy* – an equation of them with the doctrine of human evolution from the mouth of the character whose moral compass is nonexistent.

In *Democracy*, the practice of democracy itself is revealed to be a sham, “nothing more than government of any other kind” (190), and the city of D.C. is an irredeemable den of corruption in which politics is practiced as a means of self-aggrandizement. Although the

dream of Washington and L'Enfant was a city of "access, openness, and empowerment" (Luria 103), Adams has shown the power that actually flows in the city to be corrupt and corrupting, overcoming the well-made, rational plans of both Reconstruction reformers and the city's founders. In Luria's words:

[A]t the center of L'Enfant's map is a rational plan of balanced government to be realized by the energy of an expanded marketplace. Adams's design asserts the powerlessness of human reason over natural force [...] One hundred years [after L'Enfant,] Adams saw how that "commercial republic" had failed. Monied interests – what was just beginning to be called "business" – had overwhelmed national politics and republican idealism. (102)

This is a relatively timeless and uncontroversial position which has lent the novel its wide acceptance over time. But Adams has woven into his narrative of moneyed power overcoming reasonable action a pattern of mistrust for Lincoln (or, at least, Lincoln's associates), a complete lack of consideration for the plight of blacks, and his obvious admiration for the nobility and resignation of the honorable Southerner. If the young Adams was unable to deal with the fact that George Washington was the result of all wickedness, the Adams of *Democracy* seems to have solved the problem by deducing Abraham Lincoln from the sum of all wickedness and Robert E. Lee from the sum of all virtue. Whereas the Civil War and Radical Reconstruction are read by someone like Frederick Douglass as the shining moment where Federal power has accomplished its greatest good, Adams is invested in showing that such projects of monumental action are always suspect and corrupt, while non-monied Southern culture (Carrington is, after all, rather poor) offers a subdued and domestic alternative.¹⁸ The reasonable, rational exercise of power on the behalf of a greater good – the

¹⁸ Luria's account focuses not on the role the South plays in this domestic alternative to public, corrupt power but rather the "mysterious force of religion" (103). I think Luria's account is correct, particularly as it regards Adams' own life and later works such as *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* (1904). I merely wish to add how much Southern culture played the role of alternative, in *Democracy* and the early chapters of *The Education*, as religion plays elsewhere in Adams' writings.

sort of thing represented by L'Enfant's plan or Lincoln's Emancipation proclamation – finds no purchase in Adams' D.C. Power, instead, is always in the service of corruption, of coercion, of domination. The fact that power was used by the federal government to end slavery is not a factor in Adams' narrative.

Frederick Douglass's New Black D.C.

Like Adams, Frederick Douglass was an adamant critic of D.C. and its odious culture. However, Douglass formulated his critique from the opposite direction. Although Adams and Douglass agreed on abolition, Douglass saw D.C.'s problem as too much, not too little, Southerness, and was unambiguously horrified by its raggedness. Nevertheless, Douglass adopted D.C. as his home for the last era of his life, as he saw it as the place where he could both effect the most change and become the most visible symbol, for whites and blacks, of a successful African American. Christopher Sten argues that Douglass had this view of D.C. from very early in his life – when he first heard the word “abolitionist”¹⁹ – until the end of it: “Douglass retained a certain faith in the Federal Government – the executive branch, perhaps, most of all – to keep alive what Melville called the ‘Founders’ dream’ of freedom for all people. For him, Washington was still the city of hope, the place where he served his people and his country, and so it remained until the end of his life” (“City” 24,30).

Despite his belief in the power of the federal government, the later years of Douglass's career – the post-Fifteenth Amendment years – have generally been regarded as

¹⁹ In another staggering distinction between Adams and Douglass, Douglass, after reading a speech in which a Congressman used the word “abolitionist,” “From that time on, he regarded Washington as the city of hope, a place where issues of slavery, racial equality, and suffrage could be “made right” – legislated or mandated by executive order – a view that sustained him through much of his adult life, though it often led to deep frustration” (Sten, “City” 24). The Congressman in question was John Quincy Adams. For Henry Adams, his grandfather was representative of all of D.C.'s failings. For Douglass, it was John Quincy Adams's abolitionist efforts that turned D.C. into a talisman.

his most regrettable. At a surface level, Douglass' D.C. years look like a series of accomplishments; he served as the president of the Freedman's Bank, was appointed as the U.S. Marshal for D.C., then as the Recorder of Deeds for D.C., and finally as the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti. But there were downsides to all of these positions.²⁰ The bank became insolvent and was shut down shortly after Douglass assumed his presidency, and Douglass was dogged with questions as to how much he knew and when. The marshal had for more than a decade served the unofficial role of introducing guests at the White House, but President Hayes declined to have Douglass continue this position (widely believed to be for racial reasons). The Recorder of Deeds appointment was a step down from marshaldom, particularly since Douglass "had great hopes that he would be rewarded with a far grander post than he had yet held" (McFeely 305). And in Haiti, the Navy's desire to put a naval base at Mole St. Nicholas meant that Douglass usually played second fiddle to Admiral Bancroft Gherardi, who was authorized to "negotiate directly for the base" without having to go through Douglass (McFeely 347). All of this, combined with Douglass' steadfast support for a Republican Party which was increasingly blind to the plight of freed blacks, gives proof to McFeely's assertion that "Douglass was already [in 1876] part of a dead past," little more

²⁰ A more positive view of Douglass' later years is that he certainly still did some good, particularly insofar as he helped strengthen the emerging black community in D.C. by providing posts in his own department and recommendations to others, and along the way enjoyed some of the prestige and wealth which he deserved. As Charles W. Chesnutt put it: "Not every worthy life receives its reward in this world; but Douglass, having fought the good fight, was now singled out, by virtue of his prominence, for various honors and emoluments at the hands of the public" (118). Sarah Luria makes the intriguing argument that Douglass' D.C. years – and particularly his creation of the beautiful Anacostia estate, Cedar Hill – represent merely a different, more domestic way of fighting for black equality. The estate that became Cedar Hill was previously owned by a segregationist and stood as a symbol of racial separation. According to Luria, "Douglass uses the estate to make the opposite point. Throughout the property he argues that the distinctions 'black' and 'white' are not real or material but arbitrary. The estate makes what might seem strange – an ex-slave in a fine large house on a commanding prospect – look conventional" (88).

than a tool of the Republicans who “knew there were still black voters who liked a look at him, alive” (289).

But if Douglass won few political battles in his last decades, and took a number of positions (such as disapproving of the “Exoduster” migration to the Midwest) that were unpopular with many blacks, his grasp of the political and social realities of D.C. remained striking. I particularly want to focus on how Douglass utilized his cosmopolitan beliefs to advance a vision of D.C. that revised and updated L’Enfant’s original plan. Douglass was, like L’Enfant, a cosmopolitan thinker who believed that “the organization of a people into a National body, composite or otherwise, is of itself an impressive fact [...] It implies a willing surrender and subjection of individual aims and ends, often narrow and selfish, to the broader and better ones that arise out of society as a whole” (“Our Composite” 241). Douglass updated cosmopolitanism to go beyond overcoming sectional differences and into overcoming racial ones: “I want a home here not only for the negro, the mulatto and the Latin races, but I want the Asiatic to find a home here in the United States, and feel at home here, both for his sake and for ours” (“Our Composite” 252). But in the case of D.C., his concerns overlapped with L’Enfant’s; the problem for both of them was the gulf between Southern and Northern cultures, and the solution was the creation of a grand, unified city. As I will show, in the 1877 “Our National Capital” speech, Douglass articulated a cosmopolitan vision of D.C. that included a plan to reshape the city to reflect the nation’s composite nature. Although the speech is normally remembered not for its content but for the brief opposition it aroused to Douglass’ assumption of his position as U.S. Marshal, it is in fact the culmination of a long trend in Douglass’ thinking about the capital.²¹

²¹ Here is McFeely’s gloss of the speech’s contents: “Resorting to his old platform tricks of mimicry and sarcasm, he made fun of the white old guard of Washington’s embarrassingly long slaveholding

During and before the Civil War, Douglass saw in D.C. in it the same thing that contemporary viewers saw in the Eastman Johnson painting: a standard slice of the slave-holding South. As an abolitionist journalist and speaker, Douglass worked tirelessly to defeat slavery and to improve the lives of African Americans, and after the Civil War he brought those efforts to the capital. But before, during, and after the war, Douglass was skeptical of the commitment of Northern politicians to ending slavery and helping blacks, and D.C. particularly felt his disdain. In Douglass's telling, many if not most Northern whites (including, originally, Lincoln) viewed the preservation of the Union as the primary goal of both antebellum politics and the Civil War, relegating abolitionist and antislavery goals to secondary status. Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass doubted that such a measure would ever be passed, in part because of the culture of Washington, D.C. In a January 1862 article published in *Douglass' Monthly*, Douglass described what he found to be shockingly ill-conceived opposition to the end of slavery:

It is nothing that the slave-holding traitors acted from the beginning like a band of burglars, stealing all they could carry away, designing to burn and destroy the rest; it is nothing that they are now raging with malice and thirsting for loyal blood, defying the national power, and menacing the Capital itself [...] notwithstanding all this is done from no other early motive than the preservation and prosperity of the infernal slave system, no man yet durst to strike the death-blow at the obvious cause of all our present domestic calamities. ("Slave Power" 185-186)

In Douglass' reading, the belligerent and traitorous actions of the Confederate States are straightforwardly in defense of slavery, but the federal government's response, unwisely, "is not resolved as much upon the preservation of slavery as upon the preservation of the Union" ("Slave Power" 186). Although the Southern states are fighting for the dissolution of the

days" (292). More important for McFeely is that "[t]he speech was widely reported, and a petition calling for Douglass' removal, and signed by a hundred businessmen, soon reached President Hayes." In another sign of the neglect "Our National Capitol" has suffered, Luria doesn't even mention it in her discussion of Douglass and D.C.

Union and the Northern states are fighting for its preservation, only the Southern states have acknowledged slavery as the true root of the conflict. The Northern states are taking refuge in what would later be a traditional Southern argument: that the war was about the preservation of the Union and the illegality of nullification and secession, and that slavery is not the reason for battle.²² Douglass offers up the traditional explanation for the Union's reluctance to make the conflict primarily about slavery: the border states, slave-states whose alliance might nevertheless lay with the Union. "For these border States our army is constantly degraded to the level of slave dogs, hunting and catching slaves; for them we are dismissing anti-slavery men from office and position in the armies, and filling their places with men who hate the Negro, and will do all they can to perpetuate his bondage" (185). But Douglass adds a less traditional cause for Union inaction on slavery: "There is still no North at the Capital. Virginia is still the Old Dominion, and she is as intensely slaveholding when represented by Carlisle [sic] as by the traitor Mason" (186). In Douglass' telling, D.C. is Virginian, and Virginians are pro-slavery, even if they are also pro-Union, as the loyalist Senator John Carlile was. Even though the Confederate army is threatening the capital in the name of slavery, the capital is refusing to threaten slavery.

Fortunately, the tide turned quickly in terms of the antislavery movement. As Douglass points out in a speech in March of 1862, just two months after the publication of "The Slave Power Still Omnipotent at Washington": "Dr. Cheever, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Gerrit Smith, Wendell Phillips, William Goodell, and William Lloyd Harrison may now utter in safety their opinions on slavery in the national capital. Meanwhile Congress has a bill

²² Although Henry Adams was a fervent abolitionist, he fits into the category outlined by Douglass – it was secession that he took as the greatest crime, and union as the highest goal. Although Henry would later give Lincoln high praise (including in *The Education*), at the time of secession "Henry at this time thought that Lincoln had sabotaged the heroic efforts of Seward to save the Union" (Wills 60). Seward's compromise, not Lincoln's war, was Henry's preference for years.

before it for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia” (“The War and How to End It” 517). The process of slave-catching by the Army has been ended, and Lincoln has started to make overtures towards Emancipation. Douglass, echoing L’Enfant’s idea for a nation tightly wrapped around a federal center, says: “Kill slavery at the heart of the nation, and it will certainly die at the extremities” (“The War and How to End it” 517-518). Douglass was one of the key voices in the fight for emancipation, and he was right that emancipation would slowly spread from the capital outward. That particular victory was won. But although slavery was defeated in D.C. and, eventually, in the rest of the country, Lee’s surrender was not enough to bring “the North” to D.C.

In “Our National Capital,” Douglass laid out the progress made towards bringing the North to the capital. Although Douglass, who had just been appointed a Federal Marshall for D.C. by President Hayes, was attacked in the D.C. newspapers for the negative aspects of his speech, he correctly noted in this third autobiography that “I said many complimentary things of the city, which were as true as they were complimentary. I spoke of what it had been in the past, what it was at that time, and what I thought it destined to become in the future” (*Life and Times* 413). And indeed, the focus of Douglass’s speech is the gains made since the end of the Civil War and his future hopes for the city, not the racism and problems that remained. Douglass was in fact too kind to the city; as Luria puts it, Douglass, in an 1875 speech praising the city’s civil rights laws, lauds the city to the point that the speech “does not reflect the city’s social reality so much as it tries to create it” (74). “Our National Capital” partakes in a similar attempt at creation. But before we get to Douglass’ optimistic description of the city’s present and future, we can set the stage with his description of the past. Prior to recent events, “Washington, as compared with many other parts of the country, has been, and still

is, a most disgraceful and scandalous contradiction to the march of civilization” (“National Capital” 454). Contradiction is the word I want to emphasize here – D.C. was a Southern city and the Northern capital, and had previously been a slave-holding city that served as the capital of a democratic country dedicated to liberty. Most importantly, D.C. was a city shaped by sectionalism that was meant to represent an entire nation. In contrast to L’Enfant’s vision of a sectional unity, the midcentury capital was distinctly divided. And if the antebellum city was more strongly linked to one side than the other, it was not linked to the Northern abolitionist side, but rather was “pervaded by the manners, morals, politics, and religion peculiar to a slave-holding community, the inhabitants of the national capital were, from first to last, frantically and fanatically sectional. It was southern in all its sympathies, and national in name only.” (“National Capital” 455).

Over and over, Douglass asserts that antebellum D.C. either fit into the South or had its own culture. He argues that this is the result of two pernicious influences: first, and most importantly, the capital’s placement between two southern, slave-holding states, which owed to the “potent influence of George Washington” (“National Capital” 454). As we shall see, Washington’s role as creator and namesake of the capital is problematic; Washington can be claimed both by the South, as a slave-holding gentleman who served as a model for figures like Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, and the North, as the founder of the Union who would have opposed secession and nullification. Douglass is frequently complimentary to the first president, and he takes care to register his belief that “the selection of Washington as the National Capital was one of the greatest mistakes made by the fathers of the Republic” is stated “not so much in censure, as in sorrow” (“National Capital” 454). But the damage was done, because the people of Washington “are mainly of the old slave holding stock of

Virginia and Maryland [...] The sources of their revenue were, slavery and the Government. Of Uncle Sam's good things, Virginia and Maryland always got the lion's share" ("National Capital" 458). Here is the second influence on the population of D.C.: federal largesse. "Everyone wants favor; everybody expects favor; everybody is looking for favor; hence everyone smiles, bows, and fawns toward everybody else" ("National Capital" 461). This political spoils-seeking works, for Douglass, much like slavery does: wealth is obtained without honest labor, and the result is a city whose social dealings are based on a false nicety which hides governmental corruption and a false nobility which is predicated on the suffering of slaves. Rather than opposing and counterbalancing Southern sentiments, the federal government has in fact reinforced them.

D.C. could have done what Baltimore did and overcome its heritage to become a city of the North. Douglass details all the resources that the city had which could have made it an industrial power – coal, iron, labor, and a natural harbor. But the city never industrialized, and remained "isolated from the outside world and dependent on a single railroad" ("National Capital" 474) due to, as I have mentioned, "1st the presence and natural influence of slavery. 2d the overshadowing presence and example of the government" ("National Capital" 466). Propped up by two systems which reward personal inactivity, the city stagnated and festered. The people of Washington can be distinguished from "the people of the north, the west, and the east" (but not the south) by their indolence ("National Capital" 458-459). The symbol of the Washingtonian, as Douglass puts it with cutting satire, is the cane:

In the economy of life his muscles have had little to do, and disuse has induced a lack of ability and disposition [...] He generally walks with a cane, often sits toying with a

cane, and is seldom seen without a cane. He evidently carries it more as a mark of dignity and as a badge of authority, than as a means of support. (“National Capital” 459)

Propped up by these two corrupting systems, the Washingtonian’s symbol indicates his inability to get any work done. The cane is paralleled in the working classes by the “black boy;” if you send for a mechanic or plumber, “at his heels you will find the inevitable black boy. He is there to carry the tools, to tote the water, and to otherwise wait and tend on the *Boss*” (“National Capital” 466, emphasis in the original). Labor is foreign to the wealthy Washingtonian and lower-class Washingtonian alike. This produces a city that, despite having been deliberately planned and designed to display national unity, has never even achieved local unity because all improvement projects were left to languish. But post-Civil War, the federal government and the newly freed slaves have pulled together to create a new city:

The spade, plough, and pick-axe of the Freedman have changed the appearance of the face of the earth upon which the city stands. Hills have been leveled, valleys filled up, canals, gulleys, ditches, and other hiding places of putridity and pestilence, have been arched, drained, and purified, and their neighborhood made healthy, sweet, and habitable.

The old repulsive market places, so long a disfigurement to the city and a disgrace to the civilization of the age, have been swept away, and replaced by imposing and beautiful structures, in keeping with the spirit of progress. (“National Capital” 446)

Douglass goes on to list a whole slew of further improvements: “[m]agnificent thoroughfares,” “splendid mansions,” “street railways,” “public parks,” and so on (447). D.C. is finally coming into the future, having “snapped the iron chain of conservatism which anchored the city to a barbarous past” (“National Capital” 448), and the future is not only less malarious and more healthy and habitable, but also a beautiful magnificence, linked by thoroughfares and railways. The future is, in other words, L’Enfant’s plan.

Like L'Enfant, Douglass emphasizes praises the internal coherence of the city, the unity it finds when “the outlying tracts of land, once the broad receptacles of dead animals [...] have been reclaimed and added to the city and made to blossom like the rose” (“National Capital” 447). Whereas Dickens could find no sense of order in D.C., the outskirts have finally been properly related to the center. But the internal unity of the city is minor compared to D.C.’s new place as a symbol of the country’s larger unity. Reviving the regional mixing aspect of L'Enfant’s plan, Douglass envisions a future capital in which sectionalism has been left behind and a national identity can be born.

Elsewhere he may be a citizen of a state, no larger than Delaware; here he is a citizen of a great nation. Elsewhere he belongs to a section, but here he belongs to the whole country and the whole country belongs to him. No American now has a skin too dark to call Washington his home, and no American now has a skin so white and a heart so black to deny him that right. Under the majestic dome of the American Capitol, as truly as under the broad blue sky of heaven, men of all races, colors, and conditions may now stand in equal freedom, thrilled with the sentiment of equal citizenship and common country. The wealth, beauty, and magnificence which, if seen elsewhere, might oppress the lowly with a sad sense of their personal insignificance, seen here, ennoble them in their own eyes, and are felt to be only fit and proper to the capital of a great nation. (“National Capital” 451).

In Douglass’s reading, D.C. was once the capital of sectionalism, dominated by the old, slave-holding families whose slaves and political influence prevented them from having to work. The newly freed slaves, in contrast, are working hard to turn D.C. into a city without sectional divisions. Although it was a disaster that the capital was originally placed in southern territory, the efforts of the freed slaves can undo that influence and create a unified city. Anticipating efforts such as the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair and the McMillan Commission’s radical reworking of the National Mall, Douglass is arguing that D.C. can be a place where every American²³ – of any race, color, and condition – can view the monumental

²³ Of course, Douglass does not actually say every American, but all “men.” If there is an obvious complication to Douglass’ thinking about D.C., it is his near complete silence about women.

achievements of the city as something that he has a claim to. The same Capitol building which once served as a symbol of wealth and of the pre-eminence of slave power has, through the labor of freedmen, become a symbol of universal allegiance and belonging. The wealth and power that built D.C. are now the natural birthright of every American. The magnificence of the city represents what the labor of free and democratic people can do.

The concluding paragraph of the speech strikes a fervently unified note. Although the two preceding paragraphs do give a litany of D.C.'s transgressions – “slavery, treason, and assassination” – Douglass lays out a vision of unity that includes even the South:

In its grandeur and significance, it may be a sign and a bond of the American Union, a pledge of righteousness that exalts a nation, a place where the best men and best women from all sections of our widely extended country shall delight to meet and bury their differences, renew their covenants of patriotism, and shake hands, not over a bloody chasm, but over a free, prosperous, happy, and progressive *REPUBLIC*. (“National Capital” 474)

Thankfully, Douglass includes women in his description of this Utopian space established in the capital. But the key fact here is that all sections – thus including the South – will be represented. Although it is difficult to reconcile this paean to universal belonging with Douglass's scathing critiques of the Southern character, even they are invited to partake in the wonders of the capital, so long as they can leave behind the Civil War. Whereas Adams and, to a lesser extent, L'Enfant, emphasized the imperial nature of the U.S. government,

Everyone can view themselves as free under the majestic dome of the American Capitol, so long as they are a man. In fact, Douglass' rhetoric of D.C.'s improvement is almost always put in gendered terms; when he contemplates cosmopolitan opposition to the improvement of D.C., he describes the urge to improve the city as “a natural and necessary outgrowth of a healthy *manly* and self respecting patriotism” (“National Capital” 448, my emphasis). This mode of speaking, however, is not unique to his D.C. writings – Douglass, despite his ardent support for the women's rights and women's suffrage, nevertheless used “manly” as a positive descriptor and “effeminate” as a pejorative one throughout his writings, when he was discussing the actions of men. For Douglass, women were humans who deserved all of the rights of humanity, but they remained a separate sex with different and appropriate characteristics, and the physical act of city-building was not their calling. As Waldo E. Martin, Jr, puts it: “Woman's political equality, he argued, would change neither her familial roles and duties nor her exemplary nature” (140).

Douglass highlights its republican features. Unity is no longer the product of coercion but of a shared ethos of rights and liberties that invites all citizens together. The Capitol is not a crude symbol of unity enforced by power but a shining testament to unifying American values. Coercion was only necessary when, due to their support of slavery, the Southern states ignored those values and coerced others as slaves. In this vision, not only will people from every region have a stake in the American undertaking, but people of every race and class also fully own the country's progress and prosperity, and are equally free to participate in it.

Tragically, Douglass lived long enough to see that the future he foresaw in 1877 was not going to come about, at least not quickly. He saw the end of Radical Reconstruction, the unhelpful policies of Hayes, the election of Cleveland and the ascension of the Democratic Party, and the loss of social and political power so briefly gained by Southern blacks. Douglass lived to see the reign of mob justice in the South and the myth of the black rapist of white women, the myth which he rightly diagnosed as a lie designed to make it easier for the South to "degrade the Negro by judicial decisions, by legislative enactments, by repealing all laws for the protection of the ballot, by drawing the colour line in all railroad cars and stations and in all other public places in the South, thus to pave the way to a final consummation which is nothing less than the Negro's entire disenfranchisement as an American citizen" ("Why is the Negro Lynched" 503). Douglass did not live to see Jim Crow fully come to D.C, but he could have predicted that Woodrow Wilson and his Southern Democratic cabinet would, as they did, desegregate the staffers working in the federal buildings, even as magnificent federal monuments to Lincoln and Grant were going up on the

National Mall. The magnificence and unity of the city ultimately proved to be no bulwark against a return of the racist Southern culture to D.C.

The McMillan Commission and the Unity of Disunion

Although the racial inclusivity that Douglass called for was clearly not going to be realized in the early twentieth century, Douglass's dream of a more organized and grandiose D.C. was realized in those decades. The form of his vision, just not the content, was as popular as ever, and was usually situated in terms of L'Enfant's original vision of a magnificent city for an imperial American republic. Most famously, in the last years of the nineteenth century, Senator James McMillan sought to transform the landscape of Washington D.C. and reflect in that city's landscape the country's greatness. In keeping with the federal theme of unity out of disparate parts McMillan received a number of plans for transforming L'Enfant's Grand Avenue, and formed a commission to take all of those various ideas and create what John W. Reps calls "nothing less than a comprehensive development plan for all of central Washington in addition to certain studies of Rock Creek and Potomac Parks" (91-92). If this goal sounds like the same one that animated L'Enfant, it is because L'Enfant's original plan was the official guiding light of the McMillan Commission. Although it has been correctly observed, particularly by Kirk Savage, that the McMillan Commission did not make good on their claim that "departures from [L'Enfant's] plan are to be regretted and, wherever possible, remedied" (McMillan 10) (see, for example, the "L" shaped plan of L'Enfant in Figure 1.1 as compared to the McMillan Commission's kite/cruciform plan in Figure 1.3), the commissioners clearly did uphold the spirit of

L'Enfant's plan.²⁴ Whereas various nineteenth-century versions of L'Enfant's "Grand Boulevard" contain rambling walks and pathways of the kind popular with park planners in that era (see Andrew Jackson Downing's plan, Figure 1.6), we can see that the McMillan Commission's plan restores L'Enfant's original idea for a clean-lined, geometric boulevard that was anchored on two legs by the Capitol and the White House. The McMillan Commission's primary change in the grand scheme of the plan was to add two extra legs to the "L," and they kept the radiating connectors between the anchor points of the various ends of the plan. The first of these additional anchor points is not so much a deviation from L'Enfant's plan as an adaptation of it; the land where the Lincoln Memorial sits (both in the McMillan plan and in present-day Washington) simply did not exist in L'Enfant's time; it was created via dredging in the nineteenth century. And the actually existing National Mall is somewhere in between the McMillan Plan and the L'Enfant Plan; although the top of the cruciform was completed with a monument to Lincoln, the Southern wing of the cruciform never came quite into existence. As Figure 1.2 shows, where the McMillan Plan imagined Washington Channel connecting to the Potomac via a relatively small canal which reflected the neo-Classical design of the rest of the plan, what actually occurred is the considerably

²⁴ By "spirit" I mean a grand, monumental, federal ground that could serve as a center and memorial space for the entire nation. As Savage has persuasively argued, the McMillan commissioners were taking part in the creation of a public space, a modern concept, rather than public grounds, a more antique concept that animated L'Enfant's vision. As Savage points out, whereas the McMillan Commissioners centered their plan around an enormous obelisk which was able to "shape a new autonomous space," L'Enfant's vision for an equestrian monument to Washington would actually have been situated in a point so low that it "was probably under water for at least some period of the year" (148, 34). In this sense - the shift from public space to public grounds - the Commissioners were certainly not working in the tradition of L'Enfant. For more on this issue, see Savage's *Monument Wars*, chapter 4, "Inventing Public Space." Sarah Luria points out another crucial distinction between L'Enfant and the Commission: in a post-Downing, post-Olmsted world, green space was a central element of city planning, and the Commission turned the Mall into "an enormous green space" which "alters L'Enfant's original plan for the city in a crucial way" (143). But although Savage and Luria are quite convincing that the nature of the National Mall is very different from the Grand Avenue, the concept of a monumental core is very much the same in both plans.

larger and less geometric Tidal Basin, which destroyed the cruciform shape and separates the Jefferson Memorial (which is near, but not precisely on, the southern point of the McMillan cross) both spatially and aesthetically from the Mall. In short, although the McMillan plan did not quite match up to its rhetoric vis-à-vis the L'Enfant plan, it was undeniably a continuation and adaptation of L'Enfant's original vision, in ways that nineteenth-century efforts (particularly Downing's) were not.

Although most critical attention given to the McMillan Commission has focused on the document produced by the commissioners, Senator McMillan's introductory remarks set an interesting agenda for the larger document, an agenda quite contrary to Henry Adams's conception of the city. As we have seen, Adams saw D.C. as a symbol of overreach, of coercive monumental power celebrating itself while telling itself the lie that democracy is a unique and relatively noncoercive form of government. Furthermore, Adams opposed a Virginian authenticity to the Capitol's "thus saith the law," and located a chance for authentic existence in a George Washington figure. But this attempt to claim Washington for Virginia and the South is part of a long history of the battle for George Washington. During the battle over Horatio Greenough's *George Washington*, the "first commemorative statue ordered by the Federal government that actually came to completion," it was Northern congressmen who were "far more enthusiastic in their support" for the project (Savage 49). Even in the 1830s and 1840s, George Washington was becoming a symbol of federal power and unity, and thus a symbolic enemy of the Southern members of Congress. Savage argues that, from the antebellum perspective, the "true" Washington "could not sit in both camps simultaneously," but, obviously, both sides could claim theirs was the "true" Washington and both did. Virginia had Mount Vernon and D.C. had the Greenough statue and, later, the Washington

monument. As Savage puts it: “even though Washington’s grave at Mount Vernon was only a few miles downriver from the capital, the symbolic distance might as well have been an ocean.” Adams’s George Washington, then, as he is instantiated in *Democracy* both at Mount Vernon and in the figure of Carrington, can only exist outside the federal city.

McMillan makes clear, by contrast, that he believes the true George Washington to be the federal leader (and practicing Federalist). McMillan does this by ascribing the plan for the city itself to Washington (and Jefferson!) as much or more so than L’Enfant:

When the city of Washington was planned under the direct and minute supervision of Washington and Jefferson, the relations that should subsist between the Capitol and the President’s house were closely studied. Indeed the whole city was planned with a view to the reciprocal relations that should exist among public buildings. Vistas and axes; sites for monuments and museums; parks and pleasure gardens; fountains and canals; in a word, all that goes to make a city magnificent and consistent work of art were regarded as essentials in the plans made by L’Enfant under the direction of the first President and his Secretary of State. (McMillan 12)

This is not George Washington as Virginia planter and genteel aristocrat, but Washington as powerful federal executive. McMillan sounds much like L’Enfant when he argues that the key to the plan of D.C. is the interrelation of all the separate parts – the “reciprocal relations” between buildings that turn the entire city into a “consistent work of art.” But McMillan is not content to leave to leave this magnificent unity in the hands of L’Enfant; he claims instead (more or less inaccurately) that L’Enfant’s plan was designed “under the direct and minute supervision of Washington and Jefferson.” Leaving aside the fact that McMillan is going for a two-for-one deal by placing Jefferson as well as Washington in the federal/Northern/anti-slavery camp, this language is still striking. The image is of George Washington personally designing Washington, D.C. to exhibit magnificence and unity. McMillan’s language leaves no doubt: the “true” Washington wanted the symbol of the United States to be a magnificent coherence adhering to an intricate plan, not a loose

confederation. This Washington would not have joined his native Virginia in the Civil War. As Savage puts it about the Washington Monument: “The monument was not about the world of George Washington and his thirteen colonies; it was about a new nation that had split apart violently, reunified forcibly, and now stood poised to become an international power on the world stage” (117). Where Adams locates D.C.’s shortcomings in its crude grandiosity, McMillan locates the problem, in D.C. as well as in the U.S., in the inability to maintain unity and follow the clear and coherent plan laid out by its founders. Echoing the complaints of previous generations (as exemplified by Dickens), McMillan writes:

The desirability of a comprehensive plan for the development of the District of Columbia has long been felt by Congress. During the past few years particularly questions have arisen as to the location of public buildings, of preserving spaces for parks in portions of the District beyond the limits of the city of Washington [...] and, in the absence of a well-considered plan, the solution of these grave problems has either been postponed or else has resulted in compromises that have marred the beauty and dignity of the national capital. (McMillan 7)

George Washington, according to McMillan, wanted D.C. to be clearly planned and centrally directed; its subsequent failures have come from the quite regrettable deviations from the founder’s original view. The “other” George Washington – the Mount Vernon/Carrington George Washington – is a misapprehension, for the country as well as the city.

In the Commission’s considerably longer report, the problem of Mount Vernon is specifically dealt with. Unity is the key to the L’Enfant plan, and it is correspondingly the key to the McMillan Commission. The Commissioners, adding L’Enfant’s replacement Andrew Ellicott to the trinity of Washington, Jefferson, and L’Enfant, note that it was “imperative to go back to the sources of their [Washington et al] knowledge and taste in order to restore unity and harmony to their creations and to guide future development along appropriate lines” (Burnham 25). Following L’Enfant’s rhetoric just as they followed his

original design, the commissioners want the city's present and future to represent the unity of the post-Civil War country. And Mount Vernon is both part of and separate from that unity. On the one hand, the commissioners are in favor of – in complete opposition to the sentiments of Adams and others who wanted to emphasize the first president's Virginianness – uniting Mount Vernon with the National Mall. "The great desirability of connecting Mount Vernon with the capital by an agreeable and dignified approach was recognized by Congress in 1889" (Burnham 121). This road's "importance as supplementing the park system of Washington requires that we should mention it and again urge Congress upon its great value." The road will make Mount Vernon a "supplement" to the larger monumental plan of D.C.; it will literally *and* figuratively bridge the water separating federal Washington, D.C. and George Washington from Virginian Mount Vernon and George Washington. And this connection goes beyond mere "historic associations [...]" but as a matter of fact it would present such a series of beautiful views of the broad portion of the Potomac Valley as would give it a priceless recreative value for the future population of the District in addition to its sentimental value as linking the nation's capital with the home of its founder." The historical connection to George Washington is nice, but the true value of a road to Mount Vernon is that it will give people a platform for viewing the D.C. area. If Mount Vernon and D.C. are connected with a road, the result will be an imaginative connection in which a trip to Mount Vernon becomes part of the D.C. experience.

The commissioners do worry that such an integration might destroy the "other" George Washington. As they put it: "Mount Vernon is not designed on the scale of a great public monument, but on the more delicate, domestic scale of a gentleman's country place [...] which does far more to bring to the visitor a feeling of the personal presence of

Washington than the bald historical fact of his residence there” (Burnham 122). Although Washington did live at Mount Vernon, the memorial to him there emphasizes not his “bald” existence there but an intimate connection with his delicate, domestic, personal presence. But while the commissioners allow for this version of George Washington to be remembered in their plan, they know that it is no threat to their monumental version of the founder:

It will be no easy problem to design a terminus dignified and adequate for a broad national road of pilgrimage some 15 miles in length and to relate this terminus frankly to Mount Vernon mansion as the main object of the pilgrimage without intruding a discordant public note into that place which should speak not of the statesman, but of the private gentleman of Virginia who there made his home. (Burnham 122)

I take the key words here to be “public” and “private.” The entire goal of the McMillan Commission is to give to the public a national city that represents the unity, harmony, and magnificence of their country. The project is inherently public, and it is authenticated by the (slightly exaggerated) influence that the public and monumental George Washington had on the creation of the plan for D.C. The public might or might not have a right to see the personal, domestic version of George Washington, the “private gentleman of Virginia.” But if they do come to Washington’s home, the public themselves will strike a “discordant note.” The private George Washington will either not be visited by large numbers of the population, in which case he will no longer serve as a symbol of an alternative vision for the country, or the public’s visits will destroy the intimate version of George Washington in favor of the monumental Washington of the Monument. Adams’s dream of an alternative, Virginian Washington will either dissipate under the force of monumental history or remain in only the most antiquarian terms.

From here, we can turn to the “other” father of the county – the great president of the nineteenth century. The commissioners are very clear that George Washington will be the

center of their vision for the mall, just as an equestrian statue of Washington was at the heart of L'Enfant's Grand Boulevard (at "Point A" on figure 1.1). The Commissioners build their cruciform by regarding "the Monument as the center" of the entire plan (Burnham 36). The Monument, despite being only a few decades old, is already worthy of transforming L'Enfant's duumvirate into a triumvirate: "the Washington Monument stands not only as one of the most stupendous works of man, but as one of the most beautiful of human creations [...] Dominating the entire District of Columbia, it has taken its place with the Capitol and the White House as one of the three foremost national structures" (Burnham 48). But Lincoln and his general will be placed at the head and the foot of the cross, Lincoln on his own and Grant in front²⁵ of the Capitol in what is fittingly known as Union Square. The commissioners establish Lincoln's place at the head of the Mall and at the head of the pantheon of U.S. heroes simultaneously: "Crowning the *rond point*, as the Arc de Triomphe crowns the Place de l'Etoile at Paris, should stand a memorial erected to the memory of that one man in our history as a nation who is worthy to be named with George Washington – Abraham Lincoln" (Burnham 51-52). Similar, although less exalted, praise is heaped on Grant and the location for his monument: "The exceptional opportunities for monumental treatment offered by the commanding location of this areas leads the Commission to suggest that the Grant memorial already provided for shall be the chief decoration of the square; and that associated with the Grant monument shall be the figures of his two great lieutenants, Sherman and Sheridan" (Burnham 41). The commissioners follow this declaration with a pun which makes the true meaning of the statues clear: "The placing of the defenders of the

²⁵ Officially, Grant's sculpture is behind the Capitol; it is the rear of the Capitol that faces the National Mall, the Washington Monument, the Smithsonian, etc. In practice, the technical rear of the Capitol has served as its symbolic front for more than a century, due to the importance of the space "behind" the Capitol (the National Mall/Grand Avenue) and the relative lack of importance of the space "in front" of it.

Union at this great point of convergence doubly justifies the name of ‘Union Square’” (Burnham 42). A new triumvirate of political leaders has emerged: Lincoln and Grant, flanking Washington, all united in a Union identity. As Savage puts it: “With a Union Square at one end of the Mall and a Lincoln Memorial at the other, framing the obelisk in the center, the plan enshrined a national narrative of unification the authors no doubt believed would be universal and timeless” (152).

I take the key word in Savage’s description to be “universal.” Savage argues that the universality of the Commission plan is a faux-universality, clearly in conflict with the efforts of people like Douglass to bring about national mixing and inclusion: “Their Mall was a white space, undisturbed by minority voices. All the grand talk of a ‘common people’ with a ‘common destiny’ papered over key absences [...] The defeat of Reconstruction, the triumph of white supremacy, the daily struggles of African Americans to survive and prosper in a segregated world all found no place in the National Mall” (171). Even the Great Emancipator is re-imagined as the great unifier: “Together the two monuments reframed the Civil War as a story of national salvation, rather than liberation” (Savage 170). In this respect, Savage is chillingly correct; slavery, the suffering of African Americans both before and after the war, and the damaging legacy of racism have been left out of the national narrative designed by the commissioners. To put it a different way, the McMillan Plan articulates the same spatial vision that Frederick Douglass so enthusiastically predicted – a unified, coherent D.C. – but the social reconciliation that was supposed to accompany the geographical transformation has been lost. Douglass seems prophetic when he says, at the unveiling of the Freedmen’s Memorial to Lincoln in 1876, “He [Lincoln] was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the

colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country” (“Freedmen’s” 480-481). Lincoln had, according to Douglass, two great missions: “first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery” (485). In the McMillan Commission plan, the second mission has not been subordinated to the first but almost completely erased. As Savage writes, the only reference to slavery in the original plan for the Lincoln Memorial is the vague and “abstract rhetoric of ‘a new birth of freedom’” (170). Just as the first founder of the country presided over a revolution which declared all men to be created equal while ignoring the plight of the slaves, the second founder is being remembered as a defender of the Union while the reason for that disunion – the plight of the slaves – is ignored.

But if Douglass would have been horrified at the exclusion of the slaves from this national history, its “universality” is questionable in another way. To put it a different way, not only would Adams’s Carrington have undoubtedly hated the crude “thus saith the law” element of the completed Washington and Lincoln monuments, he would not have to delve very deeply into the Mall’s message to realize that he too was excluded from the “universality” of the Mall. Just after describing their plans for the memorial to the “universal” Lincoln, the commissioners lay out a plan for a pair of bridges that will connect the Lincoln Memorial to Arlington National Cemetery. The National Cemetery will gain unity through uniformity. The commissioners praise the monuments laid out for privates and unknown soldiers for their “dignity, impressiveness, and nobility” that is “not attained by any large monuments, but by the very simplicity and uniformity of the whole” (Burnham 58). The commissioners seek to extend this uniform shape of the monuments to the rest of the cemetery:

Nothing could be more impressive than rank after rank of white stones, inconspicuous in themselves, covering the gentle slopes, and producing the desired effect of a vast army in its last resting place [...] In particular, the noble slopes toward the river should be rigorously protected against the invasion of monuments which utterly annihilate the sense of beauty and repose. This is one of the most beautiful spots in the vicinity of Washington; it should not be defaced or touched in any way, and a law or rule should at once be passed forbidding the placing of any monument on this hill. (Burnham 59)

With a few exceptions for notables (such as politicians and Supreme Court justices), this has been the policy for some time, and Arlington National Cemetery is much as the commissioners desired it to be: a uniform, unified set of identical markers which do in fact suggest a great army in repose. But in 1901, when the commissioners were writing, the cemetery was not a symbol of national unity. The vast majority of its inhabitants were those who fought together against the Confederate States. Any plan which places Lincoln, Grant, and Sherman in positions of honor, then connects those memorials to a cemetery of Union soldiers united in repose on the estate of an opposing general, is less a narrative of national unity and more a narrative of Union victory. Insofar as the country has become unified, the McMillan plan makes it clear that it was unified by the sword.

In fact, if we return to where we started – L’Enfant’s original plan – we see that the commissioners are deviating from their eighteenth-century exemplar. L’Enfant imagined D.C. as a place where the North and South would meet, mingle, and ultimately blend. In the monumental plan for the National Mall, the McMillan Commission admits no blending. It is, in fact, not a coherent monument to unity but a unified expression of disunity, at least at the sectional level. Whereas L’Enfant dreamed of overcoming sectional conflicts, the McMillan Commission wanted to enshrine them permanently in American history, even while claiming a commitment to unity. The McMillan Commission’s claims are either calculatedly disingenuous or hopefully naive, and their short-term legacy did nothing to bring about unity.

During the same period that the greatest amount of work was done on the McMillan Mall, 1901-1921, the “Confederate Mall”, Monument Avenue in Richmond, experienced a parallel development. In 1901, both the National Mall and Monument Avenue had a single major feature dedicated to an illustrious Virginian: D.C.’s Washington Monument and Richmond’s Robert E. Lee statue. By 1919 Monument Avenue had acquired monuments to J.E.B. Stuart, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis; The National Mall, by 1922, had its Lincoln and Grant monuments (Sherman and Sheridan had eventually been eliminated). The supporters of Monument Avenue, like the McMillan Commissioners, deliberately avoided the idea of sectional strife; instead they stressed a Stoic belief that Lee et al could serve as models for personal moral behavior. Colonel Archer Anderson said in his speech dedicating the 1890 Lee Monument “Let this monument, then, teach to generations yet unborn these lessons of his life! Let it stand, not as a record of civil strife, but as a perpetual protest against whatever is low and sordid in our public and private objects!” (qtd in Edwards, 17). But even as both sides claimed that disunity and conflict were not the aim of their respective memorial grounds, the fact that two separate malls arose, neither of them containing a single figure of note representing the other side, shows the lack of unity reflected in either plan. This lack of unity is confirmed in the form of the final Monument Avenue memorial: the Matthew Fontaine Maury memorial.²⁶ The Maury Monument is an explicitly non-military monument which emphasizes Maury’s pre-war scientific accomplishments. As has been pointed out, as compared to the other monuments of Monument Avenue, the Maury monument downplayed

²⁶ Another monument, to the Richmond native and tennis player Arthur Ashe, was added to Monument Avenue in 1996. For obvious reasons, the monument to the African-American tennis star and civil rights advocate is often not considered part of Monument Avenue, even as it technically is on the avenue. Whereas the National Mall has reached the point that twentieth-century figures such as FDR and MLK can coexist with Lincoln and Grant as well as Jefferson and Washington, Ashe is the only non-Confederate honored with a statue on Monument Avenue.

a Southern “legacy of military prowess” and represented the new “reconciliation with the North” (Briggs 79). But even so, the monument’s planners originally hoped to place it somewhere in D.C., but the sculpture was rejected for inclusion in D.C. itself, let alone the Mall, and thus was built in Richmond in 1929. It was not until 1982, when the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was built to honor all American veterans of that war, that any monument honoring a Southerner from during or after the Civil War was added to the Mall.

Today’s Mall, with its long-overdue statue honoring Martin Luther King, Jr., multiple national war memorials (including Vietnam, Korea, World War II, and the future expansion of the Washington, D.C. World War I memorial), and the Vietnam Women’s Memorial is a worthy national site which, although it is not (and indeed could not) be all-inclusive, honors a wide swathe of the American populace and serves a unifying function. The plan laid out in 1901 and worked on for succeeding decades was no such thing. The McMillan Commissioners failed to enshrine a narrative of unity, let alone actually existing unity. Instead, their legacy lies in their rehabilitation of the plan – L’Enfant’s plan specifically and unified city plans generally. The McMillan Plan (which was a comprehensive parks plan going far beyond the Mall aspects I have focused) is frequently and deservedly held up as the first or one of the first examples of large-scale, modern city planning in the U.S. In that respect, the Commissioners are descendants of L’Enfant, worthy of praise for achieving a rough semblance of his vision in the large-scale structure of the city. Translating that structure into a sociological engine to change society was another matter; the commissioners merely reified, rather than transformed, the social landscape of D.C. They tragically left the plight of American blacks out of the narrative, and contentiously denied the South any part in the shaping of the country. They did, however, set the stage for further efforts in city-

shaping, the wholesale transformation of city structures in order to realize a coherent, centralized vision. D.C.'s contribution to the American ideal of a metropolis was the value of magnificent plan and an empowered planner. But without major growth and development, which D.C. lacked until the Civil War, and without social communion, which D.C. lacked long into the twentieth century, a plan was not enough to create a great and vibrant city.

CHAPTER 3

NEW YORK

She walked with an aimless haste, fearing to meet familiar faces. The day was radiant, metallic: one of those searching American days so calculated to reveal the shortcomings of our street-cleaning and the excesses of our architecture. The streets looked bare and hideous; everything stared and glittered.

- Edith Wharton, from "The Reckoning"

In many ways, Manhattan's problems in the late nineteenth century were the inverse of D.C.'s. The aim of L'Enfant's plan was to impose a beautiful order on an undeveloped space and then let economic development flesh out that plan. Manhattan, confined as it was on an island and regulated by a rigid grid, had no need for the imposition of further order. More to the point, the city had more growth than it knew what to do with. Whereas D.C. had an elegant spatial unity that couldn't be realized because of a lack of development, Manhattan had so much development that the city risked losing social coherence. As the twentieth century approached, the city, specifically its southern reaches, teemed with unregulated midrise growth. Between 1865 and 1890, Manhattan more than doubled in size, going from 726,386 residents (313,477 of them foreign-born) to 1,515,301 (639,943 foreign-born) in 1890 (Rosenwaike 67). That massive influx of immigrants – more than 300,000 in less than 30 years – supplied the sweatshop industry with cheap labor but far outstripped the island's ability to feed and house its population in anything but the most unhygienic, inhumane way. At the same time, the labor of those immigrants and the emerging power of the Wall Street markets were enriching a whole new class of New Yorkers. By the late nineteenth century,

the wealthiest people in New York were wealthier than any previous U.S. residents, and the poorest people in New York lived in worse conditions than any previous U.S. residents. The result was not just the obvious binary of “two halves” of society but also a multiplicity of New Yorks. There were the rich and the poor, yes, but also the distinction between the nouveau riche and old New York, and the divides between the many different ethnic enclaves in the tenement districts. Manhattan was experiencing explosive financial and demographic growth, but it was becoming not one city but many different camps. The challenge for the thinkers in this chapter – Edith Wharton, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jacob A. Riis, and William Dean Howells – was to theorize a way to turn those camps into an interrelated network of communities. For New York to become a truly great city, some form of power had to knit the divided groups together.

This social integration had to be achieved in the face of economic forces that were literally raising the ceiling for the richest Americans. As Henry James describes it in *The American Scene* (1907), the skyscraper is the perfect symbol for Manhattan:

Crowned not only with no history, but with no credible possibility of time for history, and consecrated by no uses save the commercial at any cost, they are simply the most piercing notes in that concert of the expensively provisional into which your supreme sense of New York resolves itself. They never begin to speak to you, in the manner of the builded majesties of the world as we have heretofore known such – towers or temples or fortresses or palaces – with the authority of things of permanence or even of things of long duration. One story is good only till another is told, and sky-scrapers are the last word of economic ingenuity only till another word be written. This shall be possibly a word of still uglier meaning, but the vocabulary of thrift at any price shows boundless resources, and the consciousness of that truth, the consciousness of the finite, the menaced, the essentially *invented* state, twinkles ever, to my perception, in the thousand glassy eyes of these giants of the mere market. (420, emphasis in original)

The skyscraper is a monstrous creation, lacking any sense of sacredness or permanence. It has one purpose and one purpose only – the creation of wealth – and it will be discarded

when another technological innovation makes wealth easier to create. More importantly, the skyscraper shows the larger truth about the city the United States itself: it's just a machine to make money. The magnificent edifices of the past, such as temples or fortresses, had a connection to history and a variety of social uses; they were part of a larger conversation, a story that society told itself. Skyscrapers are just the most obvious symbol of the new American order, in which the social, the aesthetic, and the historical are eliminated in favor of the economic. Overtopped by skyscrapers, a building such as Trinity Church – a symbol of beauty, history, and intimacy – has been rendered invisible. Where has Trinity Church gone? “The answer is, as obviously, that these charming elements are still there, just where they ever were, but that they have been mercilessly deprived of their visibility. It aches and throbs, this smothered visibility, we easily feel, it is caged and dishonored condition, supported only by the consciousness that the dishonour is no fault of its own” (421). Surrounded by grandiose skyscrapers, Trinity Church has become invisible; in New York City, no one can see anything but the money makers. And what happened at the architectural level has also happened at the individual level; just as the skyscrapers have rendered Trinity Church invisible, so have the economic masters of Wall Street rendered the middle and lower classes invisible. In a process that even predates the skyscraper, New York has slowly been turning all but its wealthiest inhabitants into mere cogs in the money-making machine, useful for turning profits but invisible as far as social relations are concerned.

As I will show, all four of the main writers in this chapter identified this process and observed ways that visibility could be restored to Manhattan's forgotten residents. As Rebecca Zurier explains in *Picturing the City*, her monograph about the Ashcan school of urban painting, late 19th and early 20th century New York City was driven by a “culture of

looking,” or, in Wharton’s words, staring and glittering. “Men looked at women, women looked at men, poor people looked at rich people, middle-class people looked at the poor. Some people took pleasure in looking, while others complained about being forced to look” (Zurier 45). New York City was the perfect place for this new culture of looking to flourish; as Zurier puts it: “The city’s geography placed space at a premium and forced New Yorkers into a proximity that challenged the nineteenth-century bourgeois idea of a physical separation between home and work, public and private life” (49). Packed together on an island, the upper, middle, and lower classes would have no choice but to come into contact with one another, to see and be seen by one another. This spatial proximity was exaggerated by new advancements in “gas and then electric lighting” which allowed the middle class to stay out later and see their fellow citizens better (Zurier 49). And Zurier doesn’t stop there, but puts together an ever-more impressive list of reasons why the residents of New York City could not help seeing and being seen by one another: fashion advertising in shop windows, grandiose architecture, vaudeville and motion picture shows, new advertising technologies such as billboards, political demonstrations, illustrated newspapers and magazines, flash photojournalism, etc. With all of these factors combined, New York City became “the image capital” of the world, with an “ever greater proliferation of ways of looking and things to look at” (49). In this period, New York was gaining the title that it holds to this day: the place, above all others, where one can see and be seen.²⁷

²⁷ Zurier’s book is an excellent starting point for understanding the culture of looking, especially combined with her article “Picturing the City,” co-written by Robert W. Snyder, in their collection that accompanied an exhibition of Ashcan artists, *Metropolitan Lives* (1995). Further discussions of this culture of looking can be found in Sylvia Yount’s “Consuming Drama: Everett Shinn and the Spectacular City,” which places the Ashcan painter Shinn in the context of the culture of looking, with Howells as a central figure. From a literary perspective, the first section of Ellen Moers’ *Two Dreisers* (1969) situates Dreiser, Crane, Howells, and others in the journalistic and artistic milieu which helped produce the culture of looking.

Although Zurier is absolutely right that New Yorkers in this period were forced to see one another in an unprecedented way, my work in this chapter focuses on the force that James identified: in the new Manhattan, many people have become impossible see. As technological, geographical, and cultural forces made New Yorkers look at one another, a culture of not seeing and not being seen flourished, one that attempted to use the culture of looking against itself. Subtly not being seen, and its counterpart, deliberately not seeing, were powerful forces to be wielded by the upper classes against each other as well as the rest of New York City. By these methods, much of the poverty and the wealth of New York City remained hidden, shrouded by techniques designed to channel, alter, or simply disrupt visibility. Some classes in New York City wanted to be seen in certain ways, some wanted to remain hidden, and some refused to see things that were directly in front of them. Each of the writers assembled here (Wharton, Riis, Olmsted, and Howells, as well as Max Weber²⁸) identified the importance of visibility to the cohesiveness of the city. What runs through all of these texts is the awareness that visibility cannot be halted – in New York City, one will see and be seen – but it can be channeled. Thus the question became, to what extent can visibility be channeled productively, towards the creation of a more cohesive social landscape and corresponding economic justice? Insofar as one can, to a certain extent, determine who one is seen by and who one sees, to what extent can this alter the city's social connections? Can and will the city be improved if the rich are rendered more visible to the poor, or the poor more visible to the rich? And will visibility be a one-way or a two-way process; does rendering the poor more visible to the rich mean that the opposite should also be true? Finally, in addition to cutting across economic class, to what extent does visibility

²⁸ Weber is the only one of these writers concerned with cities and seeing generally, not New York City specifically. But his insights apply as well to Manhattan as to any city in the world, if not better.

cut within economic class, creating irreconcilable social groups within the same economic group?

I begin with “Status, Class, Power,” a famous excerpt from Max Weber’s *Economy and Society* (1922), to establish the sociological reality of urban visibility. As we shall see, Weber shows that, although social status is intertwined with political power and economic class, the visible adherence to a set of rules is the true determiner of social status; who one is seen with, what one is seen doing, and where one is seen are not the markers but rather the creators of the social hierarchy. The protagonist of Edith Wharton’s novel *The Custom of the Country* (1913), Undine Spragg, learns that the hierarchical system is not as simple as it sounds in Weber; there are different and shifting conceptions of the right set to be seen with. Wharton’s novel ultimately demonstrates that there is neither a single central determiner of visibility nor an easy way to control or alter the system; although Undine is a powerful figure, her various attempts to alter the flow of visibility are mostly thwarted. In Wharton’s novels, systems of visibility have grown up in tandem with the social and economic systems of the city, and attempts to disrupt those systems are either counter-productive, or cause suffering, or both. In contrast to Wharton, the reformers Frederick Law Olmsted and Jacob Riis are both much more sanguine about their ability to alter the flow of visibility to make it bind different groups together, rather than cut them apart. Both Olmsted and Riis are interventionists who think that human reason can devise an architectural solution (a new kind of park, a new kind of apartment building) that will make the previously invisible newly visible. However, although both of them seek to inculcate middle-class values in New York’s working class via alterations in visibility, their methods are highly distinct: Olmsted’s goal is to create a utopian space in which all classes are visible to one another and thus can

peacefully coexist, while Riis wants to render the lower classes more visible to the upper classes, in order that the upper classes can help the less fortunate. I conclude with William Dean Howells' novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), in which Howells offers up an ironic counterpoint to the ideas expressed by Olmsted and Riis. In Howells' novel, a kindhearted middle-class couple sees both the cruelties of wealth and the indignities of poverty yet remains more or less indifferent to both. Born out of Howells' own experiences in trying to improve the lives of the poor by making them more visible to the rich, the narrative of *Hazard* shows that the social groupings which visibility and invisibility enforce have deeper roots than mere visibility, and Howells' novel ends by suggesting that the entire project of realism – the making visible of bourgeois life – is inadequate in the face of the multifaceted, overdetermined space that is the modern city.

There is a moment in Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady* (1881) when Ralph Touchett makes a particularly revealing remark to Isabel Archer and Henrietta Stackpole:

As London wears in the month of September a face blank but for its smears of prior service, the young man, who occasionally took an apologetic tone, was obliged to remind his companion, to Miss Stackpole's high derision, that there wasn't a creature in town.

"I suppose you mean the aristocracy are absent," Henrietta answered; "but I don't think you could have a better proof that if they were absent altogether they wouldn't be missed. It seems to me the place is about as full as it can be. There's no one here, of course, but three or four millions of people. What is it you call them – the lower-middle class? They're only the population of London, and that's of no consequence" (123).

Ralph Touchett has here reached the logical endpoint of distinctions based on social status. It doesn't occur to him to tell Isabel Archer and Henrietta Stackpole that there isn't a soul in town, outside of the 3-4 million people who make up 99.9% of London's population. It doesn't even occur to him to use a euphemism to make the same point – to declare that "society" has left town, or "anyone worth knowing," or any of the semi-polite ways which a

member of the upper crust distinguishes between who is worthy of social intercourse and who is not. Instead, Ralph simply declares that there wasn't "a creature" in town – rendering everyone below a certain level of social status equally below the status of "creature." And although Henrietta, in this case, is present to puncture Ralph's condescension with a blunt assessment of the aristocracy's literal, numerical status in London, statements such as Ralph's are frequently made and not remarked upon in by upper-class characters in novels of this period.

In Ralph's world, the lower-middle class (and everyone economically below them, and more than a few people above them too) are something like the dark matter of London. Obviously they exist, as he can see their effects: without them all those buildings probably wouldn't be there, and the streetcars would be unlikely to be necessary. Someone certainly must be building and maintaining the sewers, roads, streetlights, etc of London, not to mention producing the goods that Ralph's class consumes. But while Ralph is obviously aware of the statistical reality of the case – he would not deny Henrietta's claim that there are in fact 3-4 million people in London in September – they are of no consequence, are literally of nonexistence to him, in terms of their availability for social intercourse. The city is as full as it can be, but when Ralph says there isn't a "creature" in town he means no one to visit and be visited by – no one to see and be seen by. For social purposes, Ralph doesn't see them – they might as well be invisible. The same can be said about James' novels. Unlike his contemporaries and fellow-travelers Howells and Wharton, the material and demographic realities of the cities where James' novels are set almost never intrudes on the inner lives of the characters. Whereas figures such as Silas Lapham and Lily Bart walk city streets, noting both their fellow inhabitants and their urban surroundings, rare is the Jamesian character

(outside, of course, of Daisy Miller) who seems to have a sense of her place in a larger urban landscape. This makes Henrietta's puncturing of Ralph's class solipsism even more remarkable within James' *oeuvre*, and, more importantly for my project, shows that for novelists like Howells and Wharton, the true project is not the representation of the psychological interiority of the individual but rather the representation of the interactions between the individual self and urban center in all its manifestations. In *The Custom of the Country* and *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, New York City's people, places, and the networks binding them all combine to make up the subject of the novel of novel, a subject which accretes so much detail that it provides a highly thick description in contrast to the work of Olmsted or even Riis. In those novels, unlike James', a great deal of the city is made visible, including the ways that some members of the city are rendered invisible.

Max Weber provides a detailed sociological description of those conditions under which one can be visible or invisible to certain classes. Most crucially: economic capital and social capital do not have a one-to-one relationship to one another, and thus one's so-called "other half" – the part, however large, of society which one does not see – depends on more than simply economic distinctions. Weber describes this relationship between the social, economic, and political spheres in "Class, Status, Party," a section on political communities in part 2 of *Economy and Society*. What might casually or colloquially be called "class" is, according to Weber, more properly thought of as the interrelationship of three different spheres of social stratification, only one of which should technically be labeled "class." Each of these three methods of social stratification – class, status, and party – can be distinguished by the nature of the power used as a stratification marker. Class differences are marked by simple differences in capital, or perhaps, more complexly, in differences in their access to the

mechanism of production. Status differences are marked not by financial discrepancies, but rather by inequalities in “honor.” And party distinctions are made by virtue of discrepancies in a third substance: “power.” Weber’s project is to clearly define the different spheres of stratification instantiated by differences in money, honor, and power, while also demonstrating their points of contact – i.e. the opportunities to convert money, honor, and power into one another.

Weber actually holds “power” as the touchstone to all three different systems; although political clout is called power, plain and simple, economic and social capital also represent forms of power. Weber begins by defining power as “the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action” (926). But he introduces further complexity. Having already attempted to distinguish between power that springs from legal organization and power that springs from economic organization, Weber continues:

“Economically conditioned” power is not, of course, identical with “power” as such. On the contrary, the emergence of economic power may be the consequence of power existing on other grounds. Man does not strive for power only in order to enrich himself economically. Power, including economic power, may be valued “for its own sake.” Very frequently the striving for power is also conditioned by the social “honor” it entails. Not all power, however, entails social honor: the typical American Boss, as well as the typical big speculator, deliberately relinquishes social honor. Quite generally, “mere economic” power, and especially “naked” money power, is by no means a recognized basis of social honor. Nor is power the only basis of social honor. Indeed, social honor, or prestige, may even be the basis of political or economic power, and very frequently has been. (926).

We can see already how difficult it is for Weber to clearly differentiate and distinguish between the three main types of power he is attempting to elucidate; the three different kinds of power are just too interpenetrating to allow for a clear-cut analysis. But certain important aspects of Weber’s definition have already become clear. First, his

definition of power in this context is quite clear: power is the ability to realize one's will in the community, even against the active resistance of others. Thus the ability to purchase an object is an example of economic power, just as the ability to hold a well-attended dinner is an example of social power. And Weber is very clear that there is an equilibrium to be found within the relationship between the three different kinds of power. It is certainly possible to simultaneously hold economic, social, and political power simultaneously – after all, Weber tells us that “social honor” can and “frequently” has been used to acquire political and economic power. But there is a balancing act here: the big speculator, whose attempt to hold economic power knows no limits, and the Party Boss, whose pursuit of political power is equally inexhaustible, are both denied the right of social honor. Social honor is gained by living life with the correct style, by upholding the rules and mores dictated by one's status community. As we shall see, one crucial aspect of honor in high society is a form of moderation, a willingness to use all aspects of power discretely or, at times, to choose not to use power at all. Acting immoderately leads to a loss of style, and a corresponding loss of esteem within one's status group. By placing too much emphasis on one of the three legs of power, the speculator and the Boss have broken a clear status rule, and thus destabilize the delicate equilibrium between the three types of power – an equilibrium that depends on a moderate balance. And those that destabilize this equilibrium will be rendered invisible – no matter how wealthy the speculator is, the fact that he strives for that wealth

This highlights a point where socioeconomic distinctions break down – a place where money does not ensure social success. Classes are for Weber not communities; to put it a different way, they are not necessarily linked by any social bonds or ties. They are instead the potential for action, the potential ability to become organized. And Weber is clear that this

potential for action, to be properly class-based, must stem from the organization of economic forces. Members of the same class must have the same “life chances” (927) as determined by their income, which is in turn determined by the labor and commodity markets. A class is any group of people who, owing to the mechanisms of the financial markets, have access to roughly the same amount of money and, based on the similarity in their financial power, have the potential to act together in protection of their mutual self-interests. A class is not a community – determined by social intercourse – but merely the chance for communal action, as dictated by mutual economic interests.

Status groups, on the other hand, are precisely communities. Rather than being linked by a mere coincidence of economic potentiality, status groups are linked by the concept of honor, also known as style. In other words, a status group is a community because membership in that status group is bestowed only by the other members of that status group, based on how well an individual fulfills the particular code of honor of that status group. As Weber puts it: “In content, status honor is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific *style of life* can be expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle” (932; emphasis in the original). A status group must be a community, because only a community can award social honor based on style. A class group needs no such value judgments; it is constructed merely by virtue of the workings of the market. A status group can, however, cut across different class groups:

But status honor need not necessarily be linked with a ‘class situation.’ On the contrary, it normally stands in sharp opposition to the pretensions of sheer property.

Both propertied and propertyless people can belong to the same group, and frequently they do with very tangible consequences. (932)

This refers back to the idea of the big speculator being denied the highest levels of status honor: status groups pride themselves on not being strictly dependent on economic power to define themselves. But Weber also notes that a status group in which the propertied and the propertyless mingle interchangeably is “precarious” – subject to loss of equilibrium. Status groups usually require a certain amount of capital to live in a certain style, and the highest status groups discourage “common physical labor” and even “entrepreneurial activity” (936). By requiring an expensive style of life, but denying those who make money the right to join the status group, the highest levels of society try to keep their grouping self-contained. To retain honor – the honor that comes from power and ensures one’s visibility within the group – a member of the highest social group must be able to expend economic capital without ever being shown to acquire economic capital. If a member of the group doesn’t wear the latest Paris styles, they will not be noticed by the other members of the group, but if a member of the group is noticed making the money needed to wear the latest Paris styles, they needn’t bother buying those styles – they’ll be invisible nevertheless.

Ultimately, visibility comes down to social status, or social power, although we have seen that economic capital can help one acquire social status. It is social status that dictates whether one is seen or not seen; Ralph Touchett would consider a nouveau riche businessman as invisible as a member of the lower-middle class. Insofar as it exists for itself – and not for the achieving of economic or political power – social power is above all the power to see and be seen. As Weber puts it, when a certain street is declared the stylistically proper street for a certain status group: “(f)or example, only the resident of a certain street (‘the Street’) is considered as belonging to ‘society,’ is qualified for social intercourse, and is visited and invited” (933). Social status, or belonging to “society,” is largely a matter of

seeing and being seen, or visiting and being invited. To retain membership in a status group, one must be observed behaving in the correct way – following the right style. If a member of that group makes a stylistic error, such as ostentatiously having an affair, the other members of the group will no longer allow themselves to be seen in the presence of the offending member. Discreetly having an affair which everyone knows about but isn't ever made truly visible is no such violation – it is the visibility of the moral failing that is policed, not the moral failing itself. Those that visibly sin (whether it's having an affair or renting a house on the wrong street) lose the respect of their peers, and the peers signify this lack of respect by enforcing a lack of visibility on the offender. One lacking in social power will not be invited and will not have their own invitations honored. And on the street, members of society will recognize one another while gliding by all other citizens as if they are invisible. Style, then, also known as honor, also known as social power, determines whether one is seen or not seen. Those without social power are not seen; those with it are seen. Those who have adequate social power might even “cut” – or deliberately not see – those who have some social power but not, in the cutter's eyes, quite enough. The question, for one who would want to enter society, is to determine what style must be aped, what customs adopted, in order that one might be seen. Honor is a certain style, a method of living that includes some things (in Old New York: giving dinners, donating to charity, marrying within Old New York) and precludes others (visibly making money, wearing a dress that is too old or too new, marrying the nouveau riche). Those who behave with the correct style will be visible, will have their invitations returned and their actions acknowledged. Those who fail to meet these stylistic standards have failed to uphold honor, and are thus not just not worthy of respect or esteem, but are not even seen.

It is important at this point to note two crucial things about this system of enforced invisibility. First, although they are most famously associated with the upper classes, these practices are certainly not restricted to them. As Donald Pizer explains, even the impoverished Johnsons of *Maggie* adhere to a middle-class ethic, “a value system oriented towards approval by others, toward an audience” (127). In this respect, there is little difference between the socially powerful that Weber is discussing and the Bowery dwellers of *Maggie*. Rich and poor alike have a chosen group of peers, or aspirational peers, who are the real or imagined audiences for their social behavior. But I also want to emphasize that there is another element to this system: the deliberate not-seeing of those who do not achieve the correct behavior. It is not only that every New Yorker’s life is a performance, carefully calibrated to win the approbation of a social group. It is also the case that each social group is deeply invested in not seeing those who fail to achieve the correct style of life. Each social group is performing for their peers, their betters, and their inferiors, but each social group is also invested in making sure that they do not acknowledge those inferiors. And this deliberate lack of acknowledgement eventually codifies into something stronger: the invisibility of all those New Yorkers who fail to live up to style of life of your social group.²⁹

The Custom of the Country: Multiple Cosmologies of the Visible

²⁹ Science fiction texts have occasionally sought to take this deliberate not-seeing to its furthest logical point, with cities comprised of groups that literally cannot see each other. In Jack Vance’s story “Ulan Dhor” in the collection *The Dying Earth* (1950), a future city is comprised of people wearing either green or gray and denying the existence of anyone wearing the other color. And in China Mieville’s *The City & The City*, a central European city is in fact two cities, Beszl and Ul Qoma, with the residents “unseeing” each other based on clothing and mannerisms. These outlandish science fiction scenarios retain the same logic as “cutting” someone, refusing to see them if they have the wrong style.

The fact that Weber's analysis of social stratification applies equally well to aristocratic Europe and Progressive Era Manhattan highlights the challenges faced by reform-minded thinkers seeking to find ways to bind America's urban centers into cohesive cities. Just as L'Enfant's plan provided a sense of spatial order and political hierarchy that the living city failed to live up to, *The Custom of the Country* shows that the hierarchical social order of Old New York fails to account for the city's new diversity. Although Old New York was rigidly hierarchical, it was also a coherent system in which even those on the lower levels understood their status. *Custom* dramatizes the eruption of a new order, the order of the Invaders, the *nouveau riche* clan of Wall Street titans. And Wharton's novel is neither about a paradigm shift from one order to the next nor about a reconciliation of the two orders together. Instead it is a story about how visibility remains as important as ever, but an active battle is being fought over who to be seen with and what to be seen doing. In the absence of a clearly defined social style, the denizens of upper-class Manhattan must only be seen doing the right things with the right people in the right places without being able to know who or what they are. In short, although the system is breaking down, the mechanism of visibility remains as strong as ever. New York is ceasing to be a city, not because it doesn't have enough order, but because it has too many different orders, all of which with their own harsh demands. The enormous wealth produced by Wall Street has created a new sense of style to compete with the home-grown mores of Old New York, and the result is a city in which even the wealthiest and most socially connected of the residents don't know where they stand.

Accordingly, *The Custom of the Country* – with its ambitious, if not downright monstrous, protagonist – is one of Wharton's harshest novels. Undine Spragg's ruthless rise through the ranks of society make her a highly unsympathetic character, and yet the various

society figures that she defeats, subverts, or befriends are generally as unpleasant, only in different ways. The few relatively sympathetic characters, such as Undine's parents or Ralph Marvell, her second husband, are ineffectual figures who might be ethically superior to Undine but are far inferior to her in dynamism and force of will. Undine resembles no character in fiction so much as Theodore Dreiser's Frank Cowperwood, a similarly ruthless figure who claws his way to success (and through a barrage of marriages) just as Undine does: by ignoring or destroying every custom or person which attempts to get between him and his desires.³⁰ As many have pointed out, Undine seems to have been designed by Wharton as a female analogue to the sort of robber baron that Cowperwood represents; as Betsy Klimasmith puts it in *At Home in the City*, her book about urban domesticity in the fiction of this time period: "As a woman, Undine is barred from trading on Wall Street. She can, however, trade in settings and manipulate environments in order to produce and project the self she wishes to convey" (163). Claire Preston offers a similar appraisal, although lacking Klimasmith's spatial and environmental angle: "Although Wharton never produced a traditional male-centered business-novel, instead, in *The Custom of the Country* she converted the transactional principles of that genre to a narrative of female aggrandisement, and found therein the source of her most vigorous social anatomy" (96). But whereas Cowperwood, as we shall see, is ultimately a uniter, Undine is a destroyer of social systems who illustrates the fact that enforced invisibility undermines rather than creates the networks that cities need. Undine's desire to rise means that she must confront a succession of social rules designed to limit the visibility of the members of high society, especially the female

³⁰ Elmer Moffatt, Undine's first and, by the end of the novel, fourth husband, is a titanic manipulator and financier, like Cowperwood. But although Elmer manages to win his fortune without Undine's assistance, it is clear that Undine is the dynamically superior of the pair – more ambitious and successful than even the novel's billionaire speculator.

members. An early description of Undine: “Her black brows, her reddish-tawny hair, and the pure red and white of her complexion defied the searching decomposing radiance: she might have been some fabled creature whose home was in a beam of light” (*Custom* 14). As a creature whose natural home is pure radiance, Undine will have a long battle to enter a society that prides itself on a certain amount of invisibility.

The first dilemma Undine faces in the novel involves trying to decipher the socially correct course of action in a world with multiple social systems. Undine’s father has made a small fortune in Apex City, and the family has moved from Apex to New York City in an attempt to transmute that economic power into social status for Undine. Undine has been attempting to enter New York Society for months, without success, and has received her first big break: an invitation from Mrs. Fairford, Ralph Marvell’s sister and a member of the incredibly well-regarded Dagonet clan. And yet, while Undine “read in the *Boudoir Chat* of one of the Sunday newspapers that the smartest women were using the new pigeon-blood notepaper with white ink,” Mrs. Fairford’s invitation was “on the old-fashioned white sheet, without even a monogram” (*Custom* 12). This represents a “disappointment” to Undine, and she goes through a series of emotions, first a feeling of superiority to Mrs. Fairford, then a fear that the pigeon-blood paper is not the “smartest” after all, and then finally deciding, in a flare of self-regard, that “she wasn’t going to truckle to any woman who lived in a small house down beyond Park Avenue...” (*Custom* 13). Whereas Mrs. Fairford renders herself invisible – no color on her stationery, and no monogram – Undine insists on a most visible display, believing herself to be following the correct style. Those armed with a knowledge of the distinctions between social and economic class can already see the error in Undine’s thinking: the smallness of Mrs. Fairford’s house is an indicator of her economic class, not her

social community. And yet, we also know that “the street” is a highly important marker of social status, and 38th Street past Park Avenue is decidedly not Fifth Avenue. Something, it seems, is amiss.

Undine’s problem, as we shall see, is that there are “[u]nsuspected social gradations” operating that she does not understand – multiple sets of values in conflict (*Custom* 19). Mrs. Fairford is extending the invitation to Undine because her brother Ralph Marvell wants to meet her; Undine met Ralph while out in a social gathering that included Claud Walsingham Popple, the portrait painter who is the most socially “in” person Undine has yet met. The unsuspected social gradations are simply this: according to Mrs. Heeny, masseuse and society expert, the popular portrait painter Popple (and his patron, Peter van Degen) “aint’ nearly as in it [society]” as Ralph Marvell, who Undine refers to as “the little fellow” (*Custom* 5). Claud Popple is fabulously successful; all of the society ladies, it seems, must have a portrait by him. Peter van Degen is even more fabulously wealthy, buying whatever strikes his fancy, maintaining an enormous yacht and multiple luxurious homes, and seemingly operating at the very top of New York society. How then is Marvell superior to them socially? Popple “seemed so much more in the key of the world she read about in the Sunday papers – the dazzling, auriferous world of the Van Degen, the Driscolls, and their peers” (*Custom* 16).

The answer is a modulation of visibility. The Van Degen-Driscoll world, of which Popple is an orbiting member, is a dazzling beacon – an “auriferous” celebration of wealth and prestige taking place on Fifth Avenue. Popple’s role is to increase the visibility of this world: painting portraits of the wealthy members of society reproduces their wealth, beauty and prestige, allowing it to be displayed prominently in their home or in a gallery. Popple is a

high-class advertiser, telling the world about the wealth of his patrons. And those patrons are nationally and even internationally visible: Undine and her mother followed the “least doings” of these “social potentates” before they even moved to New York, in the Apex City³¹ papers (*Custom* 8). The Van Degen-Driscoll set broadcasts even its “least doings” to unrefined places like Apex; every action of any of its members is magnified and put on display for the appreciation of the socially lower classes of the rest of the nation. When Undine takes an opera box in order to try to meet Van Degen and become part of that dazzling beacon of society life, she believes that doing so makes her “part of the sacred semicircle whose privilege it is, between the acts, to make the mere public forget that the curtain has fallen” (*Custom* 38). At the opera, the real show is not the opera but the visibility of the privileged classes; indeed, Undine’s trip to the opera is focused so strongly on those in boxes around her that, when the opera itself begins, “[t]he music, the scenery, and the movement of the stage, were like a rich mist tempering the radiance that shot on her from every side” (*Custom* 38-39). The actual theatrical event – the opera – becomes not a beacon, but a screen or a mist that mutes the radiance of the Van Degen set. And Undine, thriving as she does under the lights, is marvelously suited to join this group; her beauty is such that Mrs. Heeny declares “I never met with a lovelier form” (*Custom* 3). As beautiful young woman of sufficient, although not overwhelming, wealth, Undine is the perfect new recruit for the Van Degen circle. As such, her gambit is successful: the mere sight of her is enough

³¹ The Spraggs hail from the fictional city of Apex, perhaps ironically named – seeing as it is so far from the New York apex of society. Or perhaps the name is not ironic, as financial success in Apex eventually elevates Undine and her final husband to hitherto unknown financial realms. At any rate, Apex seems to be more or less the same place as Zenith in Sinclair Lewis’ *Dodsworth*: a backwards town without high society but where money can be made and, just possibly, a more authentic existence pursued.

to entice Peter Van Degen, who comes to her box and offers to introduce her into his society via a restaurant dinner.

But as we know from Weber, the ease by which beauty and wealth get Undine “in” with the Van Degen set casts doubts on whether or not the Van Degen set are actually at the pinnacle of society. Sure enough, when Undine asks Peter whether his wife – a member of the Dagonet set and friend of Ralph Marvell’s – will join them at the dinner, he responds: “My wife -? Oh, *she* doesn’t go to restaurants – she moves on too high a plane” (*Custom* 43). Mrs. Van Degen doesn’t go to restaurants because they are places to see and be seen; they are deliberate mechanisms of visibility, designed to get names in the papers and increase the social visibility of all concerned. And as we have seen, this particular visibility cuts across classes and geography: it appears in the Sunday papers all over the country. It is thus a theatrical performance which is meant to inform all of America of the wealth and social desirability of those whose actions are disseminated. The Dagonet view of this process is expressed by Ralph in an internal monologue:

he said to himself that what Popple called society was really just like the houses it lived in: a muddle of misapplied ornament over a thin steel shell of utility. The steel shell was built up in Wall Street, the social trimmings were hastily added in Fifth Avenue; and the union between them was as monstrous and factitious, as unlike the gradual homogeneous growth which flowers into what other countries know as society, as that between the Blois gargoyles on Peter Van Degen’s roof and the skeleton walls supporting them. (*Custom* 46)

Later referring to these wealthy members of the Van Degen set as “Invaders” seeking entrance into polite society by marriage³² (*Custom* 49), Ralph is quite clear that what they

³² Although Ralph is among the more sympathetic and perceptive characters of the novel, we should be skeptical of his distaste for the invaders and his sense of nostalgia for an older, less visible society. In her autobiography *A Backwards Glance* (1934), Wharton tells how, in a Dumas play, a French Duchess must receive her husband’s American mistress and, while doing so, orders all the windows of her salon thrown open because “*Que tout le monde entre maintenant!*” (“Everyone comes in now!”) (*Backwards* 977). But although the French society which has been invaded is much older and more organic than Ralph’s society, Wharton has little sympathy for the Duchess’ belief that a

call society is an inappropriate misappropriation of the term. Their society is entirely wealth-based – hence the attack on Wall Street – and an entirely surface creation: just as Van Degen has imported European gargoyles to give his newly built mansion the aura of a cultural legacy, so has he married a member of the Dagonet circle to give his own circle the aura of a social legacy. The result is an unnatural monstrosity: an artificially built “society,” authorized not by the rightful guardians of the gates to society (the Dagonets et al) but by the approval of the socially lesser, who are dazzled by the “misapplied ornament” and unable to see beyond it. And Ralph is insistent that “real” society is “organic” – the Invaders have built a society rather than growing one. Such an artificially constructed set of relations can’t be anything but a sad parody of a naturally occurring order.

The Dagonet response to this situation is to keep the Invaders out of their drawing-rooms as much as possible, and to refrain from making such ostentatious shows of wealth and privilege. Their society, it seems, is not based on visibility, but invisibility. Like the van der Luydens of *The Age of Innocence*, the Dagonets ensure their social value remains high by meting it out in small increments, behind closed doors – matching their lack of financial largesse with a lack of social largesse. But, in fact, the Dagonet social system turns on something like a very visible invisibility. As Mrs. Heeny reads to Undine and her mother from a society notice: “Mrs. Henley Fairford [Ralph’s sister] gave another of her natty little dinners last Wednesday as usual it was smart small and exclusive and there was much gnashing of teeth among the left-outs as Madame Olga Loukowska gave some of her new

tradition has ended: “In the Paris I knew, the Paris of twenty-five years ago, everybody would have told me that those windows had remained wide open ever since [...] The same thing was no doubt said a hundred years earlier, and two hundred years even, and probably something not unlike it was heard at the more exclusive *salons* of Babylon and Ur” (*Backwards* 977). Society, Wharton is saying, always imagines itself as having been invisible in the past, but newly rendered visible by the invaders. The windows are thrown open in every generation, and that generation always seems to think it is the first time.

steppe dances after dinner” (*Custom* 6). The Dagonets do not appear publicly, in opera boxes or restaurants, draped in diamonds. They do not have their portraits painted by Popple, nor do they adorn their houses with European gargoyles. They just give small, smart dinners that nevertheless do get covered by the newspapers – not in the Apex Sunday paper, but in *Town Talk*. The only real difference between a Dagonet dinner and a Van Degen dinner, besides raw ostentatiousness, is the intended audience. The Van Degen restaurant dinner, conveyed by the papers to the entire country, enshrines the diners as the pinnacle of society for those who do not know any better. The Dagonet dinner at home, conveyed by a local society paper, enshrines (or at least attempts to enshrine) its diners as the pinnacle of society in the minds of the Van Degen set. Although it takes place behind closed doors, rather than in public, it is nevertheless an expression of visibility; it is a very visible display of remaining invisible. Such a display ensures that the Dagonet set keeps their place in society by virtue of the gnashing of the teeth of the Invaders who were not invited. The Dagonets, in other words, make sure that all of the Invaders see that no Invaders are seen at their exclusive dinner.

Ultimately, the novel suggests that both of these visibility-based systems bring negative social outcomes. Ralph Marvell, who as a doting father and an aspiring poet is the novel’s most sympathetic and most perceptive character, rejects both systems.³³ We have

³³ Alfred Kazin bemoans the fact that Wharton was most interested in the Ralph Marvells and the Lily Barts of her world – the “fine spirits” who, like Wharton, feel constrained by old New York society. As Kazin puts it: “It is the aristocrat yielding, the aristocrat suffering, who bestrides her best novels” when she would be better off following Howells’ example and writing about “the archetype of the new era,” “the man who has risen” (59, 58-59). While this complaint might have some force with *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth*, it has no bearing on *The Custom of the Country*. Ralph Marvell does not “bestride” the novel – Undine Spragg does. Despite Kazin’s objections, Wharton’s novel is about “the woman who has risen.” Although Ralph is an obvious analogue for Wharton and engages the reader’s sympathies, it is Undine who has the novel’s attention. And R.W.B. Lewis, in his biography of Wharton, suggests that, in addition to Ralph, Elmer and even Undine are versions of Wharton. As Lewis puts it: “So imagined, we see in Undine Spragg how Edith sometimes appeared to the view of the harried and aging Henry James: demanding, imperious, devastating, resolutely indifferent to the needs of others; something like an irresistible force of nature” (350). Kazin accuses

already seen his contempt for the Van Degen system; its emphasis on a vulgar and material visibility deeply offends his sensibilities. His marriage to Undine Spragg is a direct result of his distaste for Van Degen vulgarity; although he is quite aware of Undine's "crudity and limitations," he chooses to marry her because "the girl's very sensitiveness to new impressions, combined with her obvious lack of any sense of relative values, would make her an easy prey to the powers of folly" running free in the Van Degen set (*Custom* 51-52). But Ralph does not marry Undine in order to whisk her from Van Degen's vulgar society into refined Dagonet society, because "Ralph had never taken his mother's social faiths very seriously. Surveying the march of civilization from a loftier angle he had early mingled with the Invaders, and curiously observed their rites and customs" (*Custom* 50). Feeling detached from both the Van Degen set and his own set, Ralph observes both sets with a sort of anthropological or sociological interest that makes him a sort of proto-Weber – he has dissected the customs and rites of both sets.³⁴ He abhors Van Degenism, but he also has no interest in Harriet Ray, the girl hand-selected by his mother for marriage. Harriet Ray's beliefs perfectly encapsulate the Dagonet way: "She regarded Washington Square as the birthplace of Society, knew by heart all the cousinships of early New York, hated motor-cars, could not make herself understood on the telephone, and was determined, if she married,

Wharton of telling her own story in lieu of the story of the Invaders; in *Custom of the Country*, she has actually done something more interesting than either option: told her story *as if* she were one of the Invaders.

³⁴ In his article on appearances in *The House of Mirth* and *The Custom of the Country*, Christopher Gair expands on Ralph's sense of his own set as "aborigines" of anthropological interest. As Gair puts it: "Instead of privacy, Washington Square is now under surveillance, with its inhabitants soon to be 'exhibited at ethnological shows, pathetically engaged in the exercise of their primitive industries'" (357, quoting *Custom*). Although Gair focuses on ways that Ralph renders the Dagonet set an ethnic group on par with the Native Americans, for my purposes Gair's observation is useful for the way that it suggests that the Dagonet rearguard action of invisibility is failing. Whereas the Dagonets see themselves as above and beyond the Invaders' vulgar visibility, the most perceptive member of the Dagonet set sees them more as a museum curiosity, something to be displayed as an exhibit of an ancient age.

never to receive a divorced woman” (*Custom* 49). Geographical insularity, technological backwardness, and an emphasis on carefully choreographed visibility – being seen with a divorced woman is out of the question – these are the rules of style that dictate the status honor of the Dagonet set, but Ralph has no interest in them. And so, mistakenly believing Undine to be unsullied by either system, Ralph imagines a marriage between them in which they together form a society of two, separate from the social demands of either system,³⁵ and that he can bring this about because of Undine’s “sensitiveness to new impressions” – impressions he can provide. Ralph imagines this process in the most heroic terms possible: “he seemed to see her like a lovely rock-bound Andromeda, with the devouring monster Society careering up to make a mouthful of her, and himself whirling down on his winged horse – just Pegasus turned Rosinante for the nonce – to cut her bonds, snatch her up, and whirl her back into the blue...” (*Custom* 53).

Of course, Ralph’s project is destined for failure – we could see that even without the reference to Don Quixote. Undine, it turns out, is a creature purely devoted to seeing and being seen. Ralph intends to provide her with the “new impressions” that will unite them on their honeymoon to Europe, but she turns out to be totally unreceptive to them. Ralph takes Undine to Italy for a summer honeymoon, precisely because Italy will not be crowded in the summer, and she begs him to take her to Switzerland instead. Ralph tells her that he knows “a little place in Switzerland where one can still get away from the crowd” but that is not what Undine wants (*Custom* 93): “He had seen her face droop as he suggested the possibility

³⁵ This seemingly unattainable marriage ideal looms throughout Wharton’s fiction, and is never attained. Newland Archer is looking for this sort of union with the Countess Olenska; Lily Bart considers such a relationship with Lawrence Selden. Even poor Ethan Frome tries to run away from his small town with a woman who understands him better than his wife. In *The Reef*, this relationship comes close to actually occurring in the marriage of George Darrow and Anna Leath, only to inevitably fail to come about. In *Glimpses of the Moon*, Susy Branch and Nick Lansing actually effect such a marriage, only to immediately be drawn apart by society pressures.

of an escape from the crowds in Switzerland, and it came to him, with the sharpness of a knife-thrust, that a crowd was what she wanted – that she was sick to death of being alone with him” (*Custom* 94). The communion Ralph had hoped for had not come to pass; Ralph finds that “her mind was as destitute of beauty and mystery as the prairie school-house in which she had been educated” and for all of Ralph’s snobbery, his impression seems to be accurate (*Custom* 94). Undine’s only goal is to see and be seen; she is still chasing the dazzling Van Degen world that she aspired to while in Apex, and has mistaken Ralph as an avenue to achieving it. The mental and emotional connection that Ralph dreamed of has not come to pass and, as he now realizes, will never come to pass. Ralph’s wife looks her best in the glare of a beam of light, and has come to Europe to find such a beam. Undine is chasing the crowd – a crowd of people who will illuminate her, and whom she can illuminate in turn.

The Dagonet ethos is not built around providing such a crowd, and the Dagonet coffers are equally inappropriate for such conspicuous visibility. Ralph’s failures in delivering the dazzling Van Degen lifestyle having stacked up, Undine reappraises the relationship between the Van Degen and Dagonet social circles:

Mrs. Marvell’s [Ralph’s mother, nee Dagonet] classification of the world into the visited and the unvisited was as obsolete as a medieval cosmogony. Some of those whom Washington Square left unvisited were the centre of social systems far outside its ken, and as indifferent to its opinions as the constellations to the reckoning of the astronomers; and all these systems joyously revolved about their central sun of gold. (*Custom* 123)

Previously, Undine had accepted at least some version of society as a pyramid, with the Van Degen Invaders near the top but the Dagonet old families at the absolute pinnacle. She now sees the Invasion not as a feudal system, with the Invaders paying the old families “feudal allegiance” (*Custom* 122), but as a new Copernican revolution. The Dagonets play the Ptolemaic role: naively enshrining themselves at the center of the entire Universe, when the

truly informed know that there are constellations far beyond the Dagonet ken, and that the most important element in the entire system is the Van Degen circle: the central sun of gold. By equating wealth with the sun, Undine is embracing a misguided belief that visibility is purely dependent on wealth, and that it is by the wealth of the Van Degen set that the Dagonets are visible at all. But if this revolution is occurring – as it does occur between the penultimate and final chapters of *The Age of Innocence* – the paradigm shift is not yet complete. After all, Peter Van Degen has married a Dagonet, and it is Mrs. Heeny, the outside expert on all things New York Society, who assures Undine that the Van Degens can't even get invited to Dagonet dinners. The feudal system, at least in part, remains; the subtle visibilities of the Dagonet method can still trump the radiance of the Van Degen sun from time to time. In short, New York is divided between cosmogonies – the simple hierarchy has been replaced with competing, but certainly not democratic, chains of being.

Undine's machinations to get out of the Dagonet circle and into the Van Degen one result in her divorce but not in access to the Van Degen set (Peter Van Degen hears she was horribly cruel to Ralph during his illness, and even the Van Degens don't condone spousal cruelty when it becomes publicly known). Eventually she turns to European society; she tries to leverage her custodial rights over their son to get Ralph to give her the money for an annulment but, as he does not have the money, Ralph chooses suicide. The death of a spouse being even better than an annulment, Undine marries the French aristocrat Raymond de Chelles, only to find in French society an even more restrictive set of rules of appearance than in the Dagonet circle, the French aristocrats having had millennia longer to perfect their "organic" arrangement. For a creature whose preferred mode of visibility is the Van Degen radiance, the Chelles' system is the worst fate imaginable: "Dynasties had fallen, institutions

changed, manners and morals, alas, deplorably declined; but as far back as memory went, the ladies of the line of Chelles had always sat at their needlework on the terrace of Saint Desert, while the men of the house lamented the corruption of the government [...]” (*Custom* 328). The result is a house full of “the embroidered hangings and tapestry chairs produced by generations of diligent chatelaines” (*Custom* 327). In other words, Saint Desert, the ancestral Chelles home, is full of ancient works of art which are never to be removed from the house and never to be seen by anyone outside the family and the very, very few visitors they receive. Saint Desert contains some of the most famous tapestries in the world, including some given as a gift by Louis the Fifteenth (*Custom* 337). But they, like the Dagonets, are merely meant to be appreciated by virtue of their invisible existence; to be seen by virtue of not being seen. Whereas Mrs. Ralph Marvell was expected to have her profile increased by virtue of keeping a low profile, the Marquise de Chelles becomes the mere instrument of such a system, expected to work with a needle on tapestries that would then have their profile raised by virtue of keeping a low profile. The Dagonets expected her to distinguish between the elegant visited and the vulgar not visited; the Chelles’ expected her to take part in an even less social system, one centered on the vulgar tapestries that are shown and the elegant tapestries which are not shown.

Undine, however, is not that kind of artist. She *is* an artist of the highest order, gifted with, as Ralph knew, “a sensitiveness to new impressions,” but she is her own greatest creation. The other artists in the book are either mere pawns for one of the social systems, like Popple and his society portraits or the Chelles’ women and their famous tapestries, or totally abstracted from the vital processes of life, like Ralph Marvell and his doomed

classical poetry.³⁶ Undine practices the distinctively feminine art of turning herself into an exquisitely sculpted (if a trifle heavy, as she always worries) presence, radiant with jewels and the latest fashions. She does not want her handiwork to be admired, nor does she want to be admired in a painting; Undine presents herself rather than submit to representation. But despite her beauty and her artistic ability to present that beauty in a stunning way, Undine ultimately fails at being a society woman because she can never make her own desires flow into the channels laid down by society. She makes herself beautiful, but she is too showy for the Dagonet set, too hateful for the Van Degen set, and too assertive for the Chelles set (She is also, in a memorable sequence, too ignorant for the Chelles set – she is invited to large parties but not intimate ones because she has nothing to say. As a friend tells her, “they’re delighted to bring you out at their big dinners, with the Sevres and the plate. But a woman has got to be something more than good looking to have a chance to be intimate with them: she’s got to know what’s being said about things” (344). Undine’s lack of interest in Ralph’s life of the mind has made her unsuited for conversation). Her beauty, and her ability to showcase it, are only enough in a system of unrestricted visibility, and Undine can find no such system.

Of course, Undine exacts her revenge on all the systems that restrict her visibility. She blows up the entire order of the Chelles in her first (and last) major act of rebellion

³⁶ Donna Campbell’s description of Vandover’s romantic art, in Norris’s novel *Vandover and the Brute*, could just as well describe Ralph’s: “Vandover refuses to look at life, preferring instead to dwell on tame possibilities of life filtered through another’s imagination. In his failure to step outside the stock responses and tired convenions of an effete, exhausted tradition, he must fail because he looks to literature for his models” (104). *Custom of the Country*, like *Vandover and the Brute*, validates the person who plunges into life itself, not that one who attempts to represent it via artistic conventions, whether those conventions are high-minded like Ralph’s or vulgar like Popple’s. *Custom* is particularly remarkable because it features a woman who attacks life head-on; whereas Norris complained that literature had become too effeminate, Wharton and Undine prove that a female novelist can too play the “‘man’s game’ that American literature was becoming” in the naturalist age of Norris, Dreiser, Crane, and London (173).

against it: she commits the sacred crime of asking an outsider, an art agent, to Saint Desert to see the tapestries. And with the agent comes Elmer Moffatt, Undine's first husband from Apex and a newly minted billionaire who, like Adam Verver in James's *The Golden Bowl*, is busy transmuting his wealth into an unparalleled collection of European art. Elmer offers to deliver Undine from her confinement and restore her to her rightful place at the pinnacle of New York society; in a delicious bit of irony, New York society visits the Moffatts in their opulent Paris *hotel*, complete with the newly purchased Louis the Fifteenth tapestries, sold in act of desperation by the Chelles family. The tapestries and Undine, having both been rescued from their enforced invisibility, are ready to once again be seen, back in circulation after their long confinement; even French society must bow to Elmer's wealth, despite the vulgarity of his marriage: "The French world had of course held out the longest; it had strongholds that she might never capture. But already seceders were beginning to show themselves, and her dinner-list that evening was graced with the names of an authentic Duke and a not-too-damaged Countess" (*Custom* 375). To go with these seceders is the entire Van Degen set, including the painter Popple and Peter Van Degen himself. Finally, with infinite wealth behind her, Undine has the last laugh: she has become the creature of pure visibility that she aspired to – the radiant light at the center of a social circle, by which others are illuminated.

Unfortunately for Undine, hers turns out to have only been the penultimate laugh. She learns in conversation with Elmer that he cannot be an ambassador, as ambassadors cannot have divorced wives:

But under all the dazzle a tiny black cloud remained. She had learned that there was something that she could never get, something that neither beauty nor influence nor millions could ever buy for her. She could never be an Ambassador's

wife; and as she advanced to welcome her first guests she said to herself that it was the one part that she was really made for. (*Custom* 377-378)

Here is the final blow against the kind of visibility Undine has been chasing. Acknowledging, in her indirect discourse, that she is a performing artist playing a part, she finds that the biggest system of all – the federal government of the United States – has denied her a spot on the biggest stage. Undine has finally learned the lesson that Ellen learned before *The Age of Innocence* began and that Newland learned in its pages: every society every where has a set of rules governing proper behavior. All along, or at least ever since she mistakenly came to believe that Van Degenism constituted a Copernican revolution, Undine has known that all it takes is immense wealth to become the solar center of society. Any part, in other words, is available to a billionaire's wife; the various injunctions in Dagonet New York and Chelles France which attempted to restrict and channel visibility can be left behind. But Undine has failed to learn that those injunctions, and others, enforce social order. The most comical and backwards of them all was the injunction against divorce, the airing of one's private difficulties in the public eye. In Harriet Ray's pathetically old-fashioned belief systems, divorce and telephones are equally to be avoided – surely Undine was safe in ignoring such antiquated rules, the leftover requirements of an outdated paradigm. But the thrice-divorced Undine has had a black cloud thrown over the dazzle that she is meant to radiate: a part that she could play has been denied to her. We have seen her throughout the novel as vain, thoughtless and cruel, but we have also seen her as strong, determined, and ambitious. In this final passage, we see her in a new way: a fool who never grasped that society would always regulate visibility. The only way seems to be the artistic sort of marriage offered by Ralph Marvell in which two lovers create their own pure space but, as we have seen, such a marriage is in Wharton's novels just another illusion. In the *Custom of the Country*, Undine

leaps from Dagonet to Chelles to Van Degen visibility, looking for the one that allows the truest satisfaction of her desires, without realizing that all forms of visibility come at the price of giving up some of one's desires. And Wall Street, and Washington Square, and Paris, and D.C. all come with their own systems, their own ways – whether crude or refined, legally coercive or socially enforced – of determining how and when and where and with whom one can be seen. These rules stifle those of such wildly different temperaments as Ralph Marvell and Undine Spragg, and divide New York and, indeed, the world into separate and non-compatible social systems. We will meet, in Dreiser's *The Titan*, a figure who manages to disregard and supersede social mores, a male version of Undine who lives in a post-moral world of pure business (also known as "Chicago"). But in the New York context, leaving behind constraints on visibility is impossible, and the challenge instead is to alter systems of visibility so that they can reduce, rather than produce, suffering.

"Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns": A Space for Benign Visibility

The Custom of the Country is in many ways an articulation of the stultifying nature of social regulations of visibility, but it concludes with an ironic sigh of resignation: extreme regulations on visibility, ala the Dagonets or Chelles, seem to be harmful, but there is ultimately no escape from some system of visibility, some code of honor which determines who can see and be seen. Visibility, it seems, must be channeled, for as an unrefined force it is a destructive one – Undine, as its embodiment, wreaks havoc in every realm she enters. In Frederick Law Olmstead's manifesto "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns" (one of the clearest distillations of Olmsted's philosophy, along with "A Consideration of the Justifying Values of a Public Park") visibility is presented as a potentially destructive force

which can be used productively so long as it is properly channeled and regulated. Whereas Undine was merely concerned with finding the social sector of New York (or Europe) that would yield both the highest prestige and the fewest restrictions on visibility, Olmsted was concerned that the larger social fabric was fraying as Manhattan's increased density placed more and more pressure on the individual. Presented as a paper in 1870, after more than a decade of work on Central Park and just a few years from the completion of the original Greensward Plan, Olmsted uses "Public Parks" to suggest that parks are a necessary intervention into cities where citizens have come to see too much of one another. This problem of the overcrowding of cities – which, as we shall see, is for Olmsted a problem of visibility – will only increase.

It was in 1893 that Frederick Jackson Turner first offered up his famous thesis about American history: "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development" (1). Turner develops his thesis over the course of the essay, explaining how all of the most important aspects of American life – not just agriculture, but also democracy, ethnicity, industry, and others – were shaped by the process of westward expansion. As Turner puts it: "Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and anew development for that area" (2). Now that the frontier has closed, "with its going has closed the first period of American history" (38). Whereas frontier advancement was a self-regulating process that produced the modern United States over the course of the previous four centuries, the twentieth century would have to, in Turner's reading, find some new way to advance and transform itself. And although Turner is obviously pleased with the American character as

created by the frontier, he also notes certain downsides in the national character formed by the frontier process. The frontier did a great deal of good by serving as a key factor in “the promotion of democracy here and in Europe” via the frontier’s “product[ion] of individualism” (30). But this promotion has a dark side: “The tendency is anti-social. It produces antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control. The tax gatherer is viewed as a representative of oppression” (30). With the frontier closed and urban spaces on the rise, antisocial and individualistic democracy will not be sufficient for the governing of America. Turner identifies the problem, but offers no programmatic solution – his is a diagnosis, nothing more.

Speaking more than twenty years before Turner’s famous essay was written, Frederick Law Olmsted offered up a solution to the problem later identified by Turner. Olmsted begins by identifying the many ways that towns and cities are far superior to rural areas for social purposes, to the point that rural areas are struggling to sustain themselves against the social pull of the city. Olmsted:

The last "Overland Monthly" tells us that in California "only an inferior class of people can be induced to live out of towns. There is something in the country which repels men. In the city alone can they nourish the juices of life."

This of newly built and but half-equipped cities, where the people are never quite free from dread of earthquakes, and of a country in which the productions of agriculture and horticulture are more varied, and the rewards of rural enterprise larger, than in any other under civilized government! With a hundred million acres of arable and grazing land, with thousands of outcropping gold veins, with the finest forests in the world, fully half the white people live in towns, a quarter of all in one town, and this quarter pays more than half the taxes of all. "Over the mountains the miners," says Mr. Bowles, "talk of going to San Francisco as to Paradise, and the rural members of the Legislature declare that 'San Francisco sucks the life out of the country.'" (171)

California, by 1870, had become and would continue to be the closest thing to an American Garden of Eden. Olmsted describes the enormous state in precisely these terms: the finest

forests in the world, outcropping gold veins (seemingly available for the taking with little effort) and a hundred million acres of usable farm land. Those looking for financial advantage from the land can find it in gold or in agriculture and can do so in an unspoiled paradise, amidst forests that have yet to be decimated for industrial purposes. And Olmsted even mentions that the fruits of agriculture and horticulture are more varied than anywhere else in the civilized world – the cattle rancher, the sheep rancher, the wheat grower, and even the citrus fruit lover can all find land in California! The last, best part of the frontier is still open, but Americans have stopped flocking to it.

Even with gold for the taking, land for the using, and picturesque redwoods providing the vital natural scenery, Olmsted quotes the *Overland Monthly*: “only an inferior class of people can be induced to live out of towns.” More strikingly, these California towns are “but half-equipped cities, where the people are never quite free from the dread of earthquakes.” Olmsted paints this scene – a Garden of Eden shunned for a half-equipped, earthquake wracked city – to get at a central fact that is arriving faster than Turner realized: the city has become the preferred way of living. This is true even when the city itself lacks the great advancements we think of cities having, and the surrounding land surpasses any other rural area in arability and natural beauty.³⁷ Most tellingly, Olmsted argues forcefully that the reason for moving to the cities is *not* economic. This is the traditional explanation for the rise of the great cities in the 19th century; the industrial revolution and the corresponding shift in the organization of labor means that the city offers the greatest opportunity for economic

³⁷ Lest his audience think that there is something unique about the American city, Olmsted goes through a list of European countries experiencing the same phenomenon; the conventional wisdom, Olmsted says, is that “among no other people were rural tastes so strong, and rural habits so fixed, as with those of Old England,” but urbanization marches onward in England, as it does in Ireland, Scotland, France, Russia, Prussia, etc (173). The urge to enter the city overcomes, in the European context, millennia of “rural tastes” and “rural habits.”

advancement. But although this reorganization may have taken place in Europe, and will yet take place in the next few decades in the U.S, economic success seems more likely in the rural West than the urban Northeast:

Again, we have said to the world, "Here are countless deposits of the precious metals, scattered about over many millions of acres of wild land. We will give them away as fast as they can be found. First come, first served. Disperse then, and look for them." In spite of this policy, we find that the rate of increase of our principal towns is even now greater than that of the country. (174)

At this point in the 19th century the frontier is not yet closed; there remains a great deal of land, in California and east of California, open to the first people to claim it – they don't even have to be American. And yet American citizens and recent immigrants alike flock to the towns.³⁸

According to Olmsted, the reason is social. For one thing, the city offers distinct cultural advantages: "Compare advantages in respect simply to schools, libraries, music and the fine arts. People of the greatest wealth can hardly command as much of these in the country as the poorest work-girl is offered here in Boston at the mere cost of a walk for a short distance over a good, firm, clean pathway, lighted at night and made interesting to her by shop fronts and the variety of people passing" (175). The work-girl receives, for free, cultural opportunities that the wealthy rural dweller cannot dream of (and Olmsted does not mention this, but the wealthy city dweller obtains correspondingly even greater cultural opportunities). But beyond these cultural advantages there are distinctly social ones; schools, libraries, and the arts are wonderful, but the very streets of the city are made interesting by

³⁸ In *O Pioneers!* (1913), the character Carl Linstrum finds out this truth about economic opportunities in the city. After moving to Chicago to become an engraver, Carl returns to the prairie on the way to the Alaskan goldfields: "Engraving's a very interesting profession, but a man never makes any money at it. So I'm going to try the gold-fields" (42). The city is more interesting, but Carl thinks he has a better chance of making a fortune as a Klondike prospector than as an urban engraver, and by the end of the novel seems poised to become a successful prospector.

“the variety of people passing.” The call of the city, for Olmsted, is the ability to be with and to see other people. The streets themselves become theater scenes, full of humanity on display. Not even the majestic redwoods of California can compete with the chance to see other people on the street. Urban people watching plays an important role for Olmsted; as Betsy Klimasmith points out, Olmsted and Calvert Vaux followed Edmund Burke in believing “that the eye offered access to the outside world and opened a person’s interior to the outside” (Klimasmith 54). This means that what people see in the city and Central Park will be crucial to determining their inner lives. And although Olmsted, following Ruskin, strongly believes that people need to be exposed to nature, he also understands the lure of the city’s culture of looking. Central Park will have to do double duty. First, it will provide the well-known ability for a Manhattanite to get away from it all and get out into nature without ever leaving the island of Manhattan. Second, it will give people a place to people watch in a less dense, more diffuse environment, with nature serving as a screen that modulates and mediates the harsh reality of Manhattan’s teeming multitudes.

It is no coincidence that Olmsted’s city-watcher is a girl; he argues that the desire to enter the city is usually driven by women, who seem to him to feel more strongly the urge to enter town life:

In all probability, as is indicated by the report (in the ‘New York Tribune’) of a recent skillful examination of the condition and habits of the poor sewing women of that city, a frantic desire to escape from the dull lives which they have seen before them in the country, a craving for recreation, especially for more companionship in yielding to playful girlish impulses, innocent in themselves, drives more young women to the town than anything else. (175)³⁹

³⁹ Olmsted seems to agree with Charlotte Perkins Gilman that country women, trapped in their rural homes, have only a future of neurosis and compulsion in front of them. Gilman writes about Mary E. Wilkins’ characters: “The main area of their mind being occupied with a few people and their affairs, a tendency to monomania appears” (qtd in Fleissner 76). But according to Jennifer Fleissner, Gilman’s solution to this problem is “a more rationally organized feminine sphere” in which domestic spaces are given the same treatment as factory spaces in the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor (77,

The country offers only dull lives stretching off into the future; indeed, the country life of the poor women sounds much like the country life of the Marquise de Chelles: no recreation, no companionship, no yielding to impulses. The city, by contrast, offers companionship and recreation, the chance to enjoy cultural opportunities and, above all, social ones. Olmsted is arguing – counterintuitively but quite persuasively – that the rise of the city is not a question of class (in Weber’s term, “economic power.”). It is instead a matter of a style of life – social status. Entrance into a higher economic class will be found far more easily in the country than in the city; the world’s richest farmland is open to anyone who claims it. But there is very little social life in rural America,⁴⁰ and the call of the social is what makes the city so attractive. According to Olmsted, the geographical reorganization of America is the product of social, not economic, factors.

But Olmsted’s Manhattan has overshot citydom and come out on the other side. If even the most half-built, earthquake-ravaged city is preferable to the rural farm because there are so many more people to know, Manhattan is worse even than the rural farm because there are too many people to know. Manhattan is so packed with people, so choked with growth, that Olmsted fears that the social life that the city promises is threatening to become mere potentiality. Among the many evils of the city that Olmsted mentions – disease and misery,

79). This seems to me to be the opposite of Olmsted’s project; if Olmsted’s project more generally is to free city dwellers from the grip of constantly reasoning through the next best move at every moment, he seems particularly interested in allowing women more room to yield to their “girlish impulses.” In short, whereas Gilman sees an increased domestic rationality as the solution to the dreary compulsion of the domestic sphere, Olmsted hopes to build a non-domestic zone where rigid compulsion can become pleasant impulse.

⁴⁰ Olmsted writes: “If we push across the prairie, and call on a farmer who has been settled and doing well upon his land for twenty years, an intelligent and forehanded man, we shall hardly fail to see that very little remains to him or his family of what we formerly, and not very long ago, regarded as the most essential characteristics of rural life.” His children, servants, and friends have all fled the country for the city; the railroad can move his goods into the city and make him richer than ever before, but his social life is permanently stunted (171-172).

vice and crime – many of them can be explained biologically; the air quality in the city is poor, and the air carries not “the elements which we require to receive” but instead “highly corrupt and irritating matters, the action of which tends strongly to vitiate all our sources of vigor” (179). But the problems of the city are “perhaps not adequately accounted for in this way” (179). There is another problem, a potentially larger one, which threatens the city way of life. The great cities have grown up because of their corresponding social advantages, but the quest for economic power has had a deleterious effect on social intercourse. The streets of the city are a welcome chance to see other human beings, and be seen by them. This is one of the great appeals of urban areas. But as the cities become denser, this overabundance of humanity leads to a new outlook. Simply walking through the street necessitates a certain attitude toward one’s fellow citizens: “We may understand these better if we consider that whenever we walk through the denser part of a town, to merely avoid collision with those we meet and pass upon the sidewalks, we have constantly to watch, to foresee, and to guard against their movements. This involves a consideration of their intentions, a calculation of their strength and weakness, which is not so much for their benefit as our own” (179). A simple stroll becomes an exercise in prediction and modeling; in order to avoid collision, each other individual must be sized up, their behavior identified, analyzed, and extrapolated, and steps taken to use their actions for one’s own benefit. A smaller city could offer many chances to come into social communion with other people. Manhattan, however, requires a state of watchfulness towards them, a calculating and self-interested version of seeing. Since seeing other humans is such a crucial part of the appeal of the city, this negative version of seeing threatens to defeat all of the city’s social gains. And this is particularly problematic for Olmsted, since he argues that social communion is one of the main reasons for the rise of the

city. In this example, one's own benefit entails merely avoiding collisions; the problem becomes much greater when this interaction is writ large in a city's economic life:

Much of the intercourse between men⁴¹ when engaged in the pursuits of commerce has the same tendency---a tendency to regard others in a hard if not always hardening way. Each detail of observation and of the process of thought required in this kind of intercourse or contact of minds is so slight and so common in the experience of towns-people that they are seldom conscious of it. It certainly involves some expenditure nevertheless. People from the country are ever conscious of the effect on their nerves and minds of the street contact---often complaining that they feel confused by it; and if we had no relief from it at all during our waking hours, we should all be conscious of suffering from it. It is upon our opportunities of relief from it, therefore, that not only our comfort in town life, but our ability to maintain a temperate, good-natured, and healthy state of mind, depends. (179-180)

The city, which owes its attraction to its potential for social intercourse, has become inimical to social intercourse because of its sheer size and its emphasis on economic power. Strangers study one another in order to experience economic gain at each other's expense. This process has become so regularized that it is unconscious, especially for the city-dwellers; more sensitive visitors from the country feel its effects strongly, even if they might not be entirely conscious of the mechanism that causes them to feel confused. Only the respite of sleep protects the city dweller from breaking down entirely; without an opportunity away from this constant awareness and hardening, a "temperate, good-nature, and healthy state of mind" will become impossible. Consider, for example, what happens in *The Custom of the Country* when Elmer Moffatt offers Ralph Marvell a chance at a business deal. The deal is not illegal, but is unsavory: it involves Ralph and Elmer using inside information to make a trade at the expense of others. Ralph, as the representative of a genteel tradition, is

⁴¹ It is a strange quirk of Olmsted's thinking that he almost always refers to girls or women, rather than men and boys, being attracted to the social aspect of the city, going so far to write: "We all recognize that the tastes and dispositions of women are more and more potent in shaping the course of civilized progress, and again we must acknowledge that women are even more susceptible to this townward drift than men" (174). And yet, when he treats the negative aspect of the city, he switches almost entirely to a discussion of men – women are his social actors, but men are his economic actors.

wracked with guilt; his pre-Invader tradition forbids the (overt) instrumentalization of other humans for financial gain. When Ralph takes his problem to Undine's father, Mr. Spragg solves it by assuring Ralph that he doesn't owe anything to the average person, just the ones in his social group. In a business deal, "it's up to both parties to take care of their own skins" unless one of them had done the other "a good turn at anytime" (165). Absent a social relationship, the hard-hearted dealing of the city can be practiced with a clean conscience. Whereas everyone in the smaller town that was Old New York deserves consideration (in business if not social dealings), New New York is so big and impersonal that it can be divided into those you owe a good turn and those you do not.

The city, because it is full of people, offers unprecedented opportunities for social intercourse, to the point that the country cannot compete. Because the country cannot compete, the city grows rapidly, and an untenable state of affairs results: the city will continue to draw people in with promise of sociability, but once there, the sheer mass of humanity necessitates a hard way of dealing with one another, one which negates the social benefits of the city. The city is the bright beacon of civilization, promising new social horizons, but it is at the same time the forecloser of social horizons. Each citizen must watch each other citizen, if only to ensure that he is not being taken advantage of. Something must be done to rectify the situation. In a strange twist, although both Turner and Olmsted argue that agrarian America is more antisocial, Olmsted argues that the solution to the antisocial city is an importation of some elements of agrarian America in the form of a park. The park provides the clean air which restores biological vigor; Olmsted famously described Central Park as "the lungs of the city." But throughout Olmsted and Vaux's writings is an emphasis on visible nature, "for example, the selection and placement of trees and shrubs to create a

visual sequence that would lead the eye from a darkened foreground to an undefined distant view” (Rosenzweig 130). Olmsted and Vaux were inventing a park that would only cleanse the air for the lungs but also cleanse the landscape for the eyes. But it was about more than seeing nature; it was also about seeing humanity in a new way: “Opportunity and inducement to escape at frequent intervals from the confined and vitiated air of the commercial quarter, and to supply the lungs with air screened and purified by trees, and recently acted upon by sunlight, together with the opportunity and inducement to escape from conditions requiring vigilance, wariness, and activity toward other men---if these could be supplied economically, our problem would be solved” (182-183). Hand in hand with the biological function of the park – the purified air – comes the opportunity to escape from the constant “vigilance, wariness, and activity” that city life requires. The park is less crowded than the city, requiring far less vigilance, and Olmsted believed that nature itself would have a role in ameliorating the negative feelings of men towards one another. While the rural men are too far apart and too independent of each other to be social, the urban men have become too close together and too negatively dependent on one another to be social. Olmsted’s solution is a park which spreads men just far enough apart from one another than an equilibrium can be reached.

But Olmsted is not content to use his park to transform men from wary of each other to merely indifferent or benign towards each other. Instead, he intends to use the park to create a new kind of city-based social intercourse, one which can restore the promise of the city. Olmsted calls the practice of social intercourse the “*gregarious* class of social receptive recreations” (emphasis in original).

Consider that the New York Park and the Brooklyn Park are the only places in those associated cities where, in this eighteen hundred and seventieth year after Christ, you will find a body of Christians coming together, and with an evident glee in the prospect of coming together, all classes largely represented, with a common

purpose, not at all intellectual, competitive with none, disposing to jealousy and spiritual or intellectual pride toward none, each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others, all helping to the greater happiness of each. You may thus often see vast numbers of persons brought closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile. (186)

If the state of California represents a Garden of Eden in its abundant and available natural riches, Olmsted's Central Park is more like Heaven on Earth, perhaps lacking in lions with lambs but featuring Jews with Gentiles. In the increasingly socially sorted city, the park becomes a place for social communion that cuts across all demographic categories: poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile. "All classes are largely represented" – a stunning state of affairs considering the enormous variety in social, political, and economic status found in Manhattan. And this receptive social intercourse is the perfect antidote to the hardness of the city; rather than viewing each other as potential marks, each citizen displays "evident glee in the prospect of coming together." The city has brought them all into contact with one another, but the unregulated processes of the city have resulted in a free flow of enmity. Left to itself, visibility will create social strife. Central Park is an intervention which controls visibility, channeling it so that it serves to bind rather than divide. On the streets of Manhattan, unregulated visibility atomizes individuals, and the result is conflict. In the park, however, the citizens are free from the influence of economic concerns, deliberately uncrowded by Olmsted's design, and relaxed by the presence of nature. The result is a social communion which will strengthen the bonds of the citizens with one another, and counteract the deleterious effects of the hardness of the city's streets.

No less an observer than Henry James describes Central Park, more than three decades after Olmsted's speech, in exactly the terms that Olmsted used. James:

The strange thing, moreover, is that the crowd, in the happiest seasons, at favouring hours, the polyglot Hebraic crowd of pedestrians in particular, has, for what

it is, none but the mildest action on the nerves. The nerves are too grateful, the intention of beauty everywhere too insistent; it "places" the superfluous figures with an art of its own, even when placing them in heavy masses, and they become for you practically as your fellow-spectators of the theatre, whose proximity you take for granted, while the little overworked *cabotine* we have hypothesized, the darling of the public, is vocalizing or capering. I recall as singularly contributive in all this sense the impression of a splendid Sunday afternoon of early summer, when, during a couple of hours spent in the mingled medium, the variety of accents with which the air swarmed seemed to make it a question whether the Park itself or its visitors were most polyglot. The condensed geographical range, the number of kinds of scenery in a given space, competed with the number of languages heard, and the whole impression was of one's having had but to turn in from the Plaza to make, in the most agreeable manner possible, the tour of the little globe. And that, frankly, I think, was the best of all impressions--was seeing New York at its best; for if ever one could feel at one's ease about the "social question," it would be surely, somehow, on such an occasion. (*American* 501-502)

The "social question" which troubled Olmsted and Riis, Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer, Upton Sinclair and Jack London, John D. Rockefeller and Emma Goldman the question of what to do about the poor and the rich and the possible class war, and all the different races and religions, and the socialists and the reactionaries, well, on the right day in Central Park, the social question seems to have found its answer in Olmsted's vision. In James' account it is the park's heavy-handed overproduction of beauty that has modulated the crowd into a pleasant spectacle (and vice versa), but the effect is the same. On the streets of Manhattan James's nerves are rubbed raw and the social question looms large; in the oasis of Central Park, the polyglot crowd comes to resemble Douglass' vision for D.C: a cosmopolitan space in which every language, race, and class is present and all enmity is absent.

Although this description sounds like a total leveling of social classes, Sara Cedar Miller, the official Central Park historian, points out that there is a less egalitarian ethos operating here. Miller notes that Olmsted was the type of social reformer who thought that "the poor need[ed] an education to the refinement and taste of the mental & moral capital of gentleman" (Olmsted qtd in Miller, 20). To this end, Olmsted implemented one of Central

Park's most distinctive features: paralleling the bridle paths and the footpaths. Miller quotes Olmsted and Vaux' plan: "we propose to run footpaths, close to the carriage roads...it is hardly thought that any plan would be popular in New York, that did not allow of a continuous promenade along the drives, so that pedestrians may have ample opportunity to look at the equipages and their inmates" (20). Those who cannot afford carriages can still vicariously experience carriage riding, and draw from that experience an appreciation of the refinement and social manners of the gentleman. Central Park was thus not just a space for the radical loosening of social barriers – although in Olmsted's description of the large meeting-groups, it certainly it is that. It is also a carefully designed delivery system for the morals and manners of the upper classes, providing those less fortunate the chance to model their behavior on their social superiors. Visibility is thus not just dissipated and relaxed, but actively channeled along social and economic lines.

Herein lies the fruits of the failure of Central Park, insofar as it actually seems to have done very little to socially integrate the economic classes of New York and reduce the tensions caused by city living. Indeed, Central Park in the nineteenth century is remembered best as a playground for the rich and socially advantaged. Elbert Peets, the famous architecture critic who saw in Olmsted's disciples the triumph of European snobbery over American design, wrote in 1927:

New York wanted Central Park and wanted to be told that it was the best antidote to her slums. The gentlemen who profited by those slums were not surprised when they found the antidote well laced with bridle paths [...] It was such a pleasant remedy! It was God's wish, or Nature's, and if the Irish didn't walk three miles for the still-water cure, well, it is not our fault that Nature prefers carriage-owning Protestants of English ancestry. (187).

Peets here is mocking Olmsted's high regard for Ruskin's conception of nature as a restorer and redeemer, and describes Olmsted's lofty goals for the Park as the "still-water cure,"

scathingly comparing Olmsted's Ruskinian theories to the quackery of hydrotherapy. More importantly, Peets knows that Olmsted's claims that the park will promote radical mixing are overblown; although Olmsted claims to be providing a Ruskinian, natural solution to the problems of the city, it is not a coincidence that "Nature" in this case seems mostly to have appealed to wealthy Anglo-Saxon Protestants. And Peets' attack hits home. In their history of parks, Karen R. Jones and John Wills show that the impetus for the park was a desire to pay "homage to the United States as an egalitarian and democratic society, in contrast to old Europe" (47). Olmsted initially had to confront naysayers who thought that the upper classes would not patronize the park if it meant mixing with others: "I have been asked if I supposed that 'gentlemen' would ever resort to the Park, or would allow their wives and daughters to visit it?" (194). If the Park is open to all, then the upper classes will not be seen there; can one imagine the Dagonets mingling on the pedestrian paths with day laborers? In 1870, after the Park has been open for more than a decade, Olmsted states triumphantly: "They [the gentleman], their wives and daughters, frequent the Park more than they do the opera or the church" (197). But, in fact, the Park was *mostly* frequented by gentleman and their families in its early days; as Peets points out, most workingclass families were not close enough to visit the park on foot – confined as they were downtown – and could not afford transit to the Park.⁴² Jacob Riis, writing twenty years after Olmsted, reports of a class survey in which, out of 48 schoolboys, "three only had been in Central Park" (140).

⁴² Jones and Willis' book, *The Invention of the Park*, has a subchapter – "An Egalitarian Space?" – which examines the many ways in which "parks were ordered by racial, gender, and class-based strictures" (52). And Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar's masterful history of Central Park, *The Park and the People*, marshals even further evidence that early Central Park was largely an elite space. Among the eye-opening facts laid out by Rosenzweig and Blackmar: visitor counts from the first decade of the park show that "the largest and most regular group arrived at Central Park by carriage or horse" and one "of the first Central Park guidebooks (published in 1860) devoted more space to information on how carriage owners and horses could get to the park than on how to get

Olmsted is not unaware of these faults; he laments that “[f]or practical every-day purposes to the great mass of the people, the Park might as well be a hundred miles away. There are hundreds of thousands who have never seen it, more hundreds of thousands who have seen it only on a Sunday or holiday” (196). This is a regrettable state of affairs, and it is clear that Olmsted regrets it, even though he is obviously not responsible for the shortcomings of public transit in Manhattan nor the placement of the Park far from the downtown slums (Olmsted, among others, designed the park itself, but did not choose its location). But the fact remains that Olmsted’s intervention was a failure if his goal was social reconciliation; he permanently altered the geography of New York City, but failed, in his lifetime at least, to bring about the accompanying social reorganization which was his stated goal. In the Gilded Age, at least, Central Park was not something that united Manhattan into a single city, but something that further divided its have from its have-nots, even as it reinscribed a hierarchy in which those with carriages are the privileged class. We can see the fruits of that failure when we turn to Jacob Riis who sees a city which has fallen from socially dysfunctional to ready to descend into a catastrophically violent class war.

How the Other Half Lives: The Visibility of Poverty

Riis does not, for the most part, take part in a Weberian analysis which accounts for the tricky interactions between class and status; *How the Other Half Lives* is, as befitting Riis’s journalistic background, a blunter instrument than Weber’s sociological theories. And Riis buries his suggestions for the improvements of the city towards the back of his book, unlike Olmsted; again, the difference is between Olmsted the active reformer and Riis the

there by public transportation” (212, 213). Although Olmsted famously opposed the elitist activity of carriage racing, it’s clear that the wealthy and their carriages were a dominant force in the first decades of Central Park.

descriptive journalist. Riis' main goal is simply the showing of the impoverished to the more fortunate – visibility is his project. We have seen, in the quote from *The Portrait of a Lady*, how the lower classes become invisible while the wealthy of *The Custom of the Country* shine like a beacon. Riis' contention is that can be done to help the poor as long as those who have the power to help them live in a willed ignorance towards them, a deliberate non-seeing. Whereas Olmsted was worried that Central Park needed a mechanism by which the wealthy became visible to the poor, Riis is horrified that the poor have become invisible to the wealthy. As such, *How the Other Half Lives* was and remains the premier portrait of how cities create and then refuse to see slums, permanently consigning half (or more) of the population to economic poverty and its accompanying social breakdown. Riis, using a combination of journalistic observation, photography, blueprint diagrams, and recent urban statistics, depicts the half of New York City that has become invisible to the other half. And he goes far further than Olmsted, who describes a tense but not cataclysmic Manhattan. According to Riis, the tenement inscribes class divisions that are destined to result in out-and-out class warfare – literally, armed conflict. The social discord that Central Park was meant to alleviate had, in the decades between Olmsted's 1870 speech and Riis' 1890 book, hardened into a situation a level of conflict that, in Riis' reading, threatened to become a class-war. Furthermore, although Riis was primarily concerned with differences of economic class, his book is also full of proof that there were enormous ethnic divides in the slums. Lower Manhattan was a series of smaller urban areas, Chinatowns and Little Italys, which are the obvious but ultimately inadequate solution to the problem of Manhattan's unprecedented density. The city seems more manageable when it has been divided into discrete micro-cities which are largely homogeneous by ethnicity and economic class, but in

fact such divisions are just another set of fault lines along which the city can be torn.⁴³ Riis, describing the patterns of settlement of various groups, uses the language of warfare. The Jews are “[h]ardly less aggressive than the Italian[s]” and have “overrun the district between Rivington and Division Streets;” the Irish have been driven out by newer immigrants who are steadily “possessing the block, the street, the ward with their denser swarms” (*How* 22, 19). The only eventual solution to this ethnic clash is to do what the Irish have done: become the new landlords and take their “revenge” on the city by dealing with the new immigrants in a “picturesquely autocratic way” (19). Ethnic strife or class warfare are the only two options unless a different system of relations can be found.

Riis’ description of the poverty wrought by industrialized New York is suitably horrifying; this description not only makes up the vast majority of *How the Other Half Lives* but was and remains the best remembered aspect of it. The entire project was made necessary by a fact Riis relates late in the book: “The worst tenements in New York do not, as a rule, *look bad*.” (*How* 207, italics in original). After all, as Riis imagines an opponent arguing, the tenements with their “brown-stone fronts” are much better than “Old World” hovels. Thus Riis’ project is to show how, when the poverty does not look that bad, the city is truly rotten. A large part of the problem, thus, is not that the other half is invisible, but that their suffering has become invisible, masked by a facade (literally) of respectability. On the street, in their best clothes, the poor might not look so poor, and their brownstone buildings with symmetrical windows fronting on the street have an air of middle-class success.

Returning to *The American Scene*, in Central Park, James observes that “It was little to say, in that particular light, that such grossness as want or tatters or gin, as the unwashed face or

⁴³ A fuller consideration of urban ethnic strife and its overcoming is provided by Jane Addams in *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, and this dissertation covers those issues in Chapter 3.

the ill-shod, and still less the unshod, foot, or the mendicant hand, became strange, unhappy, far-off things..." (503). This is precisely Riis's objection: it was possible, seeing the fine facades of their buildings and their best clothes in the Sheep Meadow, to not notice that the very poor were in fact very poor – and suffering.

Riis uses all of the techniques at his disposal to show a New York City of such density and poverty as to shock any reader out of complacency and into action. Diagrams such as the one on p. 8 (Figure 2.1) illustrate how densely packed these tenements are – 12 families to a floor, in this example, with only six of 21 bedrooms having any provision for ventilation. Statistics support this image of a New York City full of people packed on top of each other in increasingly high tenements: "on the East Side, in what is still the most densely populated district in all the world, China not excluded, it was packed at the rate of 290,000 to the square mile" (*How* 6). But above all, it was Riis' photography which rendered the city's poor visible in an unprecedented way. Behind the façade of the brownstone, the tenement dweller was hidden from sight. And street scenes, photographed or painted, were a place of conspicuous visibility, where the rich and poor alike could put on their finest clothes.⁴⁴ But behind the tenement, darkened rooms hid poverty of a kind that most New Yorkers did not even imagine. Riis' print journalism and speeches were unable to penetrate the armor of everyday fashion and the fortress of the brownstone. Riis' breakthrough came via flash

⁴⁴ In *The Virtues of the Vicious*, Keith Gandall's book on Stephen Crane and Jacob Riis' depictions of the slums, Gandall notes that Riis is particularly attracted to the tough, in part because the tough makes such an excellent photograph subject because he wants to participate in New York's culture of looking. As Gandall puts it "The tough, Riis realizes, is eager to be photographed [...] his self-respect is partly based on being seen" (119). And this phenomenon goes far beyond just the tough: Riis "found that people generally like to have their pictures taken, even criminals wanted by the police" (Gandall 14). Riis' night-time visits to the dark tenement thus are the product of a happy combinations: the people in their darkened rooms are so used to the culture of looking that they are happy to be photographed by Riis, but they do not have their daytime finery or brownstone façade to improve their appearance. The result is a uniquely candid shot which shows suffering which would otherwise have gone unseen.

photography, an experimental technology that he was the first to harness for the purposes of photojournalism. Here is Riis' description, drawn from his autobiography, where the idea of photography first beckons to him:

I wrote but it seemed to make no impression. One morning, scanning my newspaper at the breakfast table, I put it down with an outcry that startled my wife, sitting opposite. There it was, the thing I had been looking for all those years. A four-line dispatch from somewhere in Germany, if I remember right, had it all. A way had been discovered, it ran, to take pictures by flashlight. The darkest corner might be photographed that way. (*Making* 267).

Riis was right: the flash photography would do something never before done: show people the reality behind the façade. As Bonnie Yochelson puts it, Riis's flash photographs, "which account for approximately one-fourth of the total, captured what had never been seen before in a photograph." (142). Alexander Alland, Sr., who began the critical reappraisal of Riis as a photographer with his book *Jacob Riis: Photographer & Citizen*, argues that Riis's flash photography made poverty visible in a way that had never before been possible and ushered in a new epistemology of poverty:

Most of all, Riis marveled at the practical impact of his pictures. Truth had previously boiled down to the reporter's word against someone else's [...] Now Riis had the most tangible proof to back his allegations. Few listened when he reported that tenement lodgers slept fifteen to a room; his pictures proved it. [...] From his pictures, "there was no appeal." (28)

Although we might have less faith in the camera's ability to capture pure reality than Riis and his contemporaries did, Riis' flash photography brought an invisible poverty to light in way that was far more objective than any previous method. According to Peter B. Hales, in his history of urban photography, it was Riis' work that established photography as "the preeminent mode of proof in the rhetoric of social and urban reform for the next ninety years" (163). Although critics like Rebecca Zurier and Maren Stange are skeptical of Riis' methods – pointing out that he "manipulated his photographs and arranged them to show the

subjects in the worst possible circumstances” (Zurier and Snyder, 21) and – there is no denying the power of photographs such as “Lodgers in a crowded Bayard Street tenement – ‘five cents a spot.’” That photo, which shows no evidence of manipulation and seems to have been taken as a candid flash photo, shows lodgers literally shoulder to shoulder, packed into a crowded tenement in ways that must have seemed unimaginable to the middle and upper classes of the late 19th century (Figure 2.2). As Yochelson puts it, the flash photos “retain their power today because the harsh light and haphazard compositions convey the chaos of living in poverty” (142). To this day, Riis’ flash photography remains our best chance of knowing life behind the tenement walls. And for Riis’ contemporaries, such photographs rendered invisible poverty visible in a way that brooked no dispute.

Riis needed that new tool to render poverty visible because of the figure haunting *How the Other Half Lives*, The Man With The Knife. Although he does not show up until the 23rd of 25 chapters, The Man With The Knife is a manifestation of James’s “social question,” the most pressing reason for improving the lives of the poor. Riis starts by telling us about an actual man with a knife: standing at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fourteenth Street, the man observes the carriages of the wealthy, “carrying the wealth and fashion of the avenues to and from the big stores down town,” and thinks of how each hour of shopping by the wealthy could feed his children for a year. “There rose up before him the picture of those little ones crying for bread around the cold and cheerless hearth – then he sprang into the throng and slashed about him with a knife, blindly seeking to kill, to revenge” (*How* 207). In Olmsted’s Central Park plan, the pedestrian users of the Park are deliberately brought alongside the carriages, so that they might better imitate their social superiors. In Riis’ description, the mere sight of a carriage is enough to send an impoverished man into a

berserker rage. This particular man with a knife is arrested, locked in a mad house, and forgotten by most, but not by Riis. The man and his knife represent a potential coming class war:

They represented one solution of the problem of ignorant poverty *versus* ignorant wealth that has come down to us unsolved, the danger-cry of which we have lately heard in the shout that never should have been raised on American soil – the shout of ‘the masses against the classes’ – the solution of violence.

There is another solution, that of justice. The choice is between the two. Which shall it be? (*How* 207).

The man with the knife is gone and forgotten, but The Man With The Knife remains, ready to spring on the indifferent wealthy from any street corner, and perhaps, in the future, not alone but with the aid of the rest of his class.⁴⁵ The man with the knife is driven to violence because of too much visibility: he sees the carriages in front of him, ostentatiously visible, and then he compares that image to a hidden one, the sight of his children starving behind tenement walls. When those two images are held side by side, action is demanded. The only avenue available to the lower class is violence, but Riis is holding out hope that, if poverty can be made visible to the upper class, the holders of power can make sure that justice is done. Riis is particularly horrified that things have reached this point in America; other countries, of course, have experienced class conflict of this kind, but America is supposed to have been uniquely immune to these challenges. Free from ancestral aristocracy and possessed of a democratic government, America was not meant to have reached the point where the gulf between the masses and the classes was such that The Man With The Knife would haunt the street corners, but as we have seen, the previous American compact was based on an agricultural, not an urban, society. After introducing The Man With The Knife, Riis’s larger aim has become clear: he is asking the decision-makers of society to choose between justice,

⁴⁵ Less than twenty years later, Jack London published the novel *The Iron Heel* (1907), a futurist parable which imagined just such a class war.

in which they devise a way to bring greater equality to an industrialized society, or violence, in which their inactivity will inevitably give rise to a class war.

As clear as Riis is that *The Man with The Knife* is coming, he is equally clear that it is social geography – the rise of the tenement – which has inscribed this enormous distinction between the masses and the classes. The slum-dwellers are, as he admits, a particularly unsavory group of people: “[t]hey are shiftless, destructive, and stupid.” (*How* 214). But Riis doesn’t stop there: “in a word, they are what the tenements have made them” (*How* 214). Where one lives determines how one will be; there does not seem to be, in Riis’s description, any allowance for the overcoming of social geography. Riis would obviously agree with Stephen Crane that a creature like the beautiful Maggie is “a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district” (*Maggie* 38); Maggie’s family is much more representative of the Bowery dwellers. The poor will be the poor, so long as they live in the slums. The system is a vicious cycle: once a family enters a tenement, their descent into complete poverty is more or less assured:

Rents were fixed high enough to cover damage and abuse from this class, from whom nothing was expected, and the most was made of them while they lasted. Neatness, order, cleanliness, were never dreamed of in connection with the tenant-house system, as it spread its localities from year to year; while reckless slovenliness, discontent, privation, and ignorance were left to work out their invariable results, until the entire premises reached the level of tenant-house dilapidation... (*How* 5)

The key here is the high rent. Laboring under high rents – rents are higher for tenements than they are for “a decent flat house in Harlem” (*How* 17) – the tenants cannot save enough of their wages to live clean, productive lives. Working absurd hours in order to pay for the high rents,⁴⁶ the tenants cannot possibly maintain their living spaces in good order. This inability to keep the apartments in good shape is used as justification for the high rents

⁴⁶ The tenement actually doubly contributes to this situation, because laws against sweatshops apply only to factories, and thus the law “does not reach” any work done in the home (Riis 98).

charged for tenements; according to Riis, the high rents are in fact the reason that tenements cannot be kept in good shape. The result is that even a kind-hearted landlord who improves his buildings will not manage to break the cycle: “The pipes were cut and the houses running full of water, the stationary tubs were put to all sorts of uses except washing, and of the wood-closets not a trace was left” (*How* 214). Having been corrupted by tenement living, the tenants are incapable of living in an improved building; the high rents have done their work too well, and now are actually necessary in order to pay for the damages the tenants do to the tenements. The cycle needs to be broken – social geography must be permanently transformed – but the tenement has done such a good job at reducing the tenant to the lowest level possible that a mere technological innovation will not be equal to the task. And it goes without saying that the tenants in this case, reduced in Riis’ description more or less to the level of animals, have no opportunities to organize themselves socially, as described by Jane Addams in *Twenty Years at Hull-House*.

Riis’ solution to this situation is a new configuration of visibility that reverses Olmsted’s. Whereas Olmsted’s Central Park is a place for the poor to observe the wealthy, Riis thinks the only hope is for the wealthy to observe the poor, not in the theatrical setting of the street or the park, but in their filthy and dilapidated homes. And Riis embraces a market solution that will use visibility for the financial benefit of both rich and poor. The old way of building tenements is ostensibly a purely financial consideration, but, in fact, the destruction wrought by the tenants makes tenements less profitable than they could be, even though they have no improvements and higher rents. The new way of building residential buildings is to give them air shafts, running water, fixtures, fire escapes, and all manners of improvements. But this is not a merely philanthropic endeavor, but a hard-headed business one. As long as

the tenants do not destroy the improvements, the building owner can charge lower rents on these improved buildings, and still make more in the long run than the tenement owner. But how to ensure that the improvements are not destroyed?

By regarding those improvements as investments and watching over them. According to Riis, the first great success in this regard comes from a Miss Ellen Collins, whose idea is “fair play between tenant and landlord” (*How* 225).⁴⁷ Even though “Miss Collins’s tenants are distinctly of the poorest” (*How* 224), they have not destroyed her improvements because “the rents were put as low as consistent with the idea of a business investment that must return a reasonable interest” and Miss Collins and her janitor “see that the rules were observed by the tenants” (i.e. that they do not damage the building) (*How* 225). And once the tenants have been observed for a time and inculcated in new habits, the watchful eye is no longer needed: “The houses seemed to run themselves in the groove once laid down” (*How* 225). After they’ve been watched for a certain amount of time, the tenants begin self-regulating.⁴⁸ Freed from the tyranny of high rents and instructed in the proper care of

⁴⁷ In fact, this particular landlord-tenant relationship comes not from a Miss Collins but from the famous English reformer Octavia Hill. Hill’s plan was more or less exactly like the one described by Riis: the establishment of affordable housing for the poor, a weekly visit from Hill or a subordinate to make sure that the tenants were respecting the property and maintaining middle-class values, and a profit of roughly 5% for the investor (who was, in the case of Hill’s first investor, no less a personage than John Ruskin) (Darley). But although Roy Lubove mentions, in his book *Progressives and the Slums*, that “Riis, White, and other housing reformers lauded the Octavia Hill method” (Lubove 107), Riis strangely doesn’t mention Hill herself in *How the Other Half Lives*, crediting Collins with the idea.

⁴⁸ This plan, implemented by Collins and praised by Riis, is not so much a new method but a rebirth of an older one. The late nineteenth-century tenement is part of a *laissez-faire* system in which poor individuals are allowed to languish in suffering while hidden from view. An earlier era in Europe had a different conception of housing the lower classes, one which Michel Foucault identifies as part of the project of enforced visibility that culminated in Bentham’s Panopticon. Foucault describes the way the surveilling gaze works: the architecture is built “to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control – to render visible those who are inside it [...] to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them” (172). Although much more limited than the Benthamite Panopticon, the Riis/Collins’ plan is

apartments, the tenants' living conditions have greatly improved, and Miss Collins has made at least 5% interest on her investment every month. This is an inversion of Olmsted's belief that the tenants need to see the trappings of wealth in order to reform their lives, work hard, and get ahead. Miss Collins lives with the tenants and watches over them, protecting her investment and instructing the tenants in how to correctly use their newfound technology. Instead of the poor being brought to the rich's playground in order to observe and imitate them, the better off can live with the poor in order to observe and instruct them – and it can all be done at a profit for the rich *and* at reduced rents and improved apartments for the poor.

Admittedly, Riis' project is not a very ambitious one. His goal was not, as Addams's was, the social unity of the higher and lower classes, but merely the staving off of a coming class war. He did not imagine a new social geography in which the economic classes could mix side by side – a system in which status is not determined by economic class – but merely wanted the multi-story dwellings of the poor to be adequate for human habitation. These aims were modest – not an end to class divisions but a reduction in their width, and not a unified social intercourse but the mere avoidance of all-out war – but they were the best he could imagine when confronted with the raw reality of New York in 1890. His ideas were far from Olmsted's near Utopian vision, but they had ultimately the same goal: the easing of social status distinctions that were born out of economic inequities. For Riis, the distinctions between the two halves of society in New York in 1890 were so great that the first project is

more or less what Foucault described: the tenement denizens can be transformed if they can be made visible and are aware of being watched and regulated. If it seems clear, as Foucault states, that “[v]isibility is a trap” (200), Riis has effectively made the case that, in the instance of the tenement, invisibility is a worse trap. Although Maren Stange is certainly right that Riis believed in “photography as surveillance, the controlling gaze as a middle-class right and tool” (23), the alternative that Riis chronicles is much more horrific.

simply avoiding a literal war – and showing the lower half to the upper half is the way to begin the peace process.

A Hazard of New Fortunes: The Realist Project of Middle-Class Visibility

William Dean Howells is in many ways the central figure of the entire culture of looking in New York City. It was Howells who suggested to Crane (via Hamlan Garland) that he make his picturesque sketches of a bread line and of a wealthy home, to show people the highs and lows of New York Society (*Portable Crane* 154). It was Howells who, as editor of *The Atlantic* and then *Harper's*, pushed American fiction toward the urban realism that would come to dominate the early decades of the twentieth century. And Howells even befriended the Ashcan painter Everett Shinn and planned with him a never-completed book that would have combined literary and visual sketches of New York City (see Zurier 170-174 for a description of the project, called *New York By Night*). Howells encouraged journalists, novelists, and painters alike to make images of the city their subject, and as the “Dean” of American letters, he had the cachet to make it happen. And yet, as we shall see, his novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* suggests that he thought the culture of looking lacked the ability to transform American society, even as Howells, a socialist, actively campaigned for such a transformation. Although he was the preeminent broker of the urban visual and a committed social reformer, Howells’ novel undercuts the belief that Riis and Olmsted share: that visibility can transform society.

Howells shared the same aims as Olmsted and Riis; he wanted New York to become a place with more social communion, where the residents felt themselves to be part of a larger community rather than mere atomistic actors. For New York to become a great city, it

had to become more tightly knit and cohesive, more like Howells's beloved Boston or L'Enfant's dream version of D.C. Like Riis, Howells was actively involved in using New York's culture of looking to bring about great solidarity. However, Howells's *A Hazard of New Fortunes* ultimately shows the flaws in Riis's belief that the upper classes will take action if only they can see the poor. Howells himself actually planned to write a book that, like *How the Other Half Lives* or Sinclair's *The Jungle*, would show the lives of the poor in such stark terms that the wealthy would have no choice but to come to their aid. The project was eventually scrapped, but the paintings by Everett Shin that were meant to accompany the book were effective enough that a society woman, Mrs. J.P. Morgan, opened up a haven for the poor after seeing them (Wong 20). But despite his desire to achieve such a reaction, Howells takes a skeptical view towards visibility in the novel, fearing that the mere sight of the poverty of others will not be enough to bring about social change.

Rochelle Gurstein aptly describes the faith in visibility, as it manifests itself in the work of Riis and many other journalists and reformers. Journalists "succeeded in associating privacy with a particularly malevolent kind of secrecy" (62). Other reform-minded figures "were suspicious of privacy and for similar reasons. Like the new journalists, many free-love proponents, sex reformers, feminists, and sociologists were convinced that if private misconduct was flooded with light, good people would act to correct it" (63). In this understanding, visibility itself is the call to reform; as long as wrongdoing can be rendered visible, the better aspects of society – the "good people" – will intervene. Gurstein, quite correctly, links Howells with the belief that society's problems must be shown. Gurstein quotes Howells, defending Henrik Ibsen's willingness to show society's underbelly: "if it is true, is it not well for us to know it? It is dreadful because it is so, not because he shows it so"

(Howells qtd in Gurstein, 65). Ibsen should not be condemned for depicting dreadful things if his depictions are true, and he has probably done great good for society by doing so. It is better, Howells argues, to know about society's problems than to ignore them, for the obvious reason that they can be fixed once brought to light.

Howells believed that urban America should be depicted as it really was; Gurstein is quite convincing on this point.⁴⁹ *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, however, suggests that it's the second part of the reformers' ethos that Howells doubts: good people might not actually intervene when poverty and suffering have been brought to light. Furthermore, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* is to a large extent Howells' narrative about the shortcomings of his own realist project. The main narrative of the novel is driven by the creation of *Every Other Week*, a new magazine that Basil March must move from Boston to New York in order to edit. Although the scale is different – *Every Other Week* is a new publication and Mr. March is barely published poet who's just been shunted into the PR side of the insurance agency he works it – the setup is quite similar to Howells's own move from Boston to Manhattan. The similarities don't end there; just like March, Howells was interested in capturing New York City in sketches for his magazine, and Howells's project eventually became *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. Thus, Howells' novel is a meta-account of his own experiences; as Christopher

⁴⁹ Gurstein also suggests that the generation of writers after Howells were mistaken to link Howells with the earlier, more genteel tradition of realism that they were repudiating. Although Sinclair Lewis famously praised Dreiser from freeing fiction “from Victorian and Howellsian timidity and gentility” (qtd in Gurstein, 117), Gurstein points out that there is very little rhetorical distance between Howells's claim that fiction should have “truth, sincerity, and natural vigor” and Dreiser's claim that fiction should be “a true picture of life, honestly and reverentially set down” (Howells and Dreiser qtd in Gurstein, 65 and 118). But although Gurstein is absolutely correct that the two standard bearers both called for truth in fiction, Lewis' claim is more than justified when we consider the fiction produced by the two men. The vast distance between Howells' novel of the moral awakening of an American tycoon, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), and Dreiser's novels of the amoral business and sexual conquests of an American tycoon, *The Financier* (1912) and *The Titan* (1914), display the gulf that existed between the two generations in their conception of what “truth” was.

Raczkowski points out, “March is committed to the realist project of making New York visible, knowable, and, importantly, manageable” (287). In *Hazard*, the story quickly becomes much less about the magazine, or even the Marches themselves, than about the creation of a cosmopolitan social circle. The magazine brings a highly unlikely set of people into social communion: the stolid, middle-class Marches; the “Invader” and reactionary Mr. Dryfoos; his radical socialist son, Conrad Dryfoos; a radical socialist Old New York heiress, Margaret Vance; a successful professional artist, Angus Beaton; an aspiring romantic artist, Alma Leighton; a slavery-defending Southerner, Colonel Woodburn; an impoverished, socialist German immigrant and Civil War veteran, Lindau; and the striving businessman who brought them all together, Fulkerson. This is a social grouping that shouldn’t ever work; artists, socialists, robber barons, entrepreneurs, socialites, and Confederates all thrown together. For a brief while the group does manage to achieve a certain level of tenuous social cohesion, but it eventually unravels. Even the realist novel, meant to hold all the truth about society in a narrative, is not up to the task of taking the raw materials of New York and imagining that they make up a flourishing community. Much more troubling, however, is that the Marches meet almost no one who is not connected to *Every Other Week* by one or two degrees of separation. The Marches have come to New York City without social connections, they meet a few people through Mr. March’s job, and they end the novel even more isolated than they began it. If the challenge is to create a viable sense of community out of the disparate elements of Manhattan society, *Hazard* shows that neither the middle-class family nor the realist novel can imagine such a community.

But Howells is even more pessimistic about art’s ability to use visibility to transform strangers into fellow members of the community. The Marches serve as Howells’s test case

for a certain proposition: what happens when good people come to New York City and see its dreadful conditions? Even before they move to New York, they are deeply embedded in the culture of looking. In *Their Wedding Journey*, which is both Howells's first novel and the one in which Basil and Isabel March are introduced, the newlyweds are inordinately concerned with looking at their fellow vacationers and with how they look to others. Otherwise, Howells carefully makes the Marches late 19th-century social everypeople: not overly gregarious and openhearted, but clearly possessed of a standard sort of bourgeois morality and good feeling towards their fellow men. He tells us that the adult Marches are known in their "unfashionable" Boston neighborhood as "being not exclusive precisely, but very much wrapped up in themselves and their children" (*Hazard* 23). So they are not socialites – their neighborhood is unfashionable and they are wrapped up in their own family – and nor are they exclusive. This idea is developed more fully in a passage that strongly foreshadows their New York future; although March feels himself to be, by virtue of his literary view of life, better equipped to understand and appreciate life than others around him,

neither he nor his wife supposed that they were selfish persons. On the contrary, they were very sympathetic; there was no good cause that they did not wish well; they had a generous scorn for all kinds of narrow-heartedness; if it had ever come into their way to sacrifice themselves for others, they thought they would have done so, but they never asked why it had not come in their way. They were very gentle and kind, even when most elusive; and they taught their children to loathe all manner of social cruelty. (*Hazard* 24)

The Marches loathe all manner of social cruelty, and are very gentle and kind. And yet they are also mostly absent; they do not seem to have put their high-minded sympathy to the test very often by bringing it into contact with suffering, social or otherwise. Most tellingly, although they maintain their willingness to sacrifice themselves for others, but they have no explanation for why they have never had the occasion to do so. In provincial Boston, the

Marches have lived good-hearted lives without ever encountering anyone who truly needs their good-heartedness. They have not been exclusive, but have been elusive. And so Howells throws this kind but detached couple into a situation where they are certain to encounter those who truly could use their sacrifice: New York City.

Howells' description of their search for a place to live in Manhattan is a masterpiece of ironic comedy; Mrs. March reminds Mr. March of all their requirements in a flat, and finishes with these instructions: "These were essentials; if he could not get them, then they must do without. But he must get them" (*Hazard* 67). But erupting through this middle-class endeavor⁵⁰ is the inevitable: the Marches eventually encounter the New York described in *How the Other Half Lives*. After describing a certain street in detail – Howells' account of "garbage heaps" in the gutters and "ash barrels" along the sidewalks sounds much like Riis – Howells concludes: "It was not the abode of the extremest poverty, but of a poverty as hopeless as any in the world, transmitting itself from generation to generation and establishing conditions of permanency to which the human life adjusts itself as it does to those of some incurable disease, like leprosy" (*Hazard* 56). The poverty of this particular street is, like the poverty described by Riis, self-sustaining. Once caught in it, families experience it "as a condition of permanency," not a temporary state which hard work and a few breaks can overcome, Horatio Alger-style. And like leper colonies, the tenement streets are isolated from the rest of New York, deliberately separate from middle and upper class parts of the city. Mrs. March even goes so far as to ask Mr. March "Why does he [their

⁵⁰ The Marches are unable to afford most of the flats that they look at, and in these outings their goal becomes keeping up a certain amount of respectability by "reject[ing] them for one reason or another which had nothing to do with the rent; the higher the rent was, the more critical they were of the slippery inlaid floors and the arrangement of the richly decorated rooms." (56). This class element is compounded because the object of their deception is not the landlord but the janitor – respectability, it seems, maintains itself through the view of the less respectable.

driver] take us through such a disgusting street?” and her disgust, we are told, is based primarily on the smell of the street (*Hazard* 56).

Mr. March’s response to both the street and Mrs. March’s question about their driver is, like Mr. March’s response to nearly everything, gentle but biting irony. “‘This driver might be a philanthropist in disguise,’ he answered with a dreamy irony, ‘and may want us to think about the people who are not merely carried through this street in a coupe, but have to spend their whole lives in it, winter and summer, with no hopes of driving out of it, except in a hearse’” (*Hazard* 56-57). March concludes his monologue with a telling awareness of the difference between his situation and that of the dwellers of the street: “Should we be as patient as they are with their discomfort? I don’t believe there’s steam heat or an elevator in the whole block. Seven rooms and a bath⁵¹ would be more than the largest and genteelest family would know what to do with. They wouldn’t know what to do with the bath anyway.” This ironic treatment ends after Mr. March, who declares that the residents of the street probably hate them for their wealth, “craned his neck out of the window for a better look, and the children of discomfort cheered him, out of sheer good feeling and high spirits.”

We see from Mr. March’s self-satire that this middle-class couple has a perfect awareness of their situation, and a great deal of sympathy for those less fortunate. March knows that the cabbie should be considered a philanthropist, just for showing them the street; rendering suffering visible is supposed to bring about reform. And March is brought into a new sense of self-awareness by these sights; he mocks their own search for an apartment, as the tenement dwellers would rejoice at the sight of the worst flat that the Marches rejected,

⁵¹ “Seven rooms and a bath” is the traditional New York flat that the Marches have been rejecting continually, to the point that when Mrs. March tells Mr. March about a nightmare about “a hideous thing with two square eyes and a series of sections growing darker and then lighter,” he responds with a laugh “Why, my dear, it was nothing but a harmless New York flat - seven rooms and a bath.” (*Hazard* 55)

and he acknowledges that they have been so mistreated by the tenement lifestyle that, as Riis tells us, the use of indoor plumbing is beyond their comprehension. And these observations are given added sting when the children, whose lot in life is so much worse than March's, give him a good-spirited cheer, when he has just been thinking about how they could each have a future as The Man With The Knife. But the Marches, as Howells foreshadowed, go no further than abstract sympathy. Mr. and Mrs. March agree that if they "settled down among them" and shared all they had with them, no good would come of it. March says "It might help us for the moment, but it wouldn't keep the wolf from their doors for a week" (*Hazard* 57). Furthermore, even keeping the wolf from their door would do a disservice to the poor, as their only way of survival is to "keep up an unbroken intimacy with the wolf" (*Hazard* 58). The episode ends when March declares that he doesn't know how the poor live with the wolf, and then he suggests a trip to Madison Ave or Fifth Ave, apparently as a palate cleanser (*Hazard* 57).⁵²

A second, briefer encounter drives the point home. Seeing a workingman eating from a trash can, Mr. March gives him a coin and is thanked effusively in French, the man's only language. Once again disgusted by New York, Mrs. March declares that she "will not come to a place where such things are possible." March responds:

"Yes? and what part of Christendom will you live in. Such things are possible everywhere in our conditions."

⁵² Howells himself, for all his sympathy for the poor, seems to have experienced more or less the same process. In "New York Streets," a chapter in his 1896 book of essays *Impressions and Experiences*, he describes the picturesque allure of the poorest streets in Manhattan: "The place has all the attraction of close neighborhood, which the poor love, and which affords them for nothing the spectacle of the human drama, with themselves for actors" (252). Although this spectacle would be "pleasingly effective" as a picture, actually coming into contact with the street and its smells drives Howells away: "All this makes you hasten your pace down to the river" (*Impressions* 252, 253). Howells understands the picturesque allure of the impoverished street, and knows, from personal experience, that closer contact with the street is more likely to send one to the river or Madison Ave than to the aid of the poor.

“Then we must change the conditions.”
“Oh no; we must go to the theater and forget them. We can stop at Brentano’s
for our tickets as we pass through Union Square.” (*Hazard* 61)

We have seen, in Howells’ quote about Ibsen, that a true, realistic play could show people dreadful conditions and impel them to reform society. And yet, in Howells’ novel, the sight of real-world suffering inspires only the briefest impulse towards reform in these good people. Instead, the Marches plan to flee the sight of poverty and hide from it in a play that seems to be far from Ibsen. A wholesale change of the conditions is likely impossible, but Mr. March is not prepared to even consider it. His suggestion that they forget the conditions and go to the play is undoubtedly ironic; his mention of “Christendom” as a place where one’s fellow man can reach such downtrodden states is equally ironic. And yet, he also literally means his ironic statements: he must move on, go to the theatre, and eventually treat the conditions he has observed in a literary manner for *Every Other Week*. The unrealistic theater is March’s choice of visibilities: he chooses to see a stylized version of life, rather than the reality right in front of him. He then participates in this stylization of life by planning a literary treatment of them. March is willing to take part in the project of rendering Riis’ other half visible, but not willing to make the changes that visibility is supposed to bring about. In Part 1, Howells’ has showed us the myth of visibility: even for a sympathetic observer like Mr. March, simply seeing the plight of the impoverished is not a strong enough call to action.

There is, however, something that Mr. March declares “better than the theater”: the “El.” Mrs. March appreciates the El even more than Mr. March does:

She declared it the most ideal way of getting about in the world [...] She now said that night transit was even more interesting than the day, and that the fleeting intimacy you formed with people in second- and third-floor interiors, while all the usual street life went on underneath, had a domestic intensity mixed with a perfect repose that was the last effect of good society with all its security and exclusiveness. (*Hazard* 66)

We can combine Mrs. March's insights about the El with Mr. March's to gain a perfect picture of its appeal:

He said it was better than the theater, of which it reminded him, to see those people through their windows: a family party of workfolk at a late tea, some of the men in their shirtsleeves; a woman sewing by a lamp; a mother laying her child in its cradle; a man with his head fallen on his hands upon a table; a girl and her lover leaning over the windowsill together. What suggestion! What drama! What infinite interest! (*Hazard* 66)

In Mr. March's description, we find the heterogeneity which was supposed to be the mark of the city: working folk as well as, presumably, the middle-class; families, lovers, singles; people in despair, people going about everyday life, and people acting tenderly towards each other. Like the community that built up around *Every Other Week*, this is precisely what a city needs, all of its elements mixing together. Only, they are not mixing together, but are merely framed for the Marches' pleasure. It's better than the theater because it offers so much more drama, because it is playing every night with an infinite number of stories, and perhaps above all because it is suggestive, not explicit. Alan Trachtenberg has described the city as a source of mystery which "has been raised to the level of spectacle, the daily performances of city life now seemed to more and more commentators to be parades of obscurity, to enigma, of silent sphinxes challenging the puzzled citizen" (104). Reformers like Riis "set out to cure the city by transforming its mysteries into light." But the Marches, having been confronted with urban "truth" on the poor street, prefer the mystery, the suggestive drama, to the harsh and troubling work of true reform.

Mrs. March highlights a different aspect of this encounter: the simultaneous intimacy and elusiveness. The experience is undoubtedly intimate; men in shirtsleeves, men with their head in their hands, babies in cradles and lovers and windowsills are all sights not meant for

public consumption. And yet they retain their “security and elusiveness” because they are mere visibility, illuminated moments which Mrs. March cannot intrude upon and which, in turn, cannot intrude upon her the way the impoverished street did. In Part 1 of the novel, this seems to be as much mixing as urban life is capable of: a series of tableaux, illuminated in the night, as the El whisks the Marches by. And the intimacy, of course, is one-way; the flat-dwellers cannot see Mrs. March. New York is thus cross-sectioned and displayed for her pleasure, her vicarious enjoyment – rendered pure visibility without any of the accompanying problems of coming into contact with humanity. Beautifully illuminated, hermetic, dramatic, and suggestive, the night visions of the El are the perfect version of New York for the Marches – visibility without contact, a real-life theater in which one does not have to worry about being drawn into the action.⁵³ As Sunny Stalter puts it: “The respectable bourgeois protagonists share the train with other classes and ethnicities, but the immigrants and poor people glimpsed in passing are intriguingly distant” (874).

Visibility, thus, is laid to rest in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* as a driver of wholesale change; if the Marches, who represent the novel’s middle-ground of social awareness, cannot be moved by the sight of poverty, few others will. One character, however, does hold out hope for visibility as an effectuator of change: Conrad Dryfoos, one of the novel’s three main characters committed to social reform. Discussing Mr. March’s literary sketches of

⁵³ Although this theatrical vision of the city seems to the Marches to cut across different classes, Christophe den Tandt argues that a later ride on the El shows “how ethnically narrow Howells’s family-based model of urban conviviality really is” (27). When Mr. March travels through the East Side, he sees a variety of different ethnic groups which Howells’ describes with the physiognomic eye of an alienist: “The small eyes, the high cheeks [...] of Russians, Poles, Czechs, Chinese; the furtive glitter of Italians; the blond dulness of Germans” (*Hazard* 159). As den Tandt describes it: “The narrator, who reflects on the ethnic make-up of the New York crowd, is overwhelmed by his discovery of a surprising gamut of national diversities” (27-28). Not only do the Marches prefer the hermetic night-time vision to the truth of their street, they also prefer not to confront the truth about New York’s ethnic diversity, even after they’ve seen it.

impoverished New York City life, Conrad seems to imagine them as something akin to *How the Other Half Lives*: “If you can make the comfortable people understand how the uncomfortable people live, it will be a very good thing, Mr. March. Sometimes it seems to me that the only trouble is that we don’t know one another well enough; and that the first thing is to do this” (*Hazard* 128). If only the comfortable people can be made to know how the uncomfortable people live, if only they can be shown the way poverty has become a modern-day leprosy, then the project of fixing the conditions of Christendom can begin. Conrad, like so many reformers of this era, thinks that visibility is the place to begin reform. He misunderstands, however, the nature of March’s project. March responds to Conrad: “‘That’s true,’ said March, from the surface only. ‘And then, those phases of low life are immensely picturesque. Of course we must try to get the contrasts of luxury for the sake of full effect.’” (*Hazard* 129). March, responding to Conrad “from the surface only,” highlights not the possibility of social change but the picturesqueness of the subjects. He is interested in the aesthetic pictorial content of his literary project, not its social and political content. And although contrasting his images of tenement life with luxurious living does seem like it would strengthen the case for social change, the “full effect” that March endorses seems to be, again, an aesthetic one – a sort of chiaroscuro of economic classes which would throw his picturesque scenes into sharp relief.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ According to Carrie Tirado Bramen, the relief between the rich and the poor was integral to the concept of picturesque in urban America in the late nineteenth century: “At its most fundamental level, the urban picturesque afforded a new way of apprehending urban space by making inequality and immigrant diversity expected elements of modernity. It signaled a constellation of aesthetic practices and meanings that rendered the heterogeneity of the city as “charming” and “quaint” rather than exclusively deleterious” (445-446). Bramen argues that the “picturesque” is not just an aesthetic category with no corresponding social function but actually “was part of a more general attempt to nationalize the transnational as distinctively American. The urban picturesque was an important vehicle for transforming immigrants from social threats to cultural resources, as signs not only of an urban identity but also of a national one” (446). But although I think Bramen is largely correct about

The novel actually dramatizes a version of this chiaroscuro effect. After the Marches meet Margaret Vance, the novel's young society woman but also one of the other characters committed to social change, Mrs. March, ironically, says of Margaret and the other society girls of her type: "They never imagine the wickedness of the world, and if they marry happily they go through life as innocent as children." (*Hazard* 216). Of course, it is Margaret, not Mrs. March, who is a known philanthropist and a great champion against the wickedness of the world. But Mrs. March continues: "They are the loveliest of the human race. But perhaps the rest of us have to pay too much for them" (*Hazard* 216). Margaret has thus become the idealized, perfect product of society; the dysfunction and poverty which characterize "Christendom" is the price paid for the creation of such creatures – and Mr. March affirms that no price is too high for "such an exquisite creature" (*Hazard* 216). "A wild laughing cry suddenly broke upon the air at the street crossing in front of them. A girl's voice called out 'Run, run, Jen! The copper is after you!' A woman's figure rushed stumbling across the way and into the shadow of the houses, pursued by a burly policeman." (*Hazard* 216). The March's reaction is again, primarily aesthetic: "Can that poor wretch and the radiant girl we left yonder really belong to the same system of things? How incredible each makes the other seem?" (*Hazard* 216). Mr. March, confronted with his imagined contrast, is merely struck by how "incredible" the two look in contrast to each other.

Much like the protagonist of *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, the Marches do eventually rise to a moral occasion. In this novel, their moral rise is precipitated by a dinner in celebration of *Every Other Week*; at the dinner the publisher, Fulkerson, describes how Mr.

how picturesque scenes of economic and ethnic diversity were a way to add other groups to the conception of America, I still want to emphasize the way that such a picturesque treatment neuters calls for reform. If the poor are just part of the landscape, there is far less incentive to mitigate their suffering. For more on Bramen's concept of the picturesque, including brief discussions of Howells and Riis, see her article "The Urban Picturesque and the Spectacle of Americanization" (2000).

Dryfoos, Conrad's father and the periodical's benefactor, broke up a strike through a combination of dishonesty and the threat of Pinkerton violence. Lindau, an elderly German employee of the periodical and March's old tutor, takes offense at this ruthless attack on the workingman, and, in his socialist-anarchist rage, verbally abuses Mr. Dryfoos. The obvious situation occurs: Dryfoos requests that Lindau be dismissed, and March flatly refuses. March – despite strongly disagreeing with Lindau's radicalism – tells Fulkerson that Lindau is “one of the truest and kindest souls in the world” (*Hazard* 301) and states that he will resign if Lindau is fired. In this moral stand, he is backed by Mrs. March, who tells him that if he consents to Lindau's firing “I should perfectly despise you” (*Hazard* 310). United in their social duty to March's old friend and mentor, the Marches take a definitive action for the first time in the novel: they risk their own financial well-being by accepting the loss of March's position. But whereas Silas Lapham's moral rise – standing by his ex-partner Milton Rogers – makes him an exemplar of ethical behavior in that earlier novel, March's similar moral stand is inadequate. He speaks to Conrad of his distaste for Lindau's beliefs – and is astonished when Conrad stands with Lindau and against his own father (*Hazard* 304). Although March is able to act in keeping with his middle-class conscience, he is blind to the fact that that Lindau – who lost a hand fighting in the Civil War – is the morally superior figure to Mr. Dryfoos, who hired a substitute for his own war duty. The finely honed social conscience of the Marches' is no good without a corresponding awareness of the suffering wrought by the economic situation. In the novel it is the three reformist minded characters – Lindau, Conrad, and Margaret Vance – who are actually vindicated.

Of course, two of them die. In a situation that could have been predicted by Riis, a riot breaks out between strikers and police. Lindau, satirically egging on the police, is

attacked by an officer, and Conrad goes to intervene between the strikers and the police, who are protecting a scab-run street car: “Then Conrad fell forward, pierced through the heart by that shot fired from the car” (*Hazard* 368). This particular bit of street theater has a witness:

March heard the shot as he scrambled out of his car, and at the same moment he saw Lindau drop under the club of the policeman, who left him where he fell, and joined the rest of the squad in pursuing the rioters. The fighting around the car in the avenue ceased; the driver whipped his horses into a gallop, and the place was left empty.

March would have liked to run; he thought how his wife had implored him to keep away from the rioting, but he could not have left Lindau lying there if he would. Something stronger than his will drew him to the spot, and there he saw Conrad dead beside the old man. (*Hazard* 368-369)

Lindau stood up to the policeman; Conrad stood up for Lindau. March, however, did nothing but watch.

Christopher Raczkowski identifies the strike as a point of rupture in March’s vision, a place where the urban sublime bursts through the realist attempt to understand the truth of the city.

When the strike erupts in the text, it is unavailable for rational management or narrative solution. Instead, it humbles and silences the novel’s protagonist. Formless, terrifying, and overdetermined by an expansive set of economic, social, and psychological factors, March’s encounter with the strike is the sublime event that exposes the blindspot of realist vision and ethics—its observer. March’s faith in the authority of rational, empirical observation is shaken by the strike’s unrepresentability much as his confidence in the social order of Gilded Age New York is shaken by the negativity generated by the strike. (288)

Although Howells is the realist *par excellence*, the strike serves in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* to show Basil March, the novel’s stand-in for Howells, the limits of realism. Simply showing people the sufferings attendant on capitalism and waiting for action to be taken is not good enough. The strike is an “overdetermined” and “unrepresentable” event that finally galvanizes March out of his realist mode of observation and into action. The sight of poverty

and suffering was not enough; only the inexplicable, irrational eruption of violence can break through to March. Having witnessed the tragic deaths of Conrad and Lindau (who survived in the hospital for a little while, eventually perishing after an operation), March sees the deeper aspects of the situation which realism cannot fathom. No longer does he just see the surface reality: the poverty which he can render picturesque by virtue of his art or inevitable by virtue of the unassailability of the capitalist system. Finally he sees not the effects, but the workings of society that have produced those effects; the deaths are like a wake-up call to the mechanisms of society which are functioning underneath his ironic, aesthetic view of the world. As he tells Mrs. March: "But what I object to is this economic chance world in which we live and which we men seem to have created" (*Hazard* 380). March acknowledges the capitalist systems as man-made, and thus for the first time he takes a stand against it, even if it is only in conversation with his wife. And he concludes that conversation with a renewed call for the possibility of art to make the system of suffering visible. Thinking back to the hungry Frenchman who he gave a coin too, March tells his wife that, whether or not the Frenchman was authentically impoverished or not, "he represented the truth; he was the ideal of suffering which would be less effective if realistically treated" (*Hazard* 383). Gone are March's ideas for picturesque portraits of the less fortunate. They have been replaced with his calls for the "ideal of suffering," an image of suffering so powerful that it can break through the indifference of those like Dryfoos, and lay bare the system that causes it.

We are not told whether or not March alters his project to make this "ideal of suffering" visible to the readers of *Every Other Week*. Instead, the novel ends with a fairly conventional epilogue, with each character's ending given: a few marriages, an entrance to European society for the Dryfooses, etc. But it seems obvious that March's new social

awareness has not been matched by a corresponding leap forward in aesthetic vision. The “ideal” of suffering will be as inadequate in effecting social change as picturesque images of suffering were; we know that merely showing the poor to the rich is not going to radically transform the behavior of the wealthy and remake New York into a harmonious whole. A new approach is needed, one which can move past the realist interest in surfaces and get to the messy, overdetermined workings of the actual city. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is Sinclair Lewis’s chosen heir to Howells, Theodore Dreiser, who captures the many forces and processes that a city needs to have if it is going to achieve greater cohesion. In Dreiser’s *The Titan*, visibility is an afterthought; the evolutionary processes that are driving the city, and their availability or lack thereof for human intervention, are the true subjects of the novel. In the younger, rapidly expanding city of Chicago, the need for dynamic processes emerges much more clearly than in Howells’s Manhattan, and Dreiser’s naturalist techniques are able to capture the flows that Howells’s realism was unable to.

CHAPTER 4

CHICAGO

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

- Carl Sandburg, from "Chicago"

Unlike D.C., with its eighteenth-century origin story, and New York, which had been a social and financial capital since the early nineteenth century at the least, Chicago was largely the product of the explosion in agricultural and industrial production that hit the American West in the middle of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the physical city was even younger than its 1833 incorporation and midcentury population boom would indicate: the fire of 1871 meant that the major buildings in Gilded Age Chicago were brand new. Lacking the inherent coherence and deep density Manhattan was given by its peninsula, or the artificial unity L'Enfant built into D.C., Chicago was in this era the most chaotic and disorganized of American cities – the most organic in its growth and the least planned in its organization. As the American city that most fully represented what the Scottish urban planner Patrick Geddes described as conurbation, Chicago was the major American city which was furthest from realizing the metropolitan dream. Geddes, surveying England's industrial centers in the late nineteenth century, applied evolutionary thinking to explain their growth. He writes

This octopus of London, polypus rather, is something curious exceedingly, a vast irregular growth without previous parallel in the world of life – perhaps likeliest to the spreadings of a great coral reef. Like this, it has a stony skeleton, and living polypes – call it, then, a "man-reef" if you will. Onward it grows, thinly at first, the pale tints spreading further and faster than the others, but the deeper tints of thicker population at every point steadily following on. Within lies the dark and crowded area; of which, however, the daily pulsating centre calls on us to seek some fresh comparison to higher than coralline life" (9).

Although the unplanned, evolutionarily driven city does have a "pulsating center" which suggests a higher order of life, the aptest comparison is to a coral reef. Chicago was the most perfect "man-reef" in the American context – endlessly spreading in all directions (save, of course, east), growing ever denser in the center even as it pushes its tendrils out in all directions. It was the major city that seemed most like the regional, single-function urban agglomerations that Alan Trachtenberg contrasted with metropolises in *The Incorporation of America*. Chicago is the city that nature built; it feasted on the bounty of the West and grew accordingly. It's not so much a city as a hungry polypus – a polypus without a plan, except for growth in all directions, including vertically (it was in Chicago, after all, that the skyscraper was invented – by Burnham, depending on which Chicago skyscraper you count as officially "first").

Geddes' great insight is that this construct – a conurbation and no longer a city – can no longer be bound by traditional municipal boundaries, and thus is ungovernable by traditional municipal methods. In the case of Geddes' "heptarchy" in England, the system of conurbations "has been growing up naturally, yet almost unconsciously to politicians, beneath our existing, our traditional political and administrative network; and plainly not merely to go on as at present, but soon to surely evolve some new form of organisation better

able to cope with its problems than are the present distinct town and county councils" (19).⁵⁵ And if England, with aristocratic and bureaucratic systems that grew up over centuries, cannot control conurbation, Gilded Age Chicago, with its unchecked commodity capitalism, was unlikely to find order in municipal government.

Yet, remarkably, Chicago rapidly did find the order that it needed to become one of the American metropolises. And it did so because it had the dynamism, the flow needed to unite economic, political, and social forces with rational plans. In this chapter, we will see that both Theodore Dreiser and Jane Addams articulate ways that Chicago can find order through a synthesis of evolutionary growth and rational planning. Dreiser's vision, as it emerges in *The Titan* (1914), is a private-sector plan in which a Nietzschean Übermensch wades into the swamp of corrupt capitalism that is Chicago and, for his own personal enrichment, gives the city a productive order in the form of arterial lines of mass transit. Dreiser thus shows how, in opposition to Mumford and Geddes' faith that evolutionary growth will only introduce more and more disorder, the processes of capitalist conflict can actually bring about order. As we shall see, Dreiser's narrative shows that the Social Darwinists, so-called, were not actually Social Darwinists but were in fact Corporate Cooperativists. Dreiser's Chicago is disorderly because of too little, not too much competition; it had too much stasis and not enough flow. Addams, in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902) and *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910), finds unity in cooperation rather than

⁵⁵ Although he was prescient in many things, Geddes seems to have underestimated the difficulty of governing an urban region. Even now, a form of municipal government which can follow the conurbation wherever it goes doesn't exist. Although we have made strides in our political organization since Geddes' time, the force (and tax base) of most municipal governments still ends at the city, county, or state line, and if one would want to build a tunnel from, say, North Bergen, New Jersey to Manhattan, one would have to wrangle funds and approval from the federal government, the city governments of Newark and New York City, and the state governments of New York and New Jersey. Conurbation outstrips municipal government, every time.

competition, but she nevertheless is equally successful in synthesizing evolutionary and rational forces. In the Halsted Street neighborhood that Hull-House serves, economic and political forms of organization have evolved towards greater integration and cooperation, but social organization lags behind. This makes the poor particularly vulnerable; while the wealthy are cooperating and integrating their interests, the recent immigrants remain atomized or, at best, molecularized at the familial level. Unless the community evolves a new sense of organization in which people can circulate between communities that have become divided along lines of class and ethnicity, rational plans for the improvement of society will find no traction. Thus Addams proposes ways for the community to evolve a new ethic of cooperation which brings people together into a living community which can intervene in the economic and political processes which cause the poor to suffer.

Dreiser's *The Titan*: A Story of Capitalist Reform

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your
 painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have seen
 the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women
 and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my
 city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be
 alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall
 bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted
 against the wilderness,
 Bareheaded,
 Shoveling,
 Wrecking,
 Planning,

Building, breaking, rebuilding.

- Carl Sandburg, from “Chicago”

The Titan, the second volume in Dreiser’s *Trilogy of Desire*, follows the protagonist Frank Cowperwood (a thinly fictionalized version of the streetcar magnate Charles Yerkes) as he builds, breaks, and rebuilds the transit system of the city of Chicago in the decades leading up to the twentieth century. But critics have been unable to agree on whether Cowperwood is hero, antihero, or villain, and whether or not his actions are heroic, villainous, or tragic. Jack E. Wallace has persuasively argued that the novel is not a tragedy, as it is usually thought to be, but in fact a comedy. But this reading is unfortunately incomplete, as Wallace acknowledges that the novel’s epilogue does “lapse” into a tragic mode (65). *The Titan* presents Cowperwood as both hero and villain, and works as both an epic and a tragedy, because it is a dialectical novel in which Dreiser is trying to synthesize answers to difficult questions posed by modern urban existence. Cowperwood’s actions are heroic when he is introducing more competition, more dynamism and flow to the city, and then villainous when he has become a source of stasis. This understanding will help us move beyond many of the traditional problems of interpretation of this novel. *The Titan* has been read as both for and against capitalism, for and against the working man, for and against the powerful individual at its center. But above all else, *The Titan* and Dreiser have both been read as hopelessly muddled, unable to make a coherent point and to reconcile an obvious affection for both the common man and the nigh-omnipotent Frank Cowperwood.

It is my contention that *The Titan* does in fact make sense of and render compatible two aspects of Dreiser’s thought that can be difficult to reconcile: his Nietzschean affection for titanic great individuals and his Marxist concern for the oppressed poor. One of the

orthodoxies of American history is that the Gilded Age had too much Darwinian/Spencerian/Nietzschean struggle for existence and not enough of a social safety net. This was felt most keenly in the cities, where the poor suffered without recourse, and the situation was only rectified when novels like *The Jungle* (1906) galvanized public opinion against the social Darwinist beliefs of the day, eventually ushering in the Progressive Age. But this sort of progressive galvanization is obviously not what *The Titan* is about; as Wallace points out, “we do not see a single poor man suffer on [Cowperwood’s] account” (66). No, what Dreiser is trying to show in *The Titan* is that, counterintuitively, what Chicago needed in the late nineteenth century was not less competition, but more. More competition, more struggle, more social Darwinism would be better for the city – and, indeed, better for the oppressed poor.

As we have seen, in the pre-progressive era of American history that the novel is concerned with, mainstream social Darwinism held that society would naturally regulate itself and intervening in those processes was dangerous. Richard Hofstadter describes the social Darwinist position on social reform from the perspective of Edward Youmans, founder of *Popular Science*: “Until the laws of social behavior are known, he declared, reform is blind; the Association might do better to recognize a sphere of natural, self-adjusting activity, with which government intervention usually wreaks havoc” (*Social* 47). The Gilded Age advocates for social Darwinism believed that unregulated processes were the only sure way to reform society; laissez-faire policies would, in the long run, create a better America, via “a more energetic prosecution of the struggle, and not by social upheaval or paper plans for a new order” (*Social* 61). Society is too complex to be altered by “paper plans;” only nature itself can design a better society – or city. The inability of social Darwinism to change

society was well-documented by critics like Upton Sinclair and Jacob Riis, and this failure was particularly obvious in urban America. As Lewis Mumford writes: “It was by following what they presumed was nature’s way that the industrialist and the municipal officer produced the new species of town, a blasted, de-natured man-heap adapted, not to the needs of life, but to the mythic ‘struggle for existence’” (452-453). In Mumford’s narrative, city planning will eventually break this cycle; in Hofstadter’s account of the larger picture, Jamesian pragmatism, with a renewed faith in human reason, will eventually slay the social Darwinist dragon. Dreiser’s novel shows how, in contrast to Mumford and Hofstadter’s point, too little, not too much, social Darwinism is what ailed the Gilded Age city. Cowperwood, who Dreiser describes as “above all, a marvelous organizer” (*Titan* 10), will improve the city via his organizing capabilities, but he will do so as part of the struggle for existence so prized by Spencer’s followers and opposed by Mumford, Hofstadter, and their progressive fellow travelers. Dreiser is thus adopting a position that looks muddled but, I think, would better be described as moderate, a Nietzsche-Spencerian struggle for existence leavened by a belief that what benefits the great men of society can benefit the masses, so long as the capitalist struggle for existence is actually being contested.

The simple truth about Social Darwinism, as it actually existed, is that it was never red in tooth and claw. When the state holds its hand, the rich guard each other’s interests, not competing with one another, keeping prices high and services poor. As a result, the working class suffers. In a reversal of Hobbes’ traditional sense of the Leviathan, the men at the top of the pyramid exist in a total state of ease, while those below them are constantly competing. Consider Hobbes’ “state of nature,” his thought experiment in which every man is constantly in competition with every other man. As he describes it, this state of nature means that “there

is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force” (70). Hobbes’ state of nature could hardly resemble nineteenth-century Chicago less; Chicago was nothing but industry, culture of the earth, transportation, building, and the moving and removing of a great many things with a great deal of force. In Hobbes’ conception of a civil society, all of these things are made possible if civil authority forbids the war of every man against every man. The only people still left in a state of nature will be the various national monarchs; in the realm of international relations, the sovereigns “because of their Independency, are in continuall jealousies, and in the state and posture of Gladiators” (71). Here is Hobbes’ justification for this behavior: “But because they uphold thereby, the Industry of their Subjects; there does not follow from it, that misery, which accompanies the Liberty of particular men.”

In the *laissez-faire* economics, all the misery that Hobbes predicts will be forestalled by the Leviathan came true. Impoverished immigrant workers competed against each other for lower and lower wages; it was an economic war of every man against every man. How did this happen? It was because the captains of industry, the sovereigns of the economic order, did not take gladiatorial poses towards one another, but were in fact happy to leave each other alone in their separate spheres. In Hobbes’ synchronic analysis of international political relations, the state of nature never actually happened – it was a moment in time which was ended whenever citizens banded together under protective sovereigns. But if the sovereign never steps in to protect citizens from economic warfare, we know exactly what will happen in an economic state of nature which persists over time: whoever acquires capital

will continue to acquire more of it, becoming more impregnable as time passes. In a diachronic reading of the economic order, stasis will occur at the top, and competition arises further down the food chain. In short, once a captain of industry becomes an economic sovereign (i.e. holds a monopoly), he no longer needs to compete; instead, he will work to ensure that his holdings stay the same over time. Other titans with noncompeting holdings will do the same, and competition will cease at the top level. As Philip Kitcher explains:

We might reasonably expect that a world run on social Darwinist lines would generate a cadre of plutocrats, each resolutely concerned to establish a dynasty and to secure his favored branch of industry against future competition. In practical terms it would almost certainly yield a world in which the gap between rich and poor was even larger than it is now.

Thus, Social Darwinist or *laissez-faire* economics will create a certain amount of order and cooperation between plutocrats as they look to preserve their position into the future, with all of the competition taking place among the poor. In short, captains of industry do not encourage Social Darwinism because they are Nietzscheans who crave constant competition, but because they are contented rulers of an economic sphere which is unlikely to be ruptured by anyone but the political sovereign (i.e., the government). And as long as they use a combination of advocacy and bribery to keep *laissez-faire* policies in place, they need not fear political intervention.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Nothing illustrates how *laissez-faire* policies lead to stasis, not competition, and strict regulation leads to competition, not stasis, than that classical interaction of finance and competition, the sports world. Consider the dominant British sporting league, the English Premier League, and the dominant American sporting league, the National Football League. The EPL has more or less no rules on how much you can spend on players, no draft, and no strong central authority. The NFL has a hard salary cap, a draft whereby future talent is integrated into the league in accordance with who needs it most, and a strong central authority. Since the 1992-1993 season, when the Premier League was formed, the following teams have won the championship (i.e. had the best record in regular season play): Manchester United (12 times), Chelsea (3 times), Arsenal (3 times), Blackburn (1 time). Over that same period of time, the following teams finished with the best record in the NFL (leaving out the playoffs, a statistical crap shoot): The Packers (2 Times), The Patriots (3 times), The Colts (2 times), The Titans (2 times), The Chargers, The Steelers, The Eagles, The Rams, The Chiefs (2 times), The

But Frank Cowperwood, in *The Titan*, is precisely the figure to bust up the cooperative cabal running Chicago's economic scene, and he does it by bringing the struggle back to the wealthiest level of capitalism. When Cowperwood arrives in Chicago from Philadelphia, he finds a disorganized city, divided into areas that are each controlled by a native Chicago capitalist. This completely disorganized city, ruled by capitalist interests, is an example of the "man-heap" bemoaned by Mumford. But in Dreiser's telling, it is absolutely not the product of a Nietzschean or Spencerian struggle. Instead, the city's ruling classes are content to not compete among themselves, and, since they control city government through the corrupt political machine, their tacit doctrine of noncompetition seems invulnerable. The result is that the capitalists are not portrayed as blond beasts but as placidly contented creatures. When Cowperwood succeeds in wounding the capitalists by destroying American Match, a company that had many financial backers amongst the city's elite, the city's four most powerful men – Hand, Schryhart, Merrill, and Arneel – call the next thirty or so richest men together to scheme against the protagonist. The robber barons of Chicago show no signs of being part of capitalism, red in tooth and claw; instead, they make up "a procession of solemn, superior, thoughtful gentlemen" (*Titan* 422). There is no energy

Jaguars, The Vikings, The 49ers, and The Cowboys. The EPL, a 20 team league with *laissez-faire* economic governance, produced 4 regular season champions in 19 seasons. The NFL, a league of around thirty teams with a strict cap and floor on spending, produced 13 regular season champions in that same span of time. This makes Roman Abramovich, the billionaire who purchased Chelsea, plunged billions of dollars into it, then won three championships as a result, a version of Frank Cowperwood, a titan who shakes things up by pushing the other titans around. As Brian Phillips puts it: "Top-level European soccer is essentially a racket that benefits the big clubs at everyone else's expense. The only thing capable of destabilizing the status quo is a massive amount of money. For around five years, from 2003 to 2008, Abramovich's billions were the most anarchic force in the sport. Chelsea wasn't staging a proletarian revolution; that's not how billionaires operate. But they were doing the next best thing — punching Manchester United in the mouth and swaggering off with both middle fingers up. Their audacity was its own kind of greatness, even if it was founded on an even more rigged game, global capitalism." Phillips' description of Abramovich's behavior could be used almost verbatim to describe the career of Cowperwood – one would only have to change the details.

or sense of motion here; their affect is bovine, not leonine. The capitalists work cooperatively to enrich each other in projects like American Match and defeat outsiders like Cowperwood, all while providing subpar services to the people.⁵⁷ To understand just exactly how the capital of Chicago profits from disorganization, consider the streetcar situation before Cowperwood begins to invest in it. Each of the three sides of the city has its own streetcar company controlled by a different Chicago capitalist. By a tacit noncompetition agreement, the controllers of the North, South, and West Side streetcar companies are content to draw profits from their own sections of the city, while the city itself suffers from a lack of unified service; there's no way to do anything but move from one side to the center of the city, since no two sides have connections with one another. The capitalists own the municipal government machine, so no new competition will be allowed, as a city franchise is needed in order to start a competing company. And so, absent Cowperwood's intervention, the people must be content with the current state of Chicago's streetcars, exemplified by the North Side company's lazy willingness to "put down poor, little, light-weight rails, and run slimpsy cars which were as cold as ice in winter and as hot as stove-ovens in summer" (*Titan* 171). By the end of Cowperwood's career, as we shall see, he will have converted horse-drawn cars to cable traction and then to a third system, electric traction; bypassed bridge traffic by

⁵⁷ Although I will focus primarily on the business aspect of Cowperwood's attacks on Chicago capital, Dreiser devotes nearly equal time to Cowperwood's social life, which often entails sleeping with the wives and daughters of Chicago capitalists, thereby turning those capitalists into enemies. Cowperwood's sexual conquests are just further proof that he is actively involved in prosecuting the struggle for human existence, while his opponents are aghast that their potential ally would violate the social compact by considering their wives and daughters fair game. Cowperwood's sexual motivations are more or less the same as his financial ones; as Ronald E. Martin puts it, financial, social, political, aesthetic, and romantic relationships are all just aspects of a "force-vector system" in Dreiser's writing (241). Walter Benn Michaels, writing about *The Financier*, puts it this way: "Cowperwood's sentimental relations are hardly incompatible with his sexual ones" (62). Michaels successfully shows how, in *The Financier*, Dreiser "goes on to think of nature in all her manifestations as capitalistic; art and sex are as speculative as the stock exchange" (83). In sex, art, and streetcars, Cowperwood competes and, as the most dynamic figure, always defeats his fellow capitalists.

repurposing a pair of otherwise failed tunnels; added elevated railroads; and united the systems of the various sides into the famous “Loop.” By any measure, Cowperwood's role as streetcar magnate is good for the city and its citizens. The only losers are the capitalists who were content not to prosecute the struggle until Cowperwood busted their tacit trust.

There is for Dreiser a useful and a useless kind of rich man - a right and a wrong kind of greedy titan. As Jack E. Wallace puts it, with quotations from Dreiser: “Dreiser divides financiers into two classes. The group he disliked were ‘the staid and conservative and socially well-placed rich.’ He much preferred millionaires who belonged to ‘the newer and quicker order’” (60). It is this newer and quicker type of millionaire – represented by Cowperwood – who actually prosecutes the struggle for existence. The staid and conservative, by contrast, merely hold on to what they have and, by doing so, often harm those below them in the socio-economic ranks. In direct contrast to the traditional understanding of this time, in which rapacious competition did a great deal of harm to the common man while it enriched the great man, Dreiser identifies a lack of competition among great men as the greatest problem facing American society. The staid and conservative rich man might once have built a great railroad (or, more likely, his father or father’s father did), but now he serves no purpose. The hungry, newly rich man, who is truly involved in the survival of the fittest game of social Darwinism, will actually benefit the rest of society. Dreiser explains this scenario in his book of philosophical treatises, *Hey Rub-a-Dub-Dub!* (1920).

Dreiser could be frequently pessimistic about America’s situation, but rather than locate America’s problems in too much greed and competition, he writes: “Only in one field – finance – not in war, politics, the arts and sheer intellect – do our essential individuals

compare favorably to those of other lands” (*Hey Rub* 57). Although Dreiser bemoans America’s status as “a mere money machine” (58), he locates America’s flaws not in its business morals, but rather in how far business morals have outstripped the rest of the country’s morals in their inevitable transformation.⁵⁸ Dreiser set out in *The Titan* to show how the ethics of sheer financial desire could benefit the city of Chicago. In the novel, Chicago is organized not *despite* the greed and vanity dominating financial ethics, but precisely *through* the practice of corrupt business ethics. As Dreiser puts it in his essay on “The American Financier” in *Hey Rub-a-Dub-Dub!*: “The first Vanderbilt was no doubt a brutal, cruel and savage man, but he had the vision which made a transcontinental railroad possible. His greed and vanity made it possible” (84).⁵⁹ Dreiser’s aim in *The Titan* is to express this truth in novelistic form: to show a ruthless, brutal, vain and greedy man whose actions nevertheless bring great benefit to the community of Chicago. In Yerkes, Dreiser

⁵⁸ Dreiser seems to share the traditional view that America is too materialistic: “[t]he strangest lack or flaw in the American organizing temperament [...] is, or has been, hitherto, its inability to see either character or significance in anything save movements which tend to further the most material financial aims” (*Hey Rub* 87). But Dreiser doesn’t look to be saved from the financiers, but rather by them, writing “[i]n the main we are too idealistic or illusioned in all *but* our material affairs” (*Hey Rub* 57; my emphasis). Where others see finance as having left the solid ground of respectable ethics, Dreiser locates all other aspects of American morals as caught in a faux respectability which needs to be sloughed off. This makes Dreiser, as befits his sympathy with Nietzsche, the leading light in the transvaluation of American morals. H.L. Mencken, Dreiser’s most sympathetic and perceptive critic, credits Dreiser with bringing American letters out of the nineteenth century’s romantic illusions of morality and into a much truer understanding of the world. Mencken writes that, as late as 1908, “the young man or woman who came to New York with a manuscript which violated in any way the pruderies and prejudices of the professors had a very hard time getting it printed. It was a day of complacency and conformity” (14). And Mencken, when he must choose the figure most responsible for defeating complacency and conformity and making the novel “true,” says that Dreiser’s formula “is now every serious American novelist’s formula” (16).

⁵⁹ Of course, it is precisely the main thrust of Richard White’s *Railroaded* that the greed and vanity of the railroad builders were what caused much of the economic instability of the late 19th century, and that their accomplishments were eventually funded by the state. In White’s words: “Governments subsidized them, secured their rights of way, regulated them, and protected them” (xxiii). Dreiser’s narrative of the titanic railroad man bringing great good to the county has been shown by White to be nonsense. However, as we shall see, Dreiser’s argument holds up rather better for the street-railways of Chicago. In Cowperwood’s Chicago, the local government was subsidizing and protecting the street-railway lines. Cowperwood’s project was not to join that trust, but to bust it.

located an amoral *Urbarmensch* whose actions made life better for others.⁶⁰ And the result is a novel that attempts to prove that the efforts of the greatest American financiers are always – no matter how they are condemned by the reformer – ultimately beneficial to the masses. As Dreiser puts it in “The American Financier,” the success of the great man stems from “a mass need for this, that and the other and his desire to supply it in order that he might improve his own condition, strengthen his own individuality, etc.” (81). The great man becomes great by identifying what the populace needs and delivering it; they both benefit, at least for a time, and this symbiotic relationship “is a condition of life, not a theory” – it is as fundamentally true as a biological law (80).

So why did Dreiser choose to write the novel that proves this theory about Charles T. Yerkes, a minor star in the constellation of titans? A large part of the answer is simple: Chicago.⁶¹ Chicago looms as the largest fact of American life in Dreiser’s imagination. In the first line of the first page of Dreiser’s first novel, a young woman boards a train for Chicago, seeking a new life. And in his first autobiographical volume, *Newspaper Days*,⁶² Chicago

⁶⁰ As Phillip Gerber puts it: “In the context of equation, Yerkes was employed by Nature as a tool toward completing a massive systems of public transit which would continue to yield lasting benefit long past their creator’s departure” (“Financier” 114). Whatever his flaws, Dreiser’s Cowperwood brings growth and reform, not suffering.

⁶¹ This is one of the standard reasons given for the choice of Yerkes; Richard Lehan lists six reasons for Dreiser’s choice, most of them versions of how Yerkes and Dreiser both sought to reconcile art and ambition. But Lehan does cite the role of cities as his fifth reason (99). F.O. Matthiessen observes that, as a Chicago newspaper man during Yerkes’ career, Dreiser knew the Chicago events of his career at first hand (129), and thus was uniquely prepared to write about them. In short, despite many other factors, I think Matthiessen is correct that his role as a Chicago titan figures most prominently in Dreiser’s choice of Yerkes for the subject of his opus.

⁶² Dreiser’s other published memoir, *Dawn*, was written before *Newspaper Days* and covers events prior to *Newspaper Days*, but, for a number of reasons, *Newspaper Days* was published a decade before *Dawn*. For a brief account of Dreiser’s autobiographical project, see Thomas P. Riggio’s “Preface” to the University of Pennsylvania Dreiser Edition of *Newspaper Days*; for a full account of how autobiography and biography appear in Dreiser’s writings, Riggio has an excellent essay, “Dreiser and the Uses of Biography,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Theodore Dreiser*.

represents for Dreiser, as it did for Carrie, as the place where the future happens: “Here was a city which had no traditions but which was making them, and this was the very thing which everyone seemed to understand and rejoice in” (3). The growth and life of cities is the central fact in Dreiser’s fictions,⁶³ and in Charles T. Yerkes he has located a captain of industry whose industry was, more or less, cities. Yerkes was involved in the creation of Philadelphia’s streetcar lines, Chicago’s natural gas lines, and London’s underground system. But he is best remembered as a pioneer in Chicago mass transit: the bringer of streetcar traction, of elevated railroads, and above all the creator of “The Loop.” And if Dreiser wants to prove that the actions of a brutal, greedy, and vain man can benefit society, he needs to prove that such a man can transform that most important fact of twentieth-century American existence: the city.

Cowperwood’s rise and fall is thus the story of how ruthless monopoly can be practiced, for a time, to improve a city. It is about how capitalism can reform itself, and bring order through the workings of the market and the mind of a financier. This seems to make Cowperwood’s narrative a suitably epic tragedy: all of his work to unify the city’s transit design is the story of a great man working on behalf of the city itself, even as he enriches himself and ignores the city’s laws and codes of morality. In this reading, it is only Cowperwood’s final overreach – in the form of the request that he be given a monopoly on

⁶³ As Jackson Lears puts it: “Theodore Dreiser had one story to tell [...] [a] young man or woman from the American hinterland flees from provincial boredom or (sometimes) moral disgrace, seeking a new life in the city” (63). Alfred Kazin highlights the primacy of Chicago in Dreiser’s imagination even more strongly; while Norris, Wharton, Herrick and others were experiencing modernity from a distance, “Dreiser was walking the streets of Chicago, the symbolic city which contained all that was aggressive and intoxicating in the new frontier world that lived for the mad pace of bull markets and the joys of accumulation” (63). And Mencken, reviewing *The Financier*, notes that that book is “the prologue rather than the play” with the real action moving to Chicago in *The Titan*. “Dreiser knows Chicago as few other men know it; he has pierced to the very heart of that most bewildering of cities” (48). In his later review of *The Genius*, Mencken continues this line of thought: “New York is vastly less interesting than Chicago. At all events, it is vastly less interesting to Dreiser” (60).

city transit for fifty more years – that turns him into a villain and brings about his fall. But the novel is not so much a tragedy with a hero and villain – that would be much too morally conventional for Dreiser. It is instead a story of how things get done in a city, in which Cowperwood's usefulness stems from the fact that his battle to unify the city's transit systems means that, under his aegis, a coherent system emerged out of chaos. Dreiser's novel illustrates how only a suitably empowered tycoon can interrupt the process of fractured development that otherwise will continue unchecked.⁶⁴

Rather than recognizing himself as a kindred spirit to the native capitalists⁶⁵ controlling Chicago and enforcing its disorganization, Cowperwood instantly sees the city itself as his future ally; in his ode to that city, Dreiser writes some of his most poetic, Sandburgian lines:

This singing flame of a city, this all America,⁶⁶ this poet in chaps and buckskin, this rude, raw *Titan*, this Burns of a city! By its shimmering lake it lay, a king of shreds and patches, a maundering yokel with an epic in its mouth, a tramp, a hobo among

⁶⁴ Indeed, history has remembered Yerkes in exactly the fashion that Dreiser intended. In his Chicago history, *City of the Century*, Donald L. Miller notes that, prior to Yerkes' intervention, "[i]t took more time to reach the city center from the city limits by horse power than it did to reach Milwaukee by steam power. Yerkes brought a massive expansion and modernization of this archaic system" (269). Miller's summation of Yerkes' career could well serve as a single sentence gloss on *The Titan*: "In building a fortune through crooked stock dealings and political thievery, he fashioned the world's greatest urban transportation system" (268). Corrupt, yes, but also an invaluable productive organizer.

⁶⁵ By "native capitalists," I mean those capitalists who are already in Chicago when Cowperwood, the outsider, arrives. It is not a term that Dreiser himself uses, but it briefly encapsulates the novel's central division, the distinctive between Chicago's home-grown, contented plutocrats and the newcomer who will revolutionize the city.

⁶⁶ Dreiser also includes some odes to this "all America" which read like some of Whitman's lists of Americans in *Leaves of Grass* or Melville's famous description of the passengers of the *Fidèle* in *The Confidence Man*: "Here came the dreamy gentleman of the South, robbed of his patrimony; the hopeful student of Yale and Harvard and Princeton; the enfranchised miner of California and the Rockies, his bags of gold and silver in his hands. Here was already the bewildered foreigner an alien speech confounding him - the Hun, the Pole, the Swede, the German, the Russian - seeking his homely colonies, fearing his neighbor of another race.

"Here was the negro, the prostitute, the blackleg, the gambler, the romantic adventurer *par excellence*." (*Titan* 6-7)

cities, with the grip of Caesar in its mind, the dramatic force of Euripides in its soul. (*Titan* 6).

Dreiser emphasizes its backwards rawness along with its power; strength, not sophistication, lies in Chicago. Having burnt down in 1871 and been built up in a mad rush of construction after, Chicago sprang up without the benefit of planning, and thus for all its raw power was "a king of shreds and patches." A king, yes, by virtue of its special role in the country's (and the world's) transport of goods; to go with his portrait of all-American humanity, Dreiser adds another brief list of heterogeneous travelers to Chicago: "Freight-cars were assembled here by the thousands from all parts of the country – yellow, red, blue, green, white.

(Chicago, he [Cowperwood] recalled, already had thirty railroads terminating here, as though it were the end of the world.)" (*Titan* 3). It is obviously not the end of the world, but the beginning of a reorientation of how the world will do business – the central hub of U.S. trade and manufacturing. But while this king might have "the grip of Caesar in its mind," it has no internal coherence. Controlled by *laissez-faire* capitalists, Chicago has grown up without any organization beyond a simple grid, and yet it is desperately in need of just that organization if it is to realize from its disparate shreds and patches its true place as an emperor of cities. In this era, before modern city planning has taken up the challenge of proposing just such a master plan,⁶⁷ Dreiser locates a force for unification in the mind and will of one Frank Cowperwood. If Cowperwood can find a way to integrate his career into the city of Chicago,

⁶⁷ In his book on that master plan (Daniel Burnham's *Plan of Chicago*), Carl Smith describes the long history of Chicago planning which predated Burnham's master efforts; following University of Chicago geographer Harold M. Meyer, Smith references the construction of a harbor in 1833, a boulevard system connecting the South, West, and Lincoln parks, and a number of other decisions made by Chicago's proto-planners (5). But despite all these efforts – and many others, some by Burnham and Olmsted – no one had attempted to shape the entire city into a single unit, pre-Burnham, and no one had provided a mechanism for moving the population throughout the entire city. Except, as I will argue, Dreiser wants to show how Charles Yerkes united the city and laid the template for its future decades before Burnham gave Chicago its first ostensible master plan.

the result will not be just vast wealth for an individual but a more organized city that will benefit all of its residents. But he will have to find a way to circumvent native capital first – the capital already established in Chicago that profits from the disorganization currently flourishing.

Cowperwood will achieve all this because he dreams of winning the struggle for control. "Streetcars, he knew, were his natural vocation. Even more than stock-brokerage, even more than banking, even more than stock-organization he loved the thought of streetcars and the vast manipulative life it suggested" (*Titan* 5). In order to understand how Cowperwood came to prefer the "vast manipulative life" of profiting from city planning and expansion to brokerage and banking, we must turn to the first Cowperwood novel, *The Financier* (1912). As a young man just entering the brokerage business under a trader named Tighe, Frank⁶⁸ finds immediate success only to decide that it isn't for him. First, Frank discovers (as all traders eventually discover) the fundamental lesson of the stock market: "It was useless, as Frank soon found, to try to figure out exactly why stocks rose and fell. Some general reasons there were, of course, as he was told by Tighe, but they could not always be depended on" (*Financier* 39). If there are no hard and fast laws that dictate the movement of the market, it is impossible to be sure of a profit. The market with its ups and downs requires a form of gambling that is distasteful to Frank; he is looking for the sure thing. Luckily for Frank, whose immense skill with numbers and figures is secondary to his skill with people, making a profit on the exchange is not contingent on knowing which way the market is going to move. Instead, the best traders are "keen students of psychology" whose success depended

⁶⁸ In *The Titan* Cowperwood is almost always "Cowperwood" in Dreiser's narration, but in *The Financier* he is interchangeably "Frank" and "Cowperwood," particularly in this early portion of the novel. I have chosen to call the Cowperwood of *The Financier* "Frank" in order to more easily distinguish which novel I am discussing.

on their ability to guess whether or not a broker representing a big manipulator, like Tighe, had an order large enough to affect the market sufficiently to 'get in and out,' as they termed it, at a profit before he had completed the execution of his order. They were like hawks watching for an opportunity to snatch their prey from under the very claws of their opponents (*Financier* 41).

Frank learns that the finances of great men are not based on guessing which way the market is moving, but based on controlling the system itself. Thus they are not gamblers; the brokers are gamblers because they buy shares in something they never intend to own. For them, shares in a railroad or manufacturer are illusory. The great men, in contrast, manipulate not just the stocks and shares, which are imaginarily connected to objects of production, but the objects themselves. They are "those whose enterprise and holdings these stocks represented, the men who schemed out and built the railroads, opened the mines, organized trading enterprises, and built up immense manufactories " (*Financier* 42). The difference between a great man and a broker goes beyond the simple problem of agency; the titan is superior to the broker, not just because he is his own man and not a tool, but also because his actions deal with the real world. This is a problem, as Dreiser points out, of representation. The broker never makes contact with the world itself, but only its shadow, the shares which, by mutual consent, those on the exchange pretend are connected to real world concerns. The broker's hold on reality is tenuous - his holdings are ephemeral, bought and sold at a moment's notice and subject to the whim of the real man who controls the tangible railroad or factory that the broker only has access to in the form of representation.

Walter Benn Michaels notes an additional complication in this distinction: the speculator, the market bear, profits when the market is down, but this fall in prices comes not

when times are lean but in a glut. “The bear reveals that nature at her most productive and the unproductive speculator [...] are collaborators” (74). This means that the speculator, despite multiple degrees of separation from the physical reality of the commodity, is in fact the one who stands the most to profit from an abundance of that commodity. And Michaels is right that the lesson of *The Financier* is that “in an economy where nature has taken the place of work, financial success can no longer be understood as payment for goods or services. It becomes, instead, a gift.” (78). But the Cowperwood of *The Titan*, having been gifted a new fortune just as he was gifted earlier misfortune, wants to move on to a status where he no longer needs to depend on gifts. Michaels writes “Cowperwood’s whole career is a glorification of chance, and the constant lesson of *The Financier* is that accidents will happen” (78). I would suggest, however, that although chance continues to play its part in Cowperwood’s career, *The Titan*’s lesson is not about an economy where nature has taken the place of work, but rather where the city – the continuous sprawl – has taken the place of nature. In Chicago, it isn’t nature that will replace work, but the city.

Having learned in *The Financier* that both the speculator and the producer are merely at the mercy of nature, Cowperwood tries to circumvent accidents by profiting from a force which seems unstoppable: the man-made growth of Chicago. He’s inspired by the strength of Chicago itself, and needs a way to profit from its growth. As Howard Horwitz puts it: “Gas and street railways are public services tied to cities, especially to ‘the expansion of the city’ (T[itan] 22). Thus the fortunes of the self are invested in an entity less volatile than the market, and infinitely expansive” (202). The man who would profit from nature must wait for her “gift,” and he is at the mercy of nature’s cycles of boom and bust, drought and glut. Cowperwood trades the necessity of the gift for the certainty of, in Horwitz’s words, the

“infinitely expansive” city.⁶⁹ And the streetcars are the way to profit from Chicago itself, because as long as the city continues growing outward, more and more streetcars will be required, and the man who controls that streetcar system will be able to print his own money.⁷⁰ It's obvious to anyone that the city will keep expanding, so obvious that Cowperwood sees, as he enters the city for the first time, "here and there, a lone working-man's cottage, the home of some adventurous soul who had planted his bare hut thus far out in order to reap the small but certain advantage which the growth of the city would bring" (*Titan* 3). Even this working-man knows that the city will continue expanding outward, and thus it is to his gain to purchase land cheaply and build a cottage now with the certain knowledge that the city will come and that cottage will become connected to the metropolis.

It is this imminent reality that gives Cowperwood his opening. As the city expands, it leaves behind any systems set in place to control it. Although the actually existing city of Chicago sprawls for miles, entering other counties, cities, townships, and even states, the legal Chicago – the part controlled by the mayor and the aldermen, and defined by the city limits – comprises only a relatively small part of the larger area. To put it a different way, although the metropolitan area can expand more or less indefinitely, entering Indiana and

⁶⁹ One of the saddest lessons of the twentieth century, particularly in the Rust Belt, is that all cities are not necessarily infinitely expansive. But in the years of the Gilded and Progressive Ages, Dreiser was among the many who could hardly conceive of a city's growth stopping. Cowperwood's ultimate goal will become, as we will see, the right to run the transit lines of Chicago for a half-century or more, under the mistaken belief that the city cannot suffer a reversal.

⁷⁰ Horwitz notes that this interest in becoming part of the city goes beyond mere financial gain to a new ontology of the self. Cowperwood, by becoming one with the city, can, like the “real men” in *The Financier*, become something greater. As Horwitz puts it: “Like Rockefeller absorbed and emboldened in the matrix of the Standard, Cowperwood would be everywhere at once; whatever location he occupies on the street map of the city, he can experience his extension to every other part” (203). Cowperwood's selfhood is no longer confined to a single point, but instead has become diffuse across the entire city, and thus impossible to resist or nullify. Someone who reaches that point, as will become clear, does run the risk of becoming one of the staid and conservative rich men – the wrong kind of rich man.

even Wisconsin, the municipal government cannot control that larger area. And since the capitalists who are Cowperwood's enemies are dependent on city franchises for their power, the percentage of the Chicago area that they control will shrink with each suburban development. The aspect of this metropolitan area that lies within Chicago city limits is impregnable to Cowperwood. It needs no infusion of capital, having more than its share of capitalists, and has political organization in the form of party machines beholden to those native capitalists. But for whatever reason, the business end of this arrangement has been willing to remain within the political and administrative bounds of the city. The native capitalists haven't yet seen the value of entrenching themselves, like the working-man's cottage, outside of the city in the certain knowledge that the greater metropolitan area (what Patrick Geddes calls the "man-reef" or "conurbation") is expanding. In Geddes' terminology, the native capital of Chicago hasn't grasped the fact that this particular "man-reef" will expand endlessly, and has for some reason failed to follow the outer tendrils of its growth. Cowperwood does grasp this fact, and before he can take on the more powerful streetcar holders, decides to use that knowledge to organize the delivery of natural gas in Chicago. As his first successful unification and his first triumph over the native capital of Chicago, the natural gas venture represents his streetcar triumph in microcosm.

When Cowperwood sets his sights on the natural gas business in Chicago, there are, as with the streetcars, three different natural gas companies for the three different major areas of Chicago: the North Side, South Side, and West Side. The South Side company is the oldest and strongest, but the other two companies only exist due to lack of foresight on the part of the older company. The North and West Side companies "had been allowed to spring into existence through the foolish self-confidence of the organizer and directors of the South

Side company, who had fancied that neither the West Side nor the North Side was going to develop very rapidly for a number of years to come, and had counted on the city council's allowing them to extend their mains at any time to these other portions of the city" (*Titan* 41).

As we have already seen, this shortsightedness is particularly damaging along two axes. First and most obviously, anyone, even the lowest working-man building his cottage, can see at this point that Chicago's growth will be uninterrupted, and the fact that the South Side organizers missed that fact a few decades ago speaks poorly for their predictive powers. Equally problematic is their belief that the city council will be beholden to their wishes; this betrays a lack of understanding of local government as great as their lack of understanding of Chicago's future. In the short run, this belief in the constancy of the city council has allowed the creation of their opposing companies. But their shortsightedness is much more damaging in the long run when we combine their dual lack of understandings about growth and city government. Cowperwood's original plan "was to buy out and combine the three old city companies" (*Titan* 41). But although he could do this in a way that would be profitable to the current owners in the short run, they refuse his offer on the grounds that their stock "intrinsically was worth more every year, as the city was growing larger and its need of gas greater" (*Titan* 42). They have, at least, grasped this much about Chicago: anyone who will profit from its growth looks set to profit in perpetuity. But they have failed to apprehend Geddes' central insight: as the conurbation extends its reach, it will no longer be governable by the city government. As the conurbation expands beyond the city limits, the inconstant city council has no power. Although they think they can just placidly sit on their franchises

and become wealthier – deliberately avoiding the struggle for existence – the nature of Chicago’s growth makes them easy prey.

Thus Cowperwood effects a new plan: "Suburbs such as Lake View and Hyde Park, having town or village councils of their own, were permitted to grant franchises to water, gas, and street-railway companies duly incorporated under the laws of the state" (*Titan* 42).

Cowperwood thus ends up unifying the natural gas of not just the city of Chicago but the entire Chicago metropolitan area by organizing three dummy companies in outlying suburbs and eventually forcing the three older companies to sell out, as their outward expansion has been blocked. From what could and should have been disorganization – the possibility of a separate natural gas company not just for each side but also for each suburb - comes a unified system which outstrips governmental organization, integrating the natural gas lines of the three sides with Hyde Park and Lake View years before the city officially annexed those suburbs. Without Cowperwood’s desire to enrich himself, it becomes a mere exercise in counterfactual history to imagine how and when Chicago might have ever achieved a unified natural gas system.⁷¹ Cowperwood, of course, gets his franchises by bribing the suburban city councils; Dreiser always highlights his protagonist’s corruption. But the Chicago capitalists held on to their much shoddier natural gas systems by bribing Chicago city council and happily profiting from subpar service. Only through more skillful bribery can Cowperwood bring competition to bear on the city’s robber barons.

⁷¹ William James provides a wonderful guide to the importance of the individual in this sort of counterfactual thinking. "Some organizing genius must in the nature of things have emerged from the French revolution; but what Frenchman will affirm it to have been an accident of no consequence that he should have the supernumerary idiosyncrasies of a Bonaparte?" (*Will to Believe* 651). The natural gas system of Chicago would have someday become organized, but Cowperwood’s particular gifts resulted in an organized system, far earlier than would have been expected, that integrated the suburbs as well as the city.

However, this unification is not actually that simple. Cowperwood ends up not being able to effect a simple combination of the six companies because, in the words of the financier Schryhart, representing Chicago's native capital: "they won't work with you" (*Titan* 81). Cowperwood, as an outsider, has had his offers of unification refused by native capital; Schryhart offers to finish the deal in a way that is mutually profitable to Cowperwood and himself as "some one of influence, or perhaps, I had better say, of old standing in Chicago, some one who knows these people" (*Titan* 81). Cowperwood of course refuses Schryhart's offer, as in this case "Schryhart, not himself, would be taking the big end in this manipulative deal" and that offends both Cowperwood's financial sensibilities and his desire to be the great man who controls the reality of the city (*Titan* 80). As we have seen, being the manipulator who controls the actual processes is just as important to Cowperwood as any financial gain. Cowperwood ends up achieving his goal of a unified natural gas company by "boodling" (i.e. bribing the aldermen) the passage of an ordinance that gives him a franchise to create a fourth gas company in the city of Chicago, one with the rights to operate on all three sides (*Titan* 95). Faced with the inability to expand into the suburbs and the possibility of a street-by-street fight within city limits, the old companies finally allow Cowperwood to unify all seven previous franchises into a single coherent entity, with Cowperwood promptly selling his 50 percent interest and walking away from the whole matter of Chicago natural gas with an enormous profit (*Titan* 98). Of course, Chicago benefits even more than Cowperwood from a workable, organized natural gas system, one that has been standardized and regulated by Cowperwood's hand-picked experts. This would not have come about without Cowperwood spoiling for a fight; the complacent natural gas holders would have made no unifying move without a threat to their business. Although, as we shall see, the people of the

city will quite reasonably object to Cowperwood's corrupt methods, at this stage in Chicago's history, out-corrupting the corrupt capitalists is the only way to improve the city in ways that will benefit the people.

This natural gas episode presages all of the major events of Cowperwood's streetcar consolidation: the outflanking of the original companies by way of suburban franchises, the subsequent opposition from entrenched Chicago capital, and the eventual triumph via the boodling of a city council bill and a consolidation which the older companies are forced to make. The primary difference between the natural gas endeavor and the subsequent streetcar undertaking is that, although Cowperwood does succeed in unifying the streetcar and elevated railroad systems, he suffers a final failure at the end of the novel when he fails to boodle the bill that will assure his permanent fortune. The city of Chicago's public transit was built by Frank Cowperwood, but the city will not grant him a fifty-year extension on his franchises, as a group of grassroots reformers and muckraking journalists combine to rouse the full force of the city's population against the prospect of a Cowperwood extension. When we examine the major beats of Cowperwood's street-car triumph and failure, we can observe a narrative in *The Titan* which takes into account both Cowperwood's usefulness to the city and his eventual inimical role in the city's development. To put this in the metaphorical terms used by Dreiser, it is the narrative of Cowperwood's transformation from sheltering banyan tree to villainous octopus.

As we have already seen, complacent capital has a parasitic relationship to the city; Chicago's native capital directs the growth of the city towards conurbation, gridlock, and poverty. But, counterintuitively, when capitalists compete amongst themselves, a greater unity can be achieved. In this case, Cowperwood builds such a unified system in the realm of

mass transit. Just as in the natural gas scenario, entrenched Chicago capital has created a patchwork system of complacent streetcar franchise holders, squeezing profit out of their designated geographic areas and foreclosing both competition and the possibility of greater organization. But capital, as we see, does not have to be a parasite. Once Cowperwood has effected his streetcar takeover, Dreiser introduces the banyan tree as a metaphor for his accomplishments:

How wonderful it is that men grow until, like colossi, they bestride the world or, like banyan trees, they drop roots from every branch and are themselves a forest – a forest of intricate commercial life, of which a thousand material aspects are the evidence. His street-railway properties were like a net – the parasite Gold Thread – linked together as they were, and draining two of the three⁷² important 'sides' of the city (*Titan* 472).

We should note, first, that the language used previously to describe the city itself – the "rude, raw Titan" – is now being applied directly to Cowperwood himself, a colossus bestriding the world. In other words, Cowperwood has achieved his ultimate goal: to become synonymous with the city, so that its growth and prosperity directly benefit him, and vice versa. But if he is a "parasite," as Dreiser describes him, he is also a life-giving force, in keeping with the banyan metaphor. The banyan tree, nicknamed "the strangler fig," usually begins life by growing up around another more conventional tree, eventually superseding that tree and, as in Dreiser's poetic metaphor, dropping roots straight down from branches and becoming a forest in and of itself. This metaphor might seem easy to read – if Cowperwood is the banyan, then the original tree is the city of Chicago, eventually to be strangled and drained of its resources so that the banyan might survive. But in the novel, although Cowperwood's gold thread takes its toll, it is also the lifegiver of an "intricate commercial

⁷² At this point in the narrative Cowperwood has only united two of the three sides; the moment where he obtains the ownership of the third side is an important matter to be discussed in the next section.

life," just as banyan trees sustain myriad life among their branches. The only loser is the original tree, which I take in this metaphor not to be the thriving city of Chicago but the noncompetitive capitalists who ran Chicago before Cowperwood arrived. The trunk that Cowperwood strangled is not the lifeforce of the city, but the parasite that was driving the city purely for its own profit, at the expense of the people. It is Cowperwood's enemies – Schryhart, Hand, etc. – who are choked by his growth, while the economic life of the city is in fact driven and supported by it.⁷³ The amoral robber baron and the impoverished workingman benefit alike from a unified transit system that connects neighborhood to neighborhood and all neighborhoods to the downtown districts.

Indeed, far more than simply modifying the technological practices of the city's streetcars, Cowperwood's great accomplishment is unifying the city's streetcars and creating the famous Union Loop (better known as just "The Loop"). As I have argued, there was no other force capable of such an achievement: native capital was content to control a few central geographical areas while conurbation took the city's growth to the suburbs, and the fragmentary nature of municipal organization meant that there was no political force which could organize a coherent mass transit system for Chicago. Although Cowperwood had to organize his system piecemeal, "each having separate franchises and capitalized separately," each element of that system works in "a single, harmonious union" with every other part (*Titan* 473). And this unity of transit has resulted in a unity of Chicago: "What had been

⁷³ Philip Gerber makes the point that, from the perspective of Yerkes, the hated titan had been a dynamic force for good for Chicago: "And had it not been his skill and determination and *imagination* that had built the Union Loop [...] He'd gone to great expense to cater to the swelling rage for technological innovation, electrifying his lines, and building power plants all over the city to supply the new alternating current that ran his underground cables" ("Jolly" 82). Of course, the same newspapers that demonized Yerkes for not switching to electric traction fast enough now demonize him because the plants that provide the electric power "rained oily black flakes of coal-snow over Chicago!" ("Jolly" 82)

when he arrived a soggy, messy plain strewn with shanties, ragged sidewalks, a higgledy-piggledy business heart, was now truly an astounding metropolis that had passed the million mark in population." What had once been haphazard conurbation - a city of shreds and patches - is now a coherent entity, revolving around a financial district of "cañon-like streets lined with fifteen and even eighteen story office buildings" and "further out were districts of mansions, parks, pleasure resorts, great worlds of train-yards and manufacturing areas (*Titan* 472). From Cowperwood's banyan-like growth comes concomitant city organization, and organization which would have been impossible without his unifying influence.

But this moment of harmonious flows represents the peak of Cowperwood's influence in the city, and the novel's final section is the story of Cowperwood's decline, in which he asks the City for a fifty-year extension of his streetcar franchises and is denied. The reason for the decline is simple enough: Cowperwood, the banyan tree, has sheltered and supported the city's growth and prosperity, provided it with a vascular system which it might never have achieved without him. And while he has done so for his personal profit, and via corrupt methods, the true objects of his enmity were the parasitical capitalists who were profiting from the city without benefiting it.⁷⁴ Now that the harmonious union has been achieved and Cowperwood's gold thread is drawing money from every corner of the city, his unifying role

⁷⁴ As Shawn St. Jean points out, Cowperwood's story is, as befits the titles *The Titan* and *The Stoic*, obviously a rewriting of the Prometheus myth: "After turning against his fellow Titans and assisting Zeus in ascension over his father Chronos, Prometheus is cast aside by the new regime" (208). St. Jean mentions that this is more or less the plot of *The Financier*, and he is correct. But there is also a democratic message implicit in the later acts of the careers of both Cowperwood and Prometheus. Prometheus later betrayed the gods and gave fire to the humans; Cowperwood betrayed the Chicago capitalists and gave a unified city to the masses (the chapter where all the capitalists unite to take down Cowperwood is called "Mount Olympus."). All we need to do is substitute Cowperwood for Prometheus, the other capitalists for the Olympian gods, and the people of Chicago standing in for humanity, and we see that the main thrust of story of *The Titan* is a retelling of Prometheus' gift of fire. Instead of fire, Cowperwood has given the people the most important thing in late-nineteenth-century society: an organized city. The gods are, like the capitalists, a cabal happy to deprive the people of what they need; Cowperwood is a gift giver whose "gift" is, in fact, simply seeing a need and providing a service.

is no longer necessary. In a post-unified Chicago, Cowperwood is not banyan tree but pure parasite. Thus his enemies are no longer Schryhart, Hand, and Chicago's native capital, but rather, in a chapter called "Capital and Public Rights," a group made up of "anarchists, socialists, single-taxers, and public ownership advocates" along with journalists who are trying to improve the city (*Titan* 519, 520). Cowperwood's profits now benefit himself alone, and his rampant boodling – described as "the degradation of honest men" – can no longer be tolerated (*Titan* 519). Dreiser describes a workingman who reads the papers' attacks on Cowperwood and concludes, "He [Cowperwood] must be made to succumb, to yield to the forces of law and order" (*Titan* 520).

It was, of course, precisely those forces of law and order that were unable to assert primacy and build a unified Chicago. The city's streetcars could only have been unified by corrupt methods, but the people of the city can no longer abide by those methods.⁷⁵ Prior to this moment in the novel, the only voices calling for law and order were those hoping to bribe a new set of aldermen and use "reform" candidates for their own personal gain. But now that there is a legitimate reform movement, capital unifies with Cowperwood. Not only do Chicago's local capitalists react with fear to these public rights advocates – supporting Cowperwood in his fight with the city council and selling him the South Side aspect of the streetcar system that he did not yet own – the fight for franchise becomes an international spectacle. "Men such as Haeckelheimer, Gotloeb, Fishel, tremendous capitalists in the East and foremost in the directorates of huge transcontinental lines, international banking houses, and the like, were amazed that the newspapers and the anti-Cowperwood element should

⁷⁵ Just as with his fictional counterpart, it was corruption that eventually doomed Yerkes. In his Chicago history, *City of Big Shoulders* (2000), Robert G. Spinney says that, despite Yerkes' impressive efforts, "[m]any Chicagoans, however, detested Yerkes for his dishonest and shady dealings" (153). Eventually, the public pressure became too great for even corrupt aldermen to accept Yerkes' bribes (154).

have gone so far in Chicago" (*Titan* 521). Dreiser uses free indirect discourse to voice their thoughts: "Such theories as were now being advocated here would spread to other cities unless checked. America might readily become anti-capitalistic – socialistic. Public ownership might appear as a workable theory - and then what?" (*Titan* 521). Faced with this terrifying prospect of a series of cities that might own their own municipal services, capital lines up behind Cowperwood. No longer a banyan, Cowperwood is now an octopus, an ever-spreading monster like the one in Norris' novel of that name: "A giant monopoly is really reaching out to enfold [Chicago] with an octopus-like grip. And Cowperwood is its eyes, its tentacles, its force!" (*Titan* 532). Whereas Cowperwood's will once drove the city in a direction amenable to both parties, his most recent actions have made him a force inimical to the health of the city. Dreiser, as we shall see, imagines this revolt against Cowperwood as a dialectical historical corrective, with the masses offering up a counterpoint to the actions of the all-powerful individual.⁷⁶

Cowperwood has finally become part of the club of capitalists who support the status quo. Just like the Chicago capitalists who were content to sit on their holdings earlier in the novel, Cowperwood wants the struggle for existence to stop right at the moment when he is at his peak. Finally, the other capitalists agree with him; now that he is part of the status quo, their battle is over. But here Dreiser makes the move that he is so rarely given credit for: he introduces the people themselves as another player in the struggle for existence.

Ronald E. Martin states the conventional view of the trilogy:

⁷⁶ Principled opposition to Yerkes had actually emerged years earlier in the form of a strike of his streetcar workers, but Dreiser left that strike out of *The Titan* in order to make Cowperwood's actions more properly dialectical. As Phillip Gerber puts it, "the strike occurred too early chronologically for Dreiser's dramatic aim; he was at this point establishing a basis for success and engaging the sympathy of the reader for Cowperwood. The strike must go." ("Financier" 118). An earlier strike would have made it more difficult for Dreiser to make the case that Cowperwood was the beneficial kind of rich man.

And, of course, the masses of people who use the natural gas, ride the street-railways, vote in elections that the financiers are struggling to control are insignificant, unthinking creatures fit only to be led or misled as the men of power choose. The vision is as undemocratic as it is amoral.

Given this system of values in the trilogy, high drama occurs only when there is opposition between men of force. (243)

But democratic high drama emerges in the sixty-first chapter, "The Cataclysm," which not only turns its attention to the common man but also takes on the dramatic form⁷⁷ as Cowperwood's corrupt aldermen are confronted by their outraged constituents. In this exchange Pinski, a Cowperwood supporter, is accosted by a mob:

A Voice. "We'll finish you, you stiff."

A Citizen (advancing; a bearded Pole). "How will you vote, hey? Tell us that! How? Hey?"

A Second Citizen (a Jew). "You're a no-good, you robber. I know you for ten years now already. You cheated me when you were in the grocery business."

A Third Citizen (a Swede. In a sing-song voice). "Answer me this, Mr. Pinski. If a majority of the citizens of the Fourteenth Ward don't want you to vote for it, will you still vote for it?"

Pinski (hesitating) (*Titan* 538)

The citizens are presented as individuals of varying ethnicity, highlighting a sense of working-class unity, which culminates in a line by "The Five Hundred" speaking with a unified voice (*Titan* 538). Pinski, like the other aldermen who take part in what the novel describes as "little dramatic incidents" (*Titan* 539), is eventually overwhelmed by the citizenry and agrees to oppose Cowperwood's plan.

These two breaks from the genre of the novel – an anti-Cowperwood handbill printed in the novel (Figure 3.1) and the "dramatic incidents" – indicate the novel's transformation

⁷⁷ In addition to being more democratic than he is usually given credit for, Dreiser here uses a surprisingly experimental tactic, the dramatic form, not unlike some of Joyce's generic experiments in *Ulysses* (1922). And with the inclusion of a printed handbill of the anti-Cowperwood forces (Figure 3.1), Dreiser even illustrates his novel with visual material.

from a valediction of Cowperwood-the-unifier to a condemnation of Cowperwood-the-parasite. The final pages of the novel, after Cowperwood's defeat, are a third generic disruption, with a section entitled "In Retrospect" serving as a philosophical treatise on the nature of life itself, with Cowperwood's career as its leading example.⁷⁸ "In Retrospect" explains the fall of Cowperwood and the rise of radical politics as a simple balancing act in the great struggle between the individual and society:

there have sprung up social words and phrases expressing a need of balance - of equation. These are right, justice, truth, morality, an honest mind, a pure heart - all words meaning: a balance must be struck. The strong must not be too strong; the weak not too weak. But without variation how could the balance be maintained? Nirvana! Nirvana! The ultimate, still equation" (*Titan* 551).

These words suggest that, as long as humanity falls short of the state of "Nirvana" which the ever-restless Cowperwood is obviously so far from achieving, it must depend on abstract concepts of right, justice, truth, etc. in order to balance the relationship between the individual and society. But more importantly for our purposes, this need to develop concepts to balance the equation stems from the fact that balance itself requires variation. Stasis is what Chicago has at the beginning of the novel, a false stasis of capitalist complacency built on top of tremendous growth and change. Cowperwood, the great competitor, interrupts this stasis to transform Chicago in a radical and unanticipated way: from the dynamic struggle for existence comes unity that will benefit the people. But the people are not passive participants

⁷⁸ As Ronald E. Martin points out in *American Literature and the Universe of Force* (1981), this is an example of the "typical endings of Dreiser's novels, with their drawing back to a cosmic viewpoint from which all human striving is vain and transitory" (224). Martin's chapter on Dreiser, "Theodore Dreiser: At Home in the Universe of Force," does an excellent job of explaining how Dreiser manages to reconcile the monumental history of a titan with the "vain and transitory" nature of all human striving; in short, he argues persuasively that Dreiser felt, rather than thought through, his various ideas, and thus ended up with a number of ideas which individually felt right but are difficult to contain in a coherent system. But I think *The Titan* is successful in showing how, despite the ideological tension between the interests of the group and the individual in theories of capitalism, the two sides often pull together in actually existing capitalism – Dreiser is, in fact, right that competition between powerful men can result in a better city for the entire community.

in this process; when Cowperwood himself wants a new false stasis, the people rise up, reject him, and take control of the city themselves.

As such, *The Titan* is an uneasy, unstable, but ultimately successful working through of the ideas that Dreiser was gesturing towards in his turgid philosophical essays. The novel depicts Cowperwood as a titanic figure of admiration, a Nietzschean figure beyond the commonplace moral values that Dreiser despised and successfully made laughable in early twentieth century American fiction. Corrupt and amoral, Cowperwood was nevertheless the only figure able to imagine a free-flowing Chicago and bring that vision about. Organization was impossible in a city where the greatest men complacently profited from stasis, and a corrupt municipal government profited from the graft from those great men. But although Chicago benefited from Cowperwood's defeat of the old rule and his transit system, the city didn't need to endure his permanent rule. Energized by reformers – serving, like Cowperwood, as figures representative of greater forces – and threatening the titan's cronies with violence, the masses play the amoral game of force as well as the titan, and take their newly organized city for themselves. Although the novel itself breaks under the strain of representing the battle between the empowered individual and the empowered masses, the message is clear: in a world where old morals have no use and force predominates, the clash between the individual and the group will, in the long run, benefit both sides. The only villains are those who hold power without wielding it, the native capitalists who believe their comfortable stasis can endure. By the end of the novel, Cowperwood reaches that state, and the masses destroy his brief illusion of permanence through their own wielding of force. But his accomplishments, of course, endure, and Chicago to this day benefits from the transit system built by the titan.

Jane Addams: Cooperative Reform Through a New Ethics

Come you, cartoonists,
Hang on a strap with me here
At seven o'clock in the morning
On a Halsted street car.

Take your pencils
And draw these faces

Try with your pencils for these crooked faces,
That pig-sticker in one corner-his mouth-
That overall factor girl-her loose cheeks.

Find for your pencils
A way to mark your memory
Of tired empty faces.
After their night's sleep,
In the moist dawn

And cool daybreak,
Faces
Tired of wishes,
Empty of dreams.

-Carl Sandburg, "Halsted Street Car"

Like Dreiser, Addams provides a narrative that explains how human reason and organic growth can work together to improve Chicago. But although the narratives are both syntheses of evolutionary and rational modes of reform, they are otherwise quite different. Most obviously, whereas Dreiser's Cowperwood integrates the city via competition, Addams' Hull-House brings organization through cooperation. In Dreiser's narrative, the upper-class tycoon will be on the side of the people only when his interests temporarily line up with them and against the idle rich. Addams not only rejects this method of reform, she

also rejects a simplistic class opposition, in which the working classes should cooperate in order to form a bloc which has the force to overcome the tycoon's desires in the labor market. Instead, Addams' vision is of cross-class fertilization, as exemplified by her decision to live in the Halsted Street neighborhood and disrupt its class homogeneity. This leads us to the second great distinction between Addams and Dreiser: whereas Dreiser was bringing flow to the entire city, making it possible for people to travel across the larger landscape, Addams's Hull-House is bringing flow at the level of the neighborhood, making it possible for people in different groups to come together. As we shall see, one of the trickiest aspects of Addams' thinking is that although she believes in the total subsumption of class differences within the community of Hull-House, she does believe in specialization of labor within that community, based on individual talents. Since the skills necessary to serve as administrators belonged almost entirely to the wealthier members of the Hull-House community, this seems to re-inscribe class differences within the community. In this reading, Addams is just dressing up class stasis in new clothes. However, it is my contention that, although the upper- and middle-class members of the community served as its administrators, it was the poorer residents who actually took the lead in setting the agenda for the community.

The first and pre-eminent aspect of that agenda is the ethic of care. Sandburg's poem "Chicago" is the perfect epigraph for the Dreiser portion of this chapter, as that poem emphasizes how, despite suffering and brutality, or perhaps because of them, the city still does enormous, triumphant work. This is an exhilarating vision of Chicago, but it is not a particularly humane one. Sandburg's "Halsted Street Car," by contrast asks the reader to view Chicago at street level, and the portrait that emerges is tragic – the members of the

neighborhood are “Tired of wishes/Empty of dreams.” Although the city is dreaming big, the humans doing that work are suffering for it. Addams locates the ethic of care that would help these residents in the ethics of the community itself; the community already cares about its members. But, when buffeted by the monumental forces that make Chicago hog butcher to the world, an ethic of care which works at the individual level is hopelessly outmatched. Addams’ goal is thus the creation of an entity – a unified neighborhood – which can take that ethic of care and expand it to encompass all of humanity. Addams’ singular accomplishment is thus helping the people themselves, and their humane ethic of care, produce a vision of Chicago. In order to do that, Hull-House must overcome all the divisions which prevent individuals from realizing their place in the larger community and their ability to pull together to effect real social change. The most important division to overcome, the one that prevented previous charity workers from doing any good, is the division between democratic methods and reform. In the top-down planning methods of someone like Burnham, the public is a passive receiver of the wisdom of the city planner. The public is something more in Dreiser’s *The Titan*, but the people are still primarily a reactive force, and they are certainly secondary to the machinations of titans. Addams’ project is to put the people themselves in charge of the city, and to make the reforms neither the product of a disinterested planner nor a vibrant market, but instead the will of the entire community.

In his response to the toasts made at the celebration of his seventieth birthday, John Dewey noted that Jane Addams “attributed to me some of the things in Chicago which she and her colleagues in Hull House did” (179). Most importantly, according to Dewey, Addams taught Dewey “the enormous value of mental non-resistance, of tearing away the armor-plate of prejudice, of convention, isolation that keeps one from sharing to the full in

the larger and even the more unfamiliar and alien ranges of the possibilities of human life and experience” (179). Many of Dewey’s Chicago school colleagues and heirs (and, to a lesser extent, Dewey himself) have long been viewed as unwilling to admit the “more unfamiliar and alien” aspects into their conception of a progressive, democratic society. Working in Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and others were firmly committed to both democracy and progressive liberalism. But the Chicago of that era seemed inimical to bringing democracy and liberalism together. The masses were usually content to vote for the party boss, who illegally paid for his votes but was nevertheless democratically elected. And the progressive elites generally worked undemocratically, either in modes such as religious charity or the top-down, technocratic city planning pioneered by Olmsted and Burnham. The reformers’ choice seemed to be: empower the people and submit to unwanted but democratic outcomes, or reform and revitalize the community by ignoring the people’s ballot voice. For the most part, the Chicago school reformers chose progressive reforms at the expense of those democratic movements that seemed alien to them; as Andrew Feffer puts it: “Their notion of democracy could not accommodate popular sentiment that did not meet the standards of organized intelligence, as in the case of pacifists during the war or rank and file union members afterward” (269). Although the Chicago pragmatists believed in a public sphere that “was open to the contribution of many previously excluded sectors of American society, notably the organized working class (when responsibly led) [...] the Chicago pragmatists could not tolerate truly discordant voices in their reform conversations” (Feffer 268-269). Neither the radical working class nor the elected but corrupt forces in society were welcome to the reform table. Reasonable progressive liberals were invited; radicals and demagogues need not apply. For

the most part, the men of the Chicago school struggled to reconcile progressive reform and democratic governance whenever the two came into conflict with one another.

As we know from Dewey's response to her toast, there was one Chicago pragmatist who was open to the more unfamiliar extremes of democracy, a figure who welcomed the voices of radicals and who praised some aspects of corrupt democracy: Jane Addams. As Edmund Wilson puts it: "Hull-House had always stood for tolerance: all the parties and all the faiths had found asylum there and lived pretty harmoniously together" (453). This harmony comes from the efforts of Addams, a leader who "could not bind herself to parties and principles: what she did had to be done independently" (Wilson 451). I wish to show that Jane Addams contributes a highly democratic and egalitarian vision to Chicago pragmatism, during an era when the false choice seemed to be between democratic governance or progressive reform. And although the general opinion of Addams' accomplishments ebbed and flowed throughout her lifetime and continues to fluctuate, I wish to show that Addams' writings and actions are a vital part of the liberal democratic tradition. In contrast to the cynical view that the people cannot act progressively and that progressives would be better off not acting through the people, I wish to show that Addams asserts the necessity of uniting progressive policies and truly democratic politics. Addams' goal was, as Mina Carson puts it, the "melting away [of] class distinction in the industrial cities" in order to put the people in position to direct the city themselves (38). This melting-away required a deep commitment to democracy, but a democracy that could make progressive alterations in American society. Although there are those who argue that she was no more democratic than the other pragmatists, it is my contention that Addams' central achievement was overcoming the divide between the upper- and lower-classes and envisioning a Chicago which could be both

liberal and democratic. Her philosophical method was historical, evolutionary, and above all dialectical. In my analysis, I show how Addams overcame three seeming binaries which, if allowed to endure, would have prevented urban America from realizing a liberal and democratic society. The first of these oppositions is the practical distinction between individual and communal action; the second, the ethical distinction between the feudal morals of the party boss and the abstract ethics of a progressive reformer; and the final distinction is between the interests of the wealthy and those of the poor. By showing that all of these distinctions are either illusory or surmountable, Addams articulated a vision of the American urban landscape that could support both progressive liberalism and democracy.

In Dreiser's endlessly seesawing vision of history, any gains made by overcoming these distinctions would be temporary. The individual and the group might pull together for a while, but eventually they will go their separate ways; self-interested and abstract ethics might demand the same behavior of Cowperwood one day, but the next day they will diverge. And, most importantly, the interests of the wealthy man and the poor will go hand in hand so long as the wealthy man is actively participating in the struggle, but once he becomes complacent, he will become the enemy of the poor. Although Addams' vision is not teleological in the sense that she wants to move history towards a specific, pre-determined goal, she is not content with the sort of ad hoc and ephemeral syntheses that Dreiser shows will arise out of competition. Instead, she wants to anchor social progress in the lasting bedrock of an ever-widening ethic of unity. Whereas Dreiser shows that evolutionary forces will cause the rich and the poor to pull in the same direction for a time, Addams wants to show both rich and poor that their fates are irrevocably linked, and that cooperation is thus the only long-term response to the problems of urban America.

Section 1: The Individual and the Group

Inspired by Darwin, but deeply opposed to the Social Darwinists' belief that society's events must be allowed to run their course in order to achieve an eventual good, Addams seeks to intervene in the process of moral evolution.⁷⁹ Thus Addams adopts a position that is both Darwinian/Spencerian, eschewing solutions that do not spring from the organic cultural makeup and processes of the community, and Pragmatist, endorsing the ability to reason through and eventually adopt a new ethics. And, she maintains, if this ethical evolution is achieved, the result will be a newly integrated Chicago, a city without obvious divides between rich and poor, native and immigrant, etc.⁸⁰ Addams takes on this opposition between the individual and the group in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902) and in her famous essay on the Pullman Strike, "A Modern Lear" (1896, first published in 1912). Although Addams' project in *Democracy and Social Ethics* is to articulate a new form of ethics in which

⁷⁹ Bob Taylor is particularly skeptical of the Darwinist aspect of Addams' thinking, which he argues is misguidedly teleological. As Taylor puts it: "It is when Addams is reminded of the need to 'walk humbly with God,' not when she is enthralled by the inevitability of social and moral progress, that her democratic humility is most persuasive and admirable" (84). It is my belief, however, that Addams' evolutionary sense is teleological only in the short-term, and certainly not inevitable – inevitability is social Darwinist doctrine which Addams opposes. Instead, Addams argues that moral evolution is only possible when people make difficult, democratic decisions that respond to present conditions. As Maurice Hamington argues, Addams "does not attempt to impose a universal ethical principle but instead focuses on the dynamics between moral orientations in an attempt to understand and rectify the problems in the relationship" (103). This is a decidedly non-teleological understanding of human history; although there are larger evolutionary forces acting, they are not moving toward a specific goal, and can be redirected in the long run. For a fuller discussion of the teleological nature of Addams' thinking (and another critic agreeing with Taylor that Addams' Darwinism *is* highly teleological), see Beth Eddy's "Struggle or Mutual Aid: Jane Addams, Petr Kropotkin, and the Progressive Encounter with Social Darwinism."

⁸⁰ Jean B. Quandt has identified this Utopian vision as uniting a number of different thinkers of this time period, all striving to find a way to return to village communitarian values in an urban system. As the progressive journalist William Allen White puts it: "Friendship, neighborliness, fraternity or whatever you may call that spirit of comradeship that comes when men know one another well, is the cement that holds together this union of states" (qtd in Quandt, 17). I argue that Addams' actual goal is not to return to this communal cement, which she sees as still operating in the slums, but to theorize and implement a new way of binding the members of a community together which is built on but supersedes that simpler communitarian ethic.

individual people come to realize how much their lives affect and are affected by the lives of others, Addams begins her chapter on industrial reform by recognizing the great virtues inherent in a titanic figure acting alone. Addams, like Dreiser, wants a more unified society but understands the force and appeal of Cowperwood-type figure striding across the landscape and improving it by sheer force of will. Comparing the actions of a committee to those of an empowered individual, Addams notes that the committee's attempts "recall the wavering motion of a baby's arm before he has learned to coordinate his muscles" while the individual "acts promptly," "secures efficient results" and thereby "we are dazzled by his success" (*Democracy* 137, 138). But without communal action, the individual's titanic efforts will eventually be for naught.

Addams' uses George Pullman's transition from benevolent benefactor to malevolent strike-breaker to show both the strength and weakness of top-down reform. Addams sets up one of her typical oppositions near the beginning of "A Modern Lear":

During the discussions which followed the Pullman strike, the defenders of the situation were broadly divided between the people pleading for individual benevolence and those insisting upon social righteousness; between those who held that the philanthropy of the president had been most ungratefully received and those who maintained that the situation was the inevitable outcome of the social consciousness developing among working people. (107)

Before we look at the side that Addams obviously takes, it's worth remembering the real benevolence of George Pullman. As Addams explains, Pullman "had been almost persecuted for this goodness by the more utilitarian members of his company" (109-110). In Pullman Town (built roughly 15 miles south of Chicago), all of the improvements denied to the people in the slums of Chicago - libraries, public schools, sanitation, paved streets, etc. - were provided. Furthermore, "[s]ince the town was completed in 1881, not a single case of

cholera, typhoid, or yellow fever had been reported” (Miller 225). Pullman’s model town was held up across the world as a beacon of what could be accomplished by the foresight of a single wise and forward-thinking individual; through his effort alone – and against the efforts of the less benevolent shareholders of his company – Pullman drastically improved the lives of his workers, giving them a pristine town far from the slums. No mother living in Pullman Town ever needed to fear losing a child to the diseases that were ravaging Chicago and other major cities.

So Addams begins by establishing the great service that Pullman did for his workers. But Pullman’s town is less remembered today than the strike and subsequent violence that Pullman eventually precipitated, and Addams uses that cataclysm to show what happens when top-down efforts are pursued. For Addams, this downfall was inevitable. The powerful individual must work a different way than Pullman:

He has to discover what the people really want, and then provide “the channels in which the growing moral force of their lives shall flow.” What he does attain, however, is not the result of his individual striving, as a solitary mountain-climber beyond that of the valley multitude but it is sustained and upheld by the sentiments and aspirations of many others. (*Democracy* 152).

The man who, like Pullman, brings sweeping change through individual action has indeed risen high above the norm, but his actions – if they remain solitary – are unlikely to have a great effect. They are sustained by his will alone; they do not channel the thoughts and feelings of the "valley multitude," so no matter how high the individual ascends, with his death or exhaustion comes the end of his progress. In Addams’ conception, no progressive solution that is implemented undemocratically can endure. We saw in *The Titan* that, even though Cowperwood built the Loop for his own purposes, the people of Chicago took ownership of it; individuals can bring about change, but only the community can sustain it. If

Cowperwood's endeavor had not matched the ideals of the people, it would have been destroyed.

And thus, Addams tells us, it was for Pullman: "The president assumed that he himself knew the needs of his men, and so far from wishing them to express their needs he denied to them the simple rights of trade organization, which would have been, of course, the merest preliminary to an attempt at associated expression" ("Modern Lear" 111). When his workers asked for the ability to participate in the process of reform, Pullman categorically denied it to them and created a conflict of international dimensions. Addams can imagine a scenario in which Pullman welcomed his workers to the reform movement and capital and labor pulled together. Under such an effort, Addams argues that reforms can be "made secure" because the entire valley could have been lifted permanently and the multitude "persuaded [...] to move up a few feet higher" (*Democracy* 152). Instead of moving the multitude a few feet, Pullman destroyed their advances in a flash of violence.

In contrast to the either/or binary that so obviously animated Pullman's actions, Addams seeks to synthesize the alternative visions. Pullman, and Dreiser, undoubtedly would have agreed with what Addams writes in *Democracy and Social Ethics*: "Progress must always come through the individual who varies from the type and has sufficient energy to express this variation" (*Democracy* 158-159). But Addams thinks that the individual or private project must then be taken up by the larger group. Addams tells of many other examples of this process, starting with: "Churches and missions establish reading rooms, until at last the public library system dots the city with branch reading rooms and libraries" (*Democracy* 163-164). Addams declares that "improvements, intended for the common use, are after all only safe in the hands of the public itself" (*Democracy* 153), but she believes that

the impetus for change must come from the individual. After the individual's effort, the community must not just support the changes but take ownership of the reforms. Although Pullman did not trust his employees to take part in his larger project, Addams does not deny his accomplishments nor seek to discredit his efforts. Instead, she praises his benevolence in achieving something no community effort could have, even as she condemns him for not seeing that his reforms needed to become democratically supported to endure. This is Addams' first rejoinder to those who would seek to separate liberalism from democracy, or vice versa. A strong individual is necessary for reform, but that reform must eventually express the people's will.

Addams believes that Pullman's problem was, ultimately, an ethical one. When Pullman's workers turned on him, the man who had been celebrated "as the friend and benefactor of workingmen, was now execrated by workingmen throughout the entire country" ("Modern Lear" 110). And this happened because "he suddenly found his town in the sweep of a world-wide moral impulse. A movement had been going on about him and through the souls of his workingmen of which he had been unconscious. He had only heard of this movement by rumor" (114-115). The movement was the growth of a new moral understanding on the parts of workingmen: "Their watchwords were brotherhood, sacrifice [...] and their persistent strivings were toward the ultimate freedom of that class from the conditions under which they now labor" (115). The workingmen were undergoing a moral evolution in which freedom and brotherhood were the new definitions of goodness; Pullman's "conception of goodness for them had been cleanliness, decency of living, and above all, thrift and temperance" (114). Addams argues that the conflict between the individual and the group will continue to recur so long as they have different visions of moral

goodness. Pullman had tried to direct history in one direction, but evolutionary forces were pushing history down a different, more democratic path. No individual, no matter how strong, can push against the evolutionary tides of history. But the powerful individual does have a role to play by providing an outlet through which a movement could flow; Pullman, as a reformer, could have and should have been a forerunner of the labor movement, not the man now remembered as one of its greatest enemies. Addams learned from his lesson, and her project became a push, not just for physical reforms, but also for ethical evolution.

These words, written about Pullman, apply equally to any philanthropist, even settlement house worker:

In so far as philanthropists are cut off from the influence of the *Zeit-Geist*, from the code of ethics which rules the body of men, from the great moral life springing from our common experiences, so long as they are “good to people,” rather than “with them,” they are bound to accomplish a large amount of harm. (“Modern Lear” 119)

This is one of Addams’ strongest beliefs: no philanthropist can ever improve the lives of the people if the philanthropist and the people do not agree on how their lives need to be improved. And such an ethical gulf was an ineluctable fact of Addams’ era. The conflict that Addams was intervening in is elucidated in Richard Hofstadter’s *The Age of Reform*, which begins by detailing two distinct forms of ethics that clashed for decades:

Out of the clash between the needs of the immigrants and the sentiments of the natives there emerged two thoroughly different systems of political ethics [...] One, founded upon the indigenous Yankee-Protestant political traditions, and upon middle-class life, assumed and demanded the constant, disinterested activity of the citizen in public affairs, argued that political life out to be run, to a greater degree than it was, in accordance with general principles and abstract laws apart from the superior to personal needs, and expressed a common feeling that the government should be in good part an effort to moralize the lives of individuals while economic life should be intimately related to the simulation and development of the individual character. The other system, founded upon the European backgrounds of the immigrants, upon their unfamiliarity with independent political action, their familiarity with hierarchy and authority, and upon the urgent needs that so often grew

out of their migration, took for granted that the political life of the individual would arise out of family needs, interpreted political and civic relations chiefly in terms of personal obligations, and placed strong personal loyalties above allegiance to abstract codes of law or morals. It was chiefly upon this system of values that the political life of the immigrant, the boss, and the urban machine was based. (9)

This distinction runs through Hofstadter's entire book. On the one hand is a nativist, entrepreneurial system of ethics that demands in the political sphere a dedication to abstract, impartial rules of social justice. On the other hand is an immigrant ethic of communal belonging which places social needs before political and civic ones, and views personal, familial, and communitarian loyalty as more important than dedication to abstract ideas. It is my contention that Jane Addams, who is only a minor player in *Age of Reform*, set out to overcome precisely this ethical gulf in *Democracy and Social Ethics*. Although *Twenty Years at Hull-House* is filled with passionate condemnations of corrupt party bosses, *Democracy and Social Ethics* is equally concerned with passionate condemnation of high-minded reformers who fail to comprehend the organic nature of the ethical system that the party bosses are manipulating. As an example, Addams condemns the reformer who speechifies about the evils of the saloon without recognizing that the "evil" saloon is actually "the original social center of the Hull House neighborhood, and has a valuable social element, sociability, which must be preserved" (Addams qtd in Linn, 205). The saloon is a problematic community center, but nevertheless it is the place where the workingman gathers to see his friends and receive succor from them in hard times.⁸¹ Hull-House must eventually supersede the saloon as a center for the neighborhood, and it can only do so if it first

⁸¹ Jack London's pro-prohibition memoir, *John Barleycorn* (1913), echoes the importance of the saloon as the only possible gathering place for the poor man: "Saloons are always warm and comfortable. Now Louis and I did not go into this saloon because we wanted a drink. Yet we knew that saloons were not charitable institutions. A man could not make a lounging place of a saloon without occasionally buying something over the bar" (1029).

supersedes the antiquated (in Addams' term, "primitive") ethics that, while useful in the small town, falls prey to the boss and the urban machine in the new American city.

Democracy and Social Ethics is full of examples of this well-meaning but ultimately inadequate ethical instinct: the workingman who uncomplainingly sleeps in the park so that a pregnant acquaintance might have his bed, the men in the saloon who lend each other money and stand each other meals, the unemployed woman who passes up a job opportunity to take care of her neighbor's children, and the impoverished family that takes in an evicted widow and her five children (21-22, 32, 20-21, 20). Although good deeds are done, Addams sees no prospect for unified action in this neighborliness; those that come face to face with one another will help each other out, but the process goes no further. Left to itself, this simple form of charity will not create a nucleus of social organization more sophisticated than bar bonhomie.⁸²

However, Addams fears that this primitive charity can be harnessed by an individual to create a problematic type of social organization. The rich man – be he corrupt alderman or ruthless capitalist – integrates himself into the community by taking advantage of primitive morality. He organizes the community by virtue of his ability to "minister directly to life and social needs" (*Democracy* 224). These corporate or municipal leaders "are corrupt and often do their work badly" but "[t]hey realize that the people as a whole are clamoring for social results, and they hold their power because they respond to that demand" (*Democracy* 225, 224). To put it a different way, they hold their power because they express themselves

⁸² This is not to say, of course, that the working class could not organize itself. Addams was not an adherent to what E.P. Thompson critiques as "the Fabian orthodoxy": "in which the great majority of people are seen as passive victims of *laissez faire*, with the exception of a handful of far-sighted organizers" (12). Addams saw first-hand that the working class could organize itself in the form of trade unions and radical groups. But any such organized group had to let go of the "primitive" ethic of face-to-face charity and conceive of a larger project. Furthermore, organizations that were homogeneously made up of the working class were, in Addams' mind, ultimately inadequate.

through the primitive instinct; not only are they "[m]en living near to the masses of voters, and knowing them intimately," they act as if they are a part of the system of primitive charity (*Democracy* 224). "Because of simple friendliness the alderman is expected to pay rent for the hardpressed tenant when no rent is forthcoming, to find 'jobs' when work is hard to get, to procure and divide among his constituents all the places which he can seize from city hall" (*Democracy* 234). The alderman thus becomes another neighbor, another local face to turn to for help in a time of unemployment. The social reformer can make no headway against this "manifestation of human friendliness" when primitive neighborliness is the primary ethical system (*Democracy* 240). Whereas Pullman did a great deal of good but was ultimately overthrown because his conception of good did not match that of the working class, these men can do a great deal of evil so long as their actions channel the ethical feelings of the working class.⁸³

In order to displace the alderman, Addams has to do away with social reform's abstract ethics and work with the Halsted Street community to create a new form of ethics suited for the modern urban community. As Anne Firor Scott puts it in her introduction to *Democracy and Social Ethics*: "A new social ethic would have to evolve which would be based on responsibility to the whole community" (xxvi), not just face-to-face neighbors. Furthermore, this new social ethic must be historical, able to recognize the importance of past

⁸³ Addams explains the system: since "approximately one out of every five voters in the nineteenth ward" were dependent on "the good will of the alderman" for their job, there is no question that the people will re-elect the alderman (*Hull-House* 207). But although the people get jobs working for, say, the streetcar companies, the streetcar company overcharges the people and the alderman overlooks the overcharging in exchange for a bribe. The alderman looks benevolent and is supported by the people, but he is using their support to exploit them. And even though some residents seem to realize that they are being exploited, "it almost seems as if they would rather pay two cents more each time they ride than to give up the consciousness that they have a big, warm-hearted friend at court who will stand by them in an emergency" (*Democracy* 253). Meanwhile, Charles Yerkes becomes wealthier and wealthier.

and future actions in the creation of a greater good. The primitive instinct is impressive, seeing as the workingman who gives up his bed for a pregnant woman does so merely on the grounds of acquaintance. But Addams has to replace this powerful primitive charity – the charity of the tribe or village which depends on immediate proximity⁸⁴ – with sense of charity that can extend to everyone in the community and into the future.

The primitive sense of charity does provide a certain organization, but the organization which it provides benefits not the people, but the wealthy man. The wealthy man is able to exploit the neighborhood because it has no other way of organizing itself. *Twenty Years at Hull-House* is Addams' narrative of the project of creating a new organizational ethics in order to wrest agency away from the rich man. We can begin with an extended excerpt from *Twenty Years* that describes the state of the city before Hull-House:

The social organism has broken down through large districts of our great cities. Many of the people living there are very poor, the majority of them without leisure or energy for anything but the gain of subsistence.

They live for the moment side by side, many of them without knowledge of each other, without fellowship, without local tradition or public spirit, without social organization of any kind. Practically nothing is done to remedy this. The people who might do it, who have the social tact and training, the large houses, and the traditions and customs of hospitality, live in other parts of the city. The club houses, libraries, galleries, and semipublic conveniences for social life are also blocks away. We find workingmen organized into armies of producers because men of executive ability and business sagacity have found it to their interests thus to organize them. But these workingmen are not organized socially; although lodging in crowded tenement houses, they are living without a corresponding social contract. The chaos is as great as it would be were they working in huge factories without foreman or superintendent. (*Twenty Years* 240-241)

⁸⁴ Addams links this primitive charity with the development of the original morality: "The evolutionists tell us that the instinct to pity, the impulse to aid his fellows, served man at a very early period, as a rude rule of right and wrong" (*Democracy* 22). This is a charity born of, and only appropriate to, small and face-to-face groupings, and must evolve as social conditions have evolved.

As we can see from her use of the term "social organism," Addams is using a biological description of human society; as a social organism, cities are conceived as an organic system which functions by virtue of social ties. But Addams sees a city that is only organized and connected in an economic sense. The city has been sorted into neighborhoods, which function as organs in terms of creating wealth, but it has limited social organization because there is no social contact across neighborhoods. To make matters worse, the party boss has managed to take low-level social relationships and use them to enrich himself and the capitalist. This is Cowperwood's Chicago: it is unified, at the macro level, by and for the capitalist. The city of Chicago has economic connections to the entire world, but the working class doesn't have social connections that can go beyond face-to-face interactions. Whereas Cowperwood can survey the entire spatial city, as well as its future temporal growth, the immigrant community (with the exception of some far-sighted radicals) confines itself to helping its neighbors, never noticing how fully the capitalist and the alderman are exploiting them.

As Addams tells us, the city built and sorted by the robber barons has created very dense slums – the workingmen are lodged in "crowded tenement houses." But within this dense conglomeration of people, no social organization has emerged. This is because the social function as it exists in both institutions – clubs, libraries, galleries – and as social practices – the making of social calls, meetings, parties, etc – has been sorted out of the districts that contain colonies of immigrants. The immigrants have been organized politically by and for the corrupt alderman and industrially by and for the business titan, but have no social institutions or practices through which to organize by and for themselves. Addams refers to the obvious excellence of the immigrants' industrial organization when she

compares their lack of social organization to that of a huge factory without a foreman or superintendent. The result would be chaos, and such chaos is the state of the slums that surround Hull-House.

In order to overcome this chaos and make a progressive democratic movement possible, Addams must somehow synthesize the two ethical systems highlighted by Hofstadter. Addams believes in both the adherence to abstract ethics such as “honesty of administration” and also in the neighborly friendliness of the alderman. Addams sympathizes with the immigrants who, inspired by face-to-face, neighborly kindness, think that “the charity visitor is moved by motives that are alien and unreal” (*Democracy* 23). But she also sees their primitive charity as unsuited to the reality of the modern city; simple neighborliness actually supports the corrupt alderman since, as the biggest neighbor, he can do the most favors while preventing real change from occurring. Addams, lamenting the fact that “[w]e are singularly slow to apply this evolutionary principle to human affairs in general” (*Democracy* 65), wants to help the neighborhood organically evolve a better sense of ethics, one which combines neighborliness with an interest in the wider welfare of the entire community’s future. Hull-House must somehow convince the people that it is in their best interest to adhere to a more universal ethical system. Although the alderman seems to be acting as a good neighbor, providing for his constituents, his corrupt methods of administration mean that the people are harmed in the long run (in the same way that Cowperwood’s continued dominance of Chicago streetcars would have harmed the people). Addams’ challenge is to show how an abstract concept such as “honesty of administration” can and should be joined with practical neighborliness. Addams wants to expand the concept

of neighborly relations to the point that honesty can be subsumed under the idea of being a good neighbor, and she does that by adding historical awareness to neighborliness.

Addams argues that the failure of organization in the neighborhood is in fact the failure to understand how present conditions are shaped by evolutionary, historical processes. Primitive charity is blind to the past issues that have resulted in joblessness because the ethic doesn't contain historical awareness. Addams builds an industrial museum precisely to give the neighborhood this sense of history: "If these young people could actually see that the complicated machinery of the factory had been evolved from simple tools, they might at least make a beginning toward that education which Dr. Dewey defines as 'a continuing reconstruction of experience'" (*Twenty Years* 156). If the people apprehend the evolution of technical processes, it is only one further step to apprehend the need for a concomitant evolution of social organization to regulate these processes. Terms which seem abstract – honesty, truth, justice – will become concrete and accessible with the acquisition of historical consciousness.

"Human progress is slow and perhaps never more cruel than in the advance of industry, but is not the worker comforted by knowing that other historical periods have existed similar to the one in which he finds himself, and that the readjustment may be shortened and alleviated by judicious action [...]" (*Twenty Years* 157-158). Under the aegis of primitive charity, the best the worker can hope for is a big brother like the alderman, one who looks out for the financial, moral, and social interests of those around him in the short term. But with a historical understanding of progress, the worker can see that collective action, judiciously taken, can affect the future of the entire community. An evolutionary sense of history shows the workers that past, present, and future are all linked, and they must

work for something more than just the present day. Here we see how Addams is taking a mediated evolutionary position. On the one hand, human society does progress in an evolutionary manner, with historical forces beyond human control creating modern conditions. But whereas a Social Darwinist understanding of history would end there, Addams finds a second lesson in history: human intervention can alter the arc of society's progress.⁸⁵ This intervention, as we have seen, is only possible at a grassroots level if the neighborhood is integrated across class and other lines; a divided neighborhood is easily harnessed by the rich man for his own purposes. But the integrated neighborhood that understands the historical nature of its problems can theorize a forward-looking solution to its historically determined obstacles, and then act with a concerted unity that is unavailable to the individual. Only with a historical understanding can the neighborhood unite to work for its own future.

This brings us to the third binary that Addams believes must be overcome to bring progressive liberalism and true democracy together: the enforced separation of the classes. As we have just seen, Addams believes that a new, evolutionarily informed ethics will bring about an integrated neighborhood that can take action in the best interests of its residents. Addams' synthesis of natural ethical feeling and universal ethical ideas is best understood in terms of the changes that she imagines it will bring to the neighborhood. Homogeneous neighborhoods, serving as the city's organs, might be ideal for economic and political unity,

⁸⁵ In Hofstadter's history of Social Darwinism, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, he identifies this idea as the pragmatist corrective to a deterministic faith in *laissez-faire* processes: "As Spencer had stood for determinism and the control of man by the environment, the pragmatists stood for freedom and control of environment by man" (125). For an excellent discussion of how Addamsian pragmatism fits in the larger scheme of American pragmatism, see Mary Jo Deegan's *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918*, particularly chapter 10, "Jane Addams and Critical Pragmatism: Her Intellectual Roots in Addition to Chicago Sociology." Deegan details, among other things, how John Dewey was a "moving force behind the Labor Museum" that I have identified as Addams' bid to show the immigrants the value of human intervention (251).

but a district that is homogeneous in its poverty, like Addams' own Halsted Street neighborhood, will experience social chaos and therefore stand open to the manipulation of the political boss. Beyond the neighborhood, society itself will begin to break down if the classes remain separated. Addams was an advocate for what David Miller describes as "social equality or equality of status," meaning "the idea of a society in which people regard and treat one another as equals, and together form a single community without divisions of social class" (83). Anne Phillips, following Miller, asks: "What possible community can the rich feel with the poorest members of their society when their wealth enables them to live in near total isolation, when the streets they live on are untainted by public housing, and when they never experience the proximity of fellow citizens in public hospitals, parks, traveling on public transport?" (81). But whereas Phillips and Miller, like Addams, both argue for a structural change in the economic system, so that income inequality is reduced and thus both society and its neighborhoods will become less divided, Addams offers an additional solution. Addams thinks a large part of the problem is ethical – not only that the wealthy can afford to live separately from the poor, but also that rich and poor alike fail to add those who live in other neighborhoods to their social quilt. To begin an ethical transformation, Addams first must replace the boss as the neighborhood's big brother. She doesn't want to put herself in the position the boss was once in, but instead build an institution that can represent the entire neighborhood. This institution is Hull-House, which represents the de-homogenization of the Halsted Street district by virtue of the arrival of the upper- and middle-class Hull-House residents. So long as the dominant social ethics remains face-to-face neighborliness, the alderman or the boss will win because he is the biggest and most powerful neighbor. Hull-House and the new ethics that it brings will supersede this neighborliness. The result

will be a neighborhood which, newly united, can use democratic methods to make its own decisions.

The metaphor that we might expect from Addams, at this point, is yeast; the upper-class residents of Hull-House will enter the depressed neighborhood and their actions will transform the inert raw material that is the impoverished immigrant community into a thriving neighborhood. This is precisely the metaphor some have taken from Addams' writings:

Granted the dominant role of the "better element" in American Society, the settlement movement considered itself to be the leaven in the dough. Jane Addams believed that persons were "chosen" for leadership by their moral eligibility and/or through a lifetime of dedication to serve society. (Lissak 19)

But this view of the settlement workers as the "leaven in the dough" – which would link Addams with the other progressive liberals who want to limit the democratic aspect of reform – misrepresents Addams' position. Addams emphatically does not see her project as fermentation, with the residents acting as yeast. Instead, Addams deploys the upper classes as equally in need of heterogeneity, telling a story about a young girl who regrets having the freedom to pursue aesthetic pursuits that her mother lacked. The girl, when told by her mother that the mother herself had musical talent, thought:

"I might believe I had unusual talent if I did not know what good music was; I might enjoy half an hour's practice a day if I were busy and happy the rest of the time. You do not know what life means when all the difficulties are removed! I am simply smothered and sickened with advantages. It is like eating a sweet dessert first thing in the morning" (*Twenty Years* 47)

It has already been made clear what the lower classes have to gain from an integrated neighborhood: the power to control their own municipal destiny through organization. It is

now clear that the upper classes need to be integrated with the lower classes just as badly, as a life of pure privilege is smothering and sickening – all sweetness with no salt.

The young Addams herself felt something like the young girl's complaint; writing about "The Subjective Necessity of Social Settlements" in 1892 (reprinted in *Twenty Years at Hull-House*), she says:

Nothing so deadens the sympathies and shrivels the power of enjoyment as the persistent keeping away from the great opportunities for helpfulness and a continual ignoring of the starvation struggle which makes up the life of at least half the race. To shut one's self away from that half of the race life is to shut one's self away from the most vital part of it... (*Twenty Years* 76).

The "vital" part of life, which we might describe as the leaven in the dough, is the persons and values of the upper class; it is, instead, the struggle for existence that makes up the life of most humans.⁸⁶ The inert life, if one of them is inert, is the upper- and middle-class life, which has been sundered from the more active aspects of human existence. However, Addams' goal is not to condemn or extol either of these alternatives but, just as she does with the individual/group and neighborly ethics/abstract ethics binaries, overcome them by synthesizing the two seeming opposites.

Addams sees only one way to overcome this particular opposition: the integration of the upper classes with the lower classes at the level of the neighborhood. In lieu of a yeast analogy, Addams uses a much more radical metaphor, one that was deployed by an enemy of

⁸⁶ Lissak mentions Addams' belief that both halves of society would benefit from integration – "[b]oth the need to serve and the need to be served were recognized as socially legitimate and useful" – but she believes that "[i]mplicit in this justification of the need for social settlements was the notion that the role of the educated upper middle class was to lead while that of the uneducated lower classes was to be passively led" (Lissak 20). In Lissak's reading, Addams deployed the notion that the upper-classes also needed their lives to be transformed in order to "rationalize and justify leadership by the upper middle class" (20). But as we shall see, although Addams' and the other wealthier residents were crucial leaders, the most important aspect of Hull-House work was performed at the initiative of Halstead Street residents.

Hull-House but co-opted by Addams. She closes her chapter "Activities and Investigations" with a moral tale, told by a member of the Chicago Woman's Club who is skeptical of Hull-House. The woman tells of finding two toads in separate parts of her garden, one large and one small, and bringing the two of them together in the hope that the two toads might draw strength from one another. Instead, the larger of the toads promptly eats the smaller one: "The moral of the tale was clear applied to people who 'lived where they did not naturally belong'" (*Twenty Years* 203). Addams responds:

I protested that was exactly what we wanted - to be swallowed and digested, to disappear into the bulk of the people.

Twenty years later I am willing to testify that something of the sort does take place after years of identification with an industrial community. (*Twenty Years* 203)

Addams thus concludes the "Activities and Investigations" chapter with this radical metaphor of digestion. The upper classes are not yeast, a separate organism that remakes the otherwise useless neighborhood. They are in the toad metaphor a separate organism that would be better off consumed by the larger portion of humanity, losing their unique status but gaining strength by virtue of their integration with a larger and more powerful organism. This is a level of organization where class distinctions can be overcome, and the neighborhood can function as a single organic entity. This "digestion" metaphor carries with it, as Addams knows, a terrifying undercurrent: the loss of selfhood, of individuality, of differentiation. A mutualistic metaphor – Hull-House as the neighborhood watch dog or shepherd, driving off predators like Cowperwood and parasites like the alderman – would be much more reassuring, but Addams takes instead the metaphor of digestion, deployed by an enemy, as her own. And as she attests, twenty years into the Hull-House project, the settlement house has in fact disappeared as a separate entity. Gone are the errors that marked a distinction between Hull-House and the Halstead Street neighborhood in the early days,

such as when the residents of Hull-House, after giving a sick orphan infant the highest possible level of medical care, decided to have "it buried by county authorities" (*Democracy* 241). This horrified the settlement house's neighbors – "[it] is doubtful if Hull-House has ever done anything which injured it so deeply in the minds of some of its neighbors" – and is the kind of mistake that would have never been made by the parasitic alderman who "saves the very poorest of his constituents from the awful horror of burial by the county" (*Democracy* 242, 239).

The old Hull-House fought for the child's life but was not integrated well enough in the neighborhood to understand the horror of county burial. Addams wants to replace that conception of charity with one in which Hull-House, acting as "a big brother" which protects the entire neighborhood "from bullies" (*Twenty Years* 112), represents the seamless integration of the upper and lower classes, the Jews, Russians, Italians, and Irish, the respectable and the morally suspect, and even the anarchist and the socialist. All of those groups are welcome to Hull-Houses parties, reading groups, and debating clubs, and those institutional meetings – while often started by a middle- or upper-class residents – are run by all members of Hull-House. At Hull-House, the neighborhood comes together for play and for entertainment, but also to theorize ways to improve the community. When all of these functions are combined, and the differences between the Hull-House residents and Halsted Street residents have been subsumed under the banner of the neighborhood, then Hull-House can act as a big brother for the entire neighborhood – a big brother that is a sort of Leviathan without a head, made up as it is of the entire community.

Lissak is right that one of the weaknesses of Addams' project is that the leadership positions at Hull-House were held almost exclusively by the upper- and middle-class

settlement members. For that reason, Addams' project is less radically democratic than she desires it to be, even as it is considerably more democratic than the efforts of any of the other Chicago pragmatists. Most famously, Addams herself was convinced by Tolstoy that her position as an administrator was too aristocratic, but her decision to add bread-baking to her tasks was dashed when she returned to America and faced the administrative duties that allowed her to respond to "the demand of actual and pressing human wants" (*Twenty Years* 182). However, although the wealthier residents occupied almost all of the conventional leadership positions at Hull-House, much of the most important work done in uniting the neighborhood came from the lower-class members of community. Most importantly, the sense of cosmopolitanism that made the whole project possible came not from Addams or any of the wealthier residents, but rather from the efforts of the impoverished immigrants.

Marilyn Fischer explains:

Because Addams's neighbors had immigrated, many from rural peasant European settings, to noisy, congested, industrialized Chicago, they had "an unusual mental alertness and power of perception" (2007, 11). And they brought gifts, a wealth of experiences from which middle-class Americans could learn. In one of many examples, Addams (1990, 149) points to her Greek neighbors, who, benefiting from centuries of casual interactions among peoples on both sides of the Mediterranean, brought "habits and customs" of dealing with race relations with more sophistication and ease than most white Americans. (160)

The cosmopolitanism that was one of Hull-House's greatest achievements was supported and deliberately nurtured by Addams. But it was the poorer, immigrant members of Hull-House community who led the way in achieving that cosmopolitanism. Indeed, if Addams is right that a sense of universal community is necessary to achieve a progressive democracy, then the wealthier residents and outside leaders lagged far behind the Halsted Street Community. *Twenty Years* is full of such examples, from the picnic chaperone who lets the boys put their

arms around the girls' waists in defiance of the middle-class ethics of Addams and company (228); to the debating society where the only speakers who ever lose their tempers are college professors (including, it seems likely, some Chicago School pragmatists) who can't keep up with the workingmen who formed the clubs (119-121); to the "Social Extension Committee" of Irish Halsted Street residents who invite only poor Italians to a particular party and eventually find their differences bridged, only because "the Italian men rose to the occasion" (234). While the wealthier residents often took the lead in organizing legislation and other big-picture projects, it was the poorer members of the Halstead Street neighborhood who did the crucial work of giving the neighborhood a sense of communitarian identity.

This is, according to Carol Nackenoff, an element that many who use Addams as an exemplar miss. Nackenoff argues that Robert Putnam famously saw Hull-House and other institutions as merely social: "For Putnam, many of the community-based associations that developed and sustained social capital had little to do with politics; many of these associations simply linked neighbors who socialized together" (122). Nackenoff argues that we can go further than socialization and take from Addams "the importance of, or opportunities for trying to replicate, the cross-class, multiethnic, and even cosmopolitan character of the Hull-House networks today" (122). Hull-House wasn't just about community activity but about community bonds that would overcome all of the traditional divides of an urban neighborhood. And once the neighborhood is integrated, something much greater lies on the horizon; Addams worked "to organize women municipally, nationally, and internationally" (Nackenoff 123). In her narratives, Addams shows us that an integrated neighborhood can have national progressive implications. She argues that once the

neighborhood has become an organized entity, it awakens to a fact pointed out to Addams by a visiting Englishman: "in spite of the boasting on the part of leading citizens in the western, eastern, and southern towns, all American cities seemed to him essentially alike and all equally the results of an industry totally unregulated by well-considered legislation" (*Twenty Years* 130). The organized neighborhood, of course, fights to improve the city via legislative and other means; Addams describes her efforts to topple the corrupt alderman of her ward, to reform city garbage collection, to enforce tenement laws that have been ignored and various other municipal reform efforts (*Twenty Years* 207, 188, 195). But the efforts don't end there; Hull-House also formed the nucleus of a committee that went on to recommend an Illinois state bill that would regulate sweatshops and child labor. The bill was passed based on the combined efforts of "trades-unions and of benefit societies, church organizations, and social clubs" (*Twenty Years* 134). From the neighborhood-level organization of these groups comes decisive action at the state level. And from there, Hull-House's battles in support of a federal sweatshop bill – based on their Illinois efforts – led to federal awareness that "only by federal regulation could their constituents in remote country places be protected from contagious disease raging in New York or Chicago" (*Twenty Years* 139). Because the entire country is economically connected, with cities as nexus points, contagious diseases will leap across municipal and governmental boundaries with ease. The only solution is concerted national efforts, and those national efforts can be democratic only if they are the eventual fruits of organization at the neighborhood level. As Addams reminds us, the great accomplishments of the first era of Progressive legislation began with community efforts of reform and were only enacted when all the various grassroots organizations were able to pull together.

Jane Addams saw the need for an agency to drive Chicago and organize it in the face of corrupt, wasteful, and destructive forces. But she also knew that that agency would have to find a way to direct the evolutionary forces shaping the city. Although she, like many of the other Chicago pragmatists, ultimately depended on her own reason and the works of other middle-class thinkers, her progressive dream was built on the necessity of democratic organization, and a corresponding unity between her goals and the organic values of the immigrant community. A force for progressive good like Pullman Town ended disastrously because it was a fully non-organic endeavor, cut-off from the social and ethical evolution that the workingclass community was undergoing. And the slums, by contrast, were fully at the mercy of those forces, with no social organization to combat them. In response to this disorganization, Addams' Hull-House project sought to connect each member of the Halstead Street community to each other member, not spatially or even economically (as they were already connected economically) but ethically, socially, and temporally. From social ties came ethical bonds, and from ethical bonds – providing they cut across the axes of class, ethnicity, and ideology – came the ability for the citizenry to organize itself for its future interests. The result was an enduring community that could bring about liberal reforms via democratic methods, something that seemed impossible to both the corrupt party bosses and the outside charity workers alike. So long as the people of a neighborhood were united, they could direct the growth of the city in such a way that it benefited the people. And they could only be organized if they had a new, evolutionary ethics, one that acknowledged both the historico-evolutionary underpinnings of the current situation and the power of human reason to intervene in that process.

These are the lessons that Addams learned from her efforts to reform Chicago. First, individual efforts can accomplish much, but actions that are born of a bedrock of democratic support are much more difficult to dislodge. Second, democratic organization is only possible when communities are linked to each other socially and temporally; a shared social past and future are necessary for communal action. Finally, the upper classes, the experts, and the elites are not separate forces acting on this community but must be ethically and geographically integrated with the community. If all of these conditions are met, Addams believes that progressive policies can be democratically enacted; in their absence, progressive efforts must be effected undemocratically and democracy threatens to be inimical to progressivism. Although Addams' project never lived up to her toad metaphor – she herself remained an administrator and not a bread-baker – her efforts were unique among the progressives of her times in that they offered a blueprint for how to gain organic, democratic support for progressive, rational reforms. And Addams did so by breaking down the traditional barriers between the classes, and turning the neighborhoods of the city into cosmopolitan spaces of mixing.

FIGURES

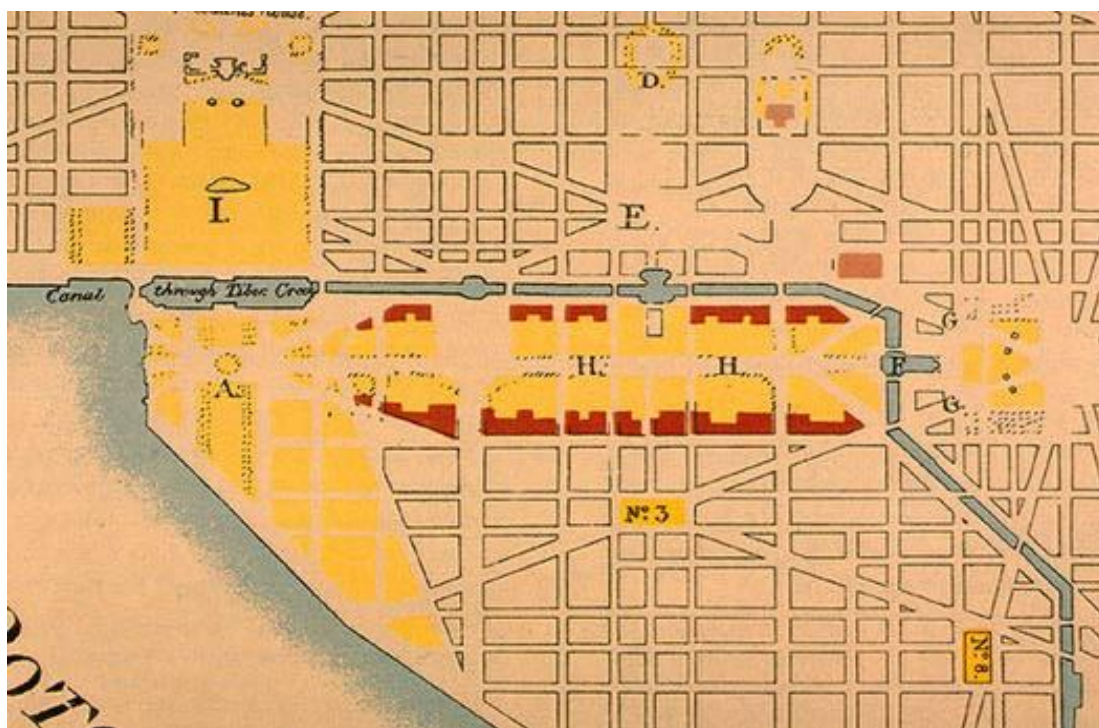


Figure 1.1: Detail of L'Enfant's Plan. Pierre Charles L'enfant, 1791. (Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division)



Figure 1.2: Current Tidal Basin. (USGS image, 2002)

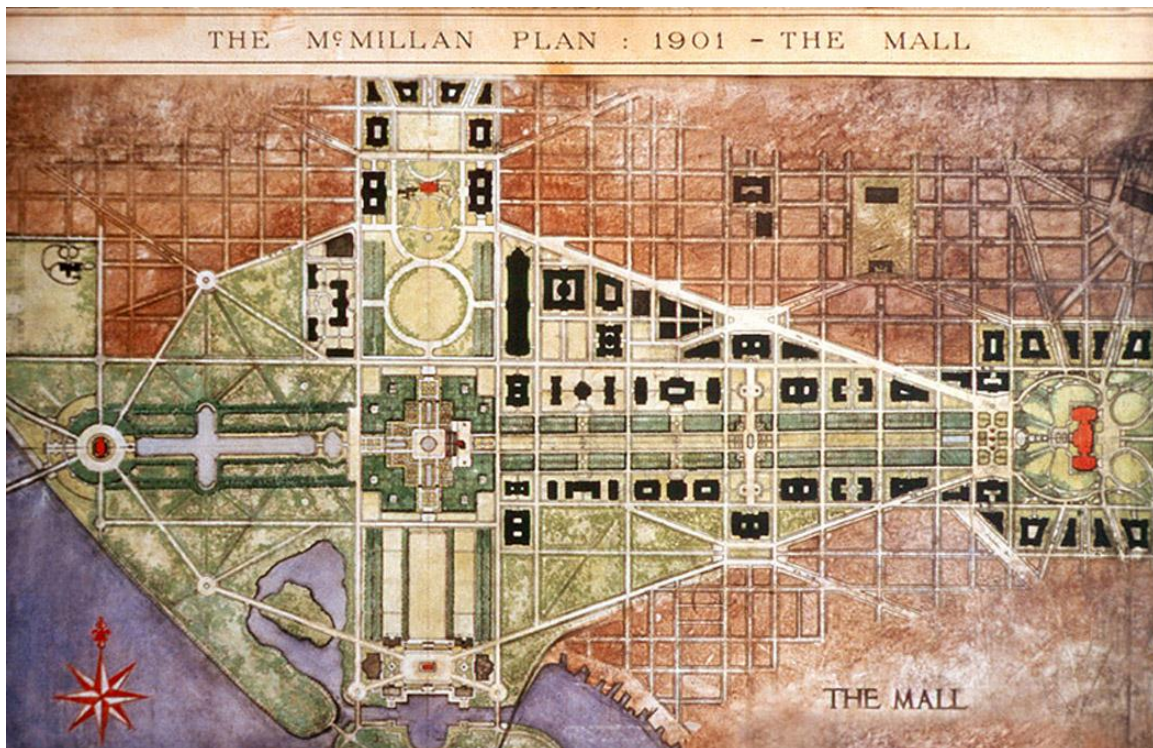


Figure 1.3: McMillan Plan, Daniel Burnham et al, 1901.

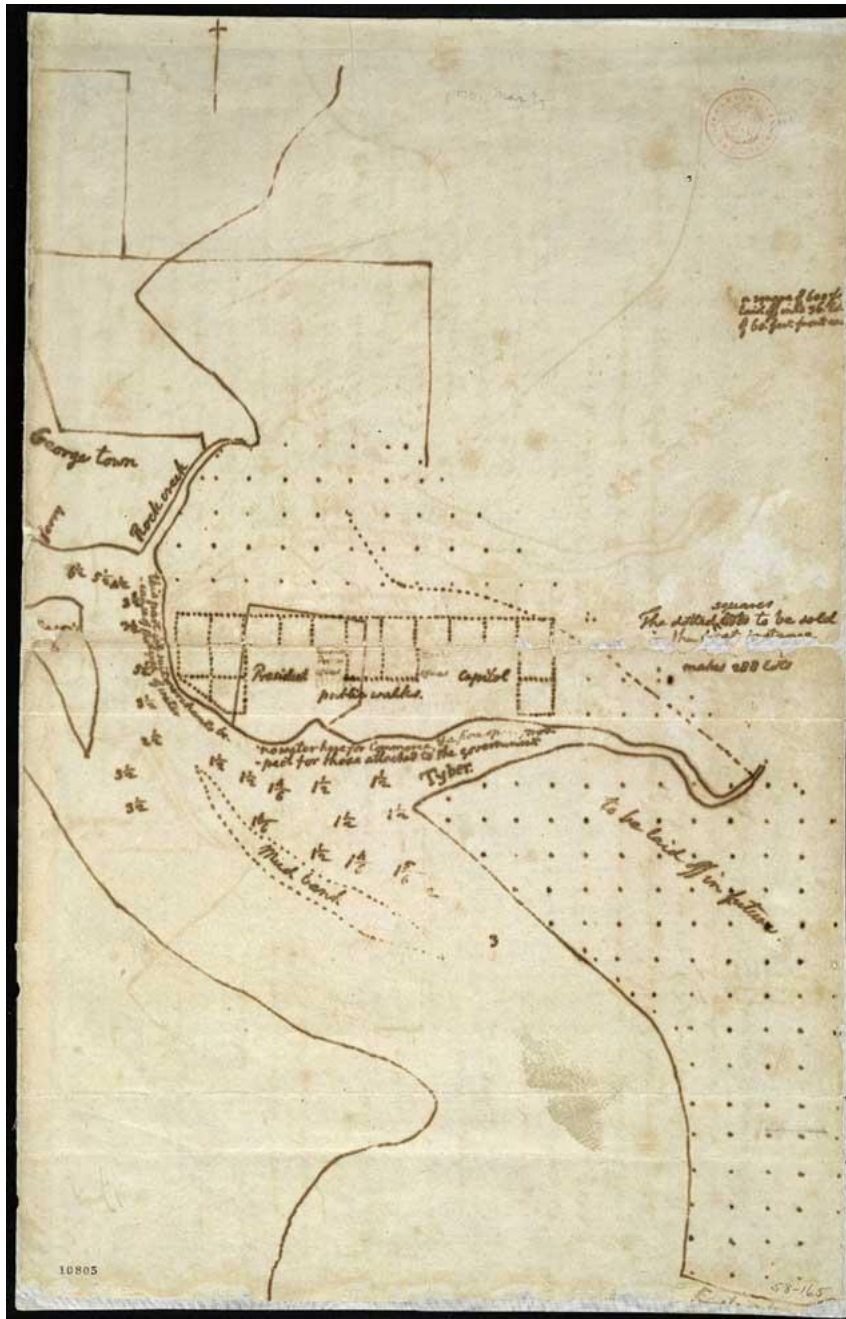


Figure 1.4: Jefferson's original survey for D.C., 1791. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division)



Figure 1.5: Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South*. 1859. (Robert L. Stuart Collection.)

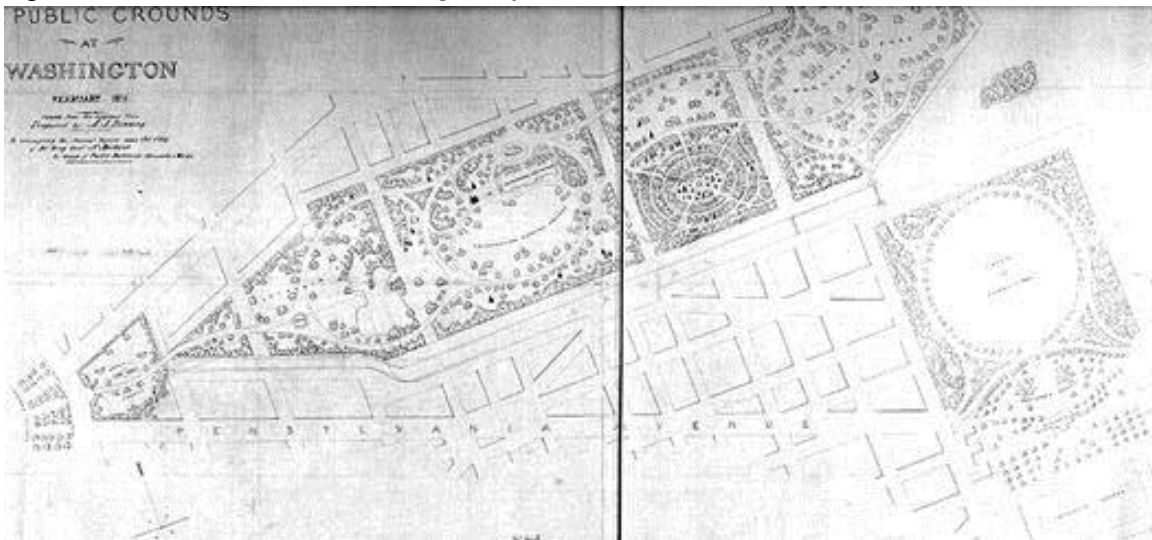


Figure 1.6. Andrew Jackson Downing's "Plan Showing Proposed Method of Laying Out Public Grounds at Washington," 1851. Copy by Nathaniel Michler, 1877. (National Archives and Records Administration, Cartographic Branch)



Tenement of 1863, for twelve families on each flat.*
D, DARK. L, LIGHT. H, HALLS.

* This "unventilated and fever-breeding structure" the year after it was built was picked out by the Council of Hygiene, then just organized, and presented to the Citizens' Association of New York as a specimen "multiple domicile" in a desirable street, with the following comment: "Here are twelve living-rooms and twenty-one bedrooms, and only six of the latter have any provision or possibility for the admission of light and air, excepting through the family sitting- and living-room; being utterly dark, close, and unventilated. The living-rooms are but 10 x 12 feet; the bedrooms 6½ x 7 feet."

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Figure 2.1: 1863 Tenement floorplan (reprinted in *How the Other Half Lives*). 1890.



Figure 2.2: “Lodgers in a crowded Bayard Street tenement – ‘five cents a spot.’” 1890.

THE TITAN
WALDEN H. LUCAS
against the
BOODLERS

Every citizen of Chicago should
come down to the City Hall

TO-NIGHT
MONDAY, DEC. 12

and every Monday night
thereafter while the Street-car
Franchises are under consider-
ation, and see that the interests
of the city are protected against

BOODLEISM

Citizens, Arouse and Defeat the Boodlers!

540

Figure 3.1: Anti-Cowperwood Handbill, from *The Titan*. 1914.

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