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Modernism/modernity, Volume 25, Number 1, January 2018, pp. 45-72  
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2018.0002>



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## The City Shining on a Hill, or by a Lake: (Re)Thinking Modern Americanness, (Re)Writing the American Lynch Narrative, and Ida B. Wells

Cyraina Johnson-Roullier

In her editor's introduction to a recent special issue of *Modernism/modernity*, "Mediamorphosis: Print Culture and Transatlantic/Transnational Public Sphere(s)," Ann Ardis writes that the issue works to "unsettle a very familiar and interrelated set of 'great divides' that have governed the study of this period."<sup>1</sup> Ardis's list of "great divides," however, leaves one unmentioned: that is, the divide that has traditionally existed between white and black American moderns, or Euro-American authors, especially those belonging to the "Lost Generation," such as Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and the authors of the Harlem Renaissance. Although the new modernist studies has increasingly made race an important consideration of modern discourse, it has not adequately addressed the deeper significance of this divide.<sup>2</sup> In this context, rather than simply pursuing the study of chronologically relevant African American texts, it is important to ask what can the critical encounter with race, as a disembodied concept or idea, bring to an understanding of the modern itself? Certainly, although race has been and is now even more a central concern for modernists, the *idea of race* itself in modern discourse has largely escaped the meticulous investigation it has received in philosophy for a long time. From this alternative vantage point, race and modernity may be seen to possess what might be termed a more than symbiotic relationship, in which the significance of one may be thought almost to be bred from the other. If, as the preeminent scholar of critical

MODERNISM / *modernity*  
VOLUME TWENTY FIVE,  
NUMBER ONE,  
PP 45–72. © 2018  
JOHNS HOPKINS  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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- 46 race theory David Theo Goldberg has articulated, this relationship may be described more fundamentally in terms of the idea that modernity serves both to camouflage and to provide the ground for radical, racially determined exclusions, it is, then, only within its purview that such exclusions may be discovered and laid bare to further examination for the whole of modern discourse. Goldberg writes:

In the case of discriminatory exclusions, it can be strongly concluded that what the moral order fails explicitly to exclude it implicitly authorizes. . . . But in ignoring the social fabric and concrete identities in virtue of which moral judgment and reason are individually effective . . . moral modernity fails to recognize the series of exclusions upon which the state of modernity is constituted. . . . So, though the formal principles of moral modernity condemn and discourage some racist expressions, they fail, and fail necessarily, to condemn and discourage such expressions exhaustively.<sup>3</sup>

The modernity Goldberg is referring to here is that of the Enlightenment, with its ideas of rationality and reason, equality, liberty and individual freedom, representing a moral order in which the human being was upheld as paramount. In Goldberg's view, however, it is the human being that supplies the ground for the moral ambiguity he identifies as part and parcel of the modern. For him, it is modernity's vision of the relation between what is human and what is not human that highlights race as the core problem of modernist moralism. If modern discourse serves to underscore a moral understanding of humanity that focuses on individual freedom and liberty while simultaneously regulating, based on a racial determination, to whom such individuality, freedom and liberty may apply, it must also necessarily blind itself to its own internal contradictions, or the moral universe upon which it is based cannot hope to stand. Thus, it becomes clear that exploring the *idea of race* as a concept, rather than as a set of racially derived or determined texts or historical moments, insists upon the expansion of modern discourse into the realm of modernity, where it is framed by much more varied, often unfamiliar contexts, and encountered in many different and unexpected forms.

From this perspective, when understood as the complicated circumstance of the modern described by Ardis, print culture offers a very fruitful way to undertake such a study of modernism and modernity. Indeed, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz identify print culture as a primary site "of modernism's entanglement . . . with what may seem at first quite unliterary promotions of feminism, socialism, nationalism, and other programs of social change."<sup>4</sup> In discussing print culture as the ground of modern entanglement with a material history not commonly viewed as part and parcel of modernism, Mao and Walkowitz re-emphasize what has long been considered a core focus of the modern: the interrogation of the "literary" itself, particularly as concerns "texts that seem neither to be art nor to be about art."<sup>5</sup>

If one considers the pamphlet in this context, as a means to investigate the relation between race and modernity (as described by Goldberg), it may suddenly also be seen as a kind of well-tended path toward the expansion of modern critical examination of this issue deep into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially with regard to American culture. While scholarly examinations of African American literature

have not foregrounded the pamphlet quite as much as the slave narrative, from the eighteenth century onward the pamphlet offered innumerable opportunities to African Americans—largely excluded from the public sphere as they were—not only to voice their opinions publicly on a variety of subjects from politics to the imperative of religious piety, but, decade after decade, to wage a keen, undivided battle against the racial injustices they incessantly suffered in American society.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the pre-twentieth-century pamphlet can be seen, in Mao and Walkowitz's terms, as a kind of "mass media rhetorics" of the day, as both its unregimented form and its instantaneity allowed its authors not only to reach but to create more specialized audiences to which they would not otherwise have had access ("New Modernist," 738).

By looking backward into the pamphlet's pre-twentieth-century material history and opening up that history to investigate the relation between race and modernity as this might affect our understanding of American modernism, a new vision of what is meant by "American" and, in turn, "Americanness" is revealed. In such a "longer vision"—to borrow Teresa Zackodnik's phrase—there are many possible neglected modern moments to recover by studying the intersection of race, modernism, and modernity through their convergence in the pamphlet form.<sup>7</sup> Here, however, I concentrate on just one of these possibilities, a pamphlet put together by the radical black journalist Ida B. Wells on the occasion of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.<sup>8</sup>

### **World's Fair, White City, and Americanness Reimagined**

In 1893, the city of Chicago was fighting to rise like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes of its devastating 1871 fire, spurring the organizers of the World's Columbian Exposition to set out to stimulate in all who would experience the fair an intense and unsurpassable wonder (fig. 1). The magnitude and variety of the fair's exhibits were matched and transcended by its visitors, 27.5 million people who had traveled from all over the world to experience it (fig. 2).<sup>9</sup> The fair thus served as much more than just a representation of four centuries of American progress: it also became an important cultural text through which to read and understand American society at this moment in its cultural history. Most importantly, as cultural text the fair "advance[d] the causes of American nationalism, imperialism and consumerism. . . . put[ting] the world on display with a view toward trumpeting America's own national progress toward utopia."<sup>10</sup>

The fair thus became an important arbiter of late-nineteenth-century Americanness. But it is on precisely this question of Americanness and what it meant to be an American at this moment in American cultural history that the fair, despite all its glory, may be understood to have foundered. For all of its display of a utopic American culture, what lay below the pristine and shining exterior of the "White City," as it quickly came to be called, was what the great black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, in a speech made on the Exposition's Colored American Day (the only concession to African American demands for participation made by the fair's administration), identified as the fair's central and most glaring cultural contradiction (fig. 3):



▲  
Fig. 1. Court of Honor, World's Columbian Exposition, Columbian Fountain by Frederick William MacMonnies, Wikimedia Commons.

We hear nowadays of a frightful problem called a Negro problem. What is this problem? As usual, the Negro is humbugged. The Negro problem is a Southern device to mislead and deceive. There is, in fact, no such problem. The real problem has been given a false name. It is called Negro for a purpose. It has substituted Negro for Nation, because the one is despised and hated, the other is loved and honored. The true problem is a National problem. . . . Men talk of the Negro problem. There is no Negro problem. The problem is whether the American people have honesty enough, loyalty enough, honor enough, patriotism enough to live up to their own Constitution.<sup>11</sup>

Douglass's approximation of "Negro" with "National" performs the important function of both pinpointing and expanding the parameters by which the cultural "problem" presented by racial difference in relation to the fair is understood. As the high point of the events that marked Colored American Day, Douglass's speech sought to fight the cultural misappropriations that formed the foundation of African American exclusion from all managerial and decision-making levels of the fair. Substituting "Negro" for "National" suggests that the cultural "problem" of racial difference is contained, confined



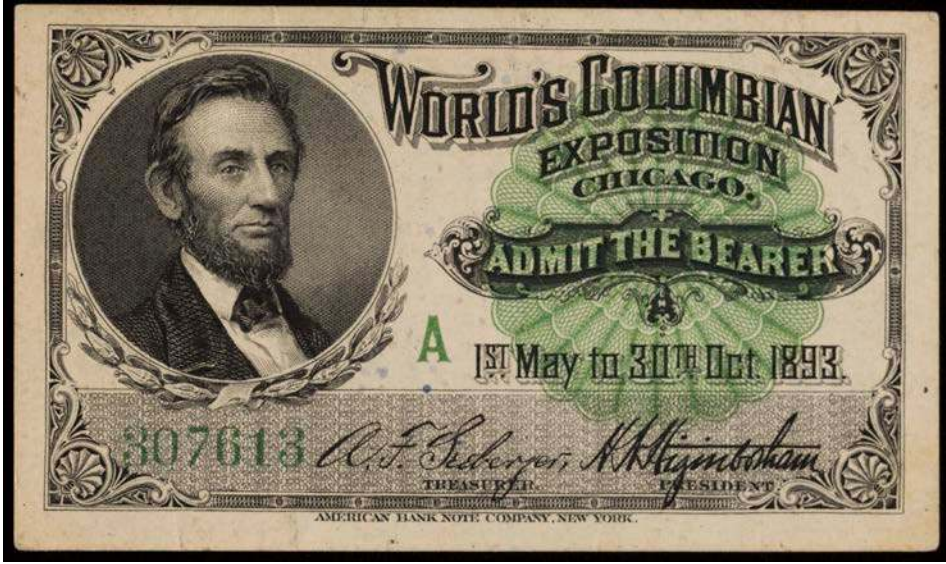
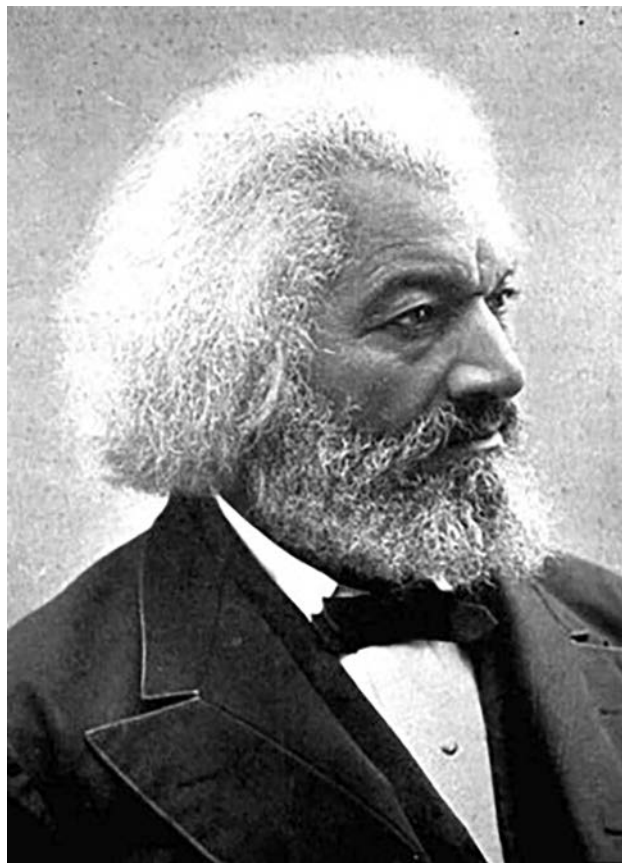


Fig. 2. Entry Ticket, World's Columbian Exposition, Newberry Library photo, Christina Olson Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago. Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

to one small irregular spot on the entire American cultural map. But in substituting again “National” for “Negro,” Douglass effects a powerful rhetorical reversal that aligns the “problem,” i.e., the question of the “Negro,” with the question of Americanness and the manner by which Americanness is to be understood and represented in relation to the idea of modernity, both on the fairgrounds and beyond its gates. Douglass examined this question of Americanness even more deeply in another project of cultural resistance with which he was involved, the small pamphlet entitled *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (1893), edited by the anti-lynching activist and journalist Ida B. Wells, and featuring essays by Frederick Douglass, Wells, Irvine Garland Penn and Wells's future husband, Ferdinand L. Barnett (figs. 4–5). Wells compiled the pamphlet to protest the exclusion of African Americans from all participation in the fair beyond that of consumption or commodity.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, as James C. Davis notes, those who came “to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition saw ‘Negroes’ but few, if any, African Americans.”<sup>13</sup> There was the famous exhibit of the Fon people of what was then the nation of Dahomey (now Benin, West Africa), which, positioned on the Midway Plaisance outside the fairgrounds proper along with many other non-white “ethnic” exhibits, was generally described for picturing blacks as savages in contradistinction to the more “civilized” spaces found in the interior of the fair.<sup>14</sup> As an example of commodity, Davis also mentions Nancy Green, the living embodiment of the Quaker Oats trademark Aunt Jemima, introduced to the American public for the first time at the fair, along with the company's self-rising pancake mix. Nancy Green's daily performance of Aunt Jemima personified the stereotype of the black Mammy from the Old South, a black woman devoid of sexuality whose happy demeanor, hardworking goodwill and unflagging loyalty to the white family whose needs



▲  
Fig. 3. Frederick Douglass, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893,  
Wikimedia Commons.

she fulfilled made her a solid fixture in post-Reconstruction white understanding of African American life and experience.<sup>15</sup>

While Nancy Green's Aunt Jemima upheld the cultural text of the racial status quo, Wells, with her pamphlet (which she herself brought to the fair) upended both the visual and the discursive parameters of racial difference as these were represented in the White City. In its complete refusal to accept the limited cultural locations and spaces at the fair predetermined as those provided for things African American, the pamphlet represented a radical rhetorical intervention in the fair's cultural text, tearing a ragged hole in its symbolic assertion of cherished American values and ideals, and rethinking its modern implications. Like nothing else at the fair, as an immediate form of "mass media rhetorics," Wells's pamphlet disavowed the fair's representation of modern Americanness. It highlighted, in fact, its status *as* representation, divorced from the actual American reality of the time, whose true aspect was to be found in the brutal upholding of a status quo characterized by an artificially—and often violently—imposed racial difference.

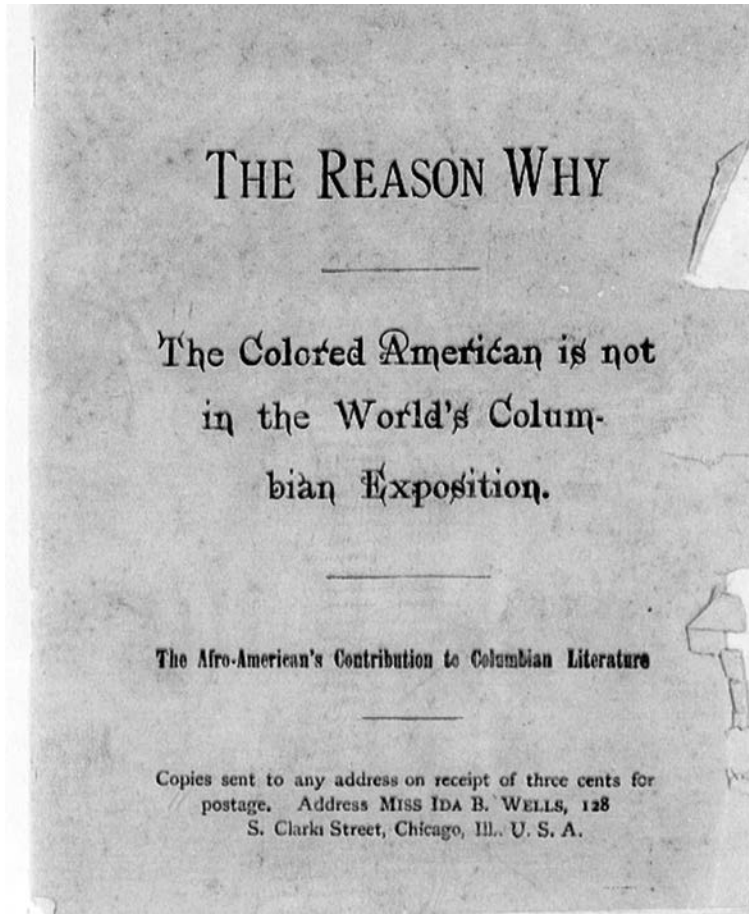


Fig. 4. Cover of *The Reason Why*, 1893, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Wells's refusal to accept the exclusion of blacks from any authoritative role in the production of the fair resulted in her endeavor to encapsulate, in *The Reason Why*, an apology for black material absence from all functions beyond those of consumer, commodity, or manual laborer at the fair. Her effort, then, was to make sure that no distortion of the historical record should be the basis for shifting the blame for this lack onto African Americans themselves, who had done everything imaginable to find a path to viable—and visible—participation in the fair's celebration of American cultural achievement. Having enjoined Frederick Douglass, the most prominent African American of his time, to help with the project, Wells finally succeeded in obtaining from him a space for herself at the fair in the Haiti Pavilion (fig. 6); Douglass, who had served as the American ambassador to Haiti from 1889 to 1891, had been placed in charge of the building by the Haitian government. He offered Wells a desk, from which location she personally placed her pamphlet in the hands of fairgoers, distributing 10,000 copies that had been published with support from members of various local churches.<sup>16</sup> The





Fig. 5. Ida B. Wells, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893,  
by Marry Garrity, restored by Adam Cuerden, Wikimedia Commons.

key issue here, however, is *visibility*. Although the Haiti Pavilion could be viewed as a separate cultural space at the fair, distinct from that of America, the domain of a new nation seen as a political pariah in the wake of the virulent animosity with which it had initially been met by other sovereign nations (especially those representing the planter societies of the New World), the fact that Wells distributed her pamphlet from this location underscores, rather than detracts from, the power of the cultural statement she made in so doing. As the only independent black nation in the Western hemisphere, and the only nation in which black slaves had succeeded in freeing themselves through violent resistance, in the late nineteenth century Haiti exemplified the zenith of black possibility and achievement. Though representing the citizens of a different nation, in its overt assertion of black people's capacity to overcome nearly two centuries of cultural, political, and economic dependency, the Haiti Pavilion signaled to all who visited the Exposition its central motif of American progress. That the black people in question were Haitian, rather than African American, would not have been more important than



Fig. 6. Haiti Pavilion, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893, Wikimedia Commons. Courtesy of The Field Museum Library, Chicago.

the racial heritage shared by both—the fact of blackness connecting them despite differences of national affiliation—yet would not serve to entirely eradicate such national differences. The establishment of Haiti as an independent black nation implied the *possibility* of such an achievement and condition for the entire black diaspora, and this would necessarily have included African Americans. The political implications of Haiti's existence were lost on no one, and would have been evident to all who had any knowledge of Haiti and its explosive history. Thus, although African Americans had been denied a separate space at the fair to display their achievements since Emancipation, Wells endeavored, by recording them in the form of a pamphlet, to offer material reality *in that context* to an ensemble of African American contributions which might have otherwise gone unnoticed *as an ensemble*. By offering her pamphlet from within the Haiti Pavilion to any fairgoer who visited, Wells provided the cultural authority, recognition, and comprehensiveness she sought for those accomplishments within the fairgrounds proper, while powerfully contradicting mainstream assumptions about the limitations of race by linking African American achievements with the racial success of the Haitian insurrection.<sup>17</sup> That this took place from within the culturally vilified space of Haiti does not negate the fact that the accomplishments Wells documented were those of African Americans, and as such, a challenge to prevailing notions of Americanness that would preclude any acknowledgement of the kind of black achievement Wells insisted must be recognized as part of the fair's historical record. In this light,

- 54 then, the pamphlet may be understood as working toward a reconceptualization of the very idea of Americanness within which Wells existed as an African American, both as it served to describe America itself, and as it was expressed in the mainstream vision of the fair. A veiled appropriation of the gendered discourse of patriarchy, both rhetorical in the form of the pamphlet, and materially visible in the physical form of Ida B. Wells herself, the combination of Wells/pamphlet thus serves as a cultural text on display, consumable and consumed at the fair, a text that defies and rewrites conventional understandings of blackness, whiteness, femininity, masculinity, Americanness, and, through it, American citizenship, into a challenging and problematic and otherwise inaccessible simultaneity.<sup>18</sup>

### Ida B. Wells, Unappointed Exhibitor

Through the act of physically distributing the pamphlet, Wells effects a powerful contradiction that gives the lie to the image of America as a “City upon a Hill,” revealing its “civilized” utopia as a sham, like the gleaming whiteness of its temporary buildings covered by staff (the mixture of plaster, cement, and hemp that was used to hide the metal frames of the fair’s immense buildings and giving the illusion of timeless architectural grandeur).<sup>19</sup> Wells makes clear that below the fair’s majestic façade lay an insupportable hypocrisy, just as the tawdry circumstances of its construction over a swamp by a lake underlaid the gleaming White City of beautiful boardwalks and peaceful lagoons. Wells uses the combination of Wells/pamphlet to counter the flawed reality of the representations of cultural otherness to be found on the Midway Plaisance, where many fairgoers gawked in awed fascination at the living exhibits of the various peoples (fig. 7). One such fairgoer, Elisabeth A. Gookin, a white, middle-class Chicagoan, chronicled her experiences at the fair in two diaries that depict her observations in minute detail (fig. 8). Gookin’s diaries in general describe a daily round of mundane activities, all of the kinds of things by which the life of an ordinary white middle-class Chicago woman might be characterized in the late nineteenth century, such as cooking, enjoying dinners and luncheons, receiving visitors to tea, and attending the theater. In her ordinariness, Gookin was everything that the fair, and Wells, were not.<sup>20</sup> For her, the fair was a smorgasbord of difference and otherness “making one feel far away from home” and offering a variety of unusual sights and sounds that could never be replicated in the same way in real life because the physical distances between them would be too great.<sup>21</sup> Seeing the Rajah of Kapathala, she remarks that “he has good features and looks like an intelligent man,” and of the Bedouin encampment she observes that one “of the girls would have been pretty had she been neatly dressed,” adding that “they do not seem to be very cleanly in their habits” (Gookin Diary, August 10, 1893; August 2, 1893).

Her diaries describe several more encounters with cultural otherness on the Midway in an odd, detached way, in which such difference is represented as both controlled and controllable, and with regard to which there is not the slightest hint of potential threat. On October 6, 1893, for example, she writes:



▲  
Fig. 7. The Midway Plaisance, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893, Bird's eye view from Ferris wheel looking east, by William Henry Goodyear, Brooklyn Museum Archives, Goodyear Archival Collection, Wikimedia Commons.

We went to the Chinese Theater where we were much amused by their feats of joy—glory—and the play which represented scenes in the world's creation—Their modes of acting are very peculiar. The tones of their voices are very discordant and disagreeable, a kind of screech—Their dancing is a kind of posturing. The music like that of all Oriental nations is crude and inharmonious. (Gookin Diary, October 6, 1893).

As Gookin does not come into regular contact with Chinese people, the sounds and gestures they make are naturally strange to her. Seeing them as “crude” might also evidence her understanding of their status as non-white. On July 11, 1893, she writes, “We directed our steps first to the Midway Plaisance . . . [At] the ‘Cairo St.’ which is very narrow and paved with brick, we saw many strange people of different kinds—several camels and donkeys on which men and boys were taking short rides.” And later on the same day she adds: “went into the Plaisance, saw the strange animals and people—went to the Javanese theatre had our dinner in the German Village” (Gookin Diary, July 11, 1893).

16<sup>th</sup> visit  
 24 August - Illinois day - very warm  
 Left home early, before 8 A.M.  
 and reached the grounds soon  
 after 9. We hoped to secure seats  
 where we could comfortably  
 view the parade of the strange  
 people from the "Plaisance" but  
 the crowd were ahead of us  
 and we were obliged to stand  
 for an hour and a half in  
 the hot sunshine - or give  
 up what we mainly cared  
 to see - Finally through the  
 kindness of two gentlemen (strange-  
 =ers to me) who helped me to  
 stand on a very narrow space  
 at the end of a setter - not  
 more than three inches in  
 length - I was enabled to see  
 fairly well - There were Turks  
 Arabs - Soudanese - Dahomey's  
 Amazons, Bedonins, South  
 Sea Islanders - Singalese Ja-  
 =vane and North American

▲  
 Fig. 8. Page from Elizabeth Gookin's Diary, World's Columbian Exposition,  
 1893, Newberry Library photo, Gookin Family Papers, January 1887-  
 December 1874, box 6, folder 51, Newberry Library, Chicago. Courtesy  
 of the Newberry Library.

It is interesting to note that for Gookin, the "strange" animals are on a par with the "strange" people (and not so far apart in their material reality); both seem to be to her equally different, as far from her own comfortable reality as if miles of unfriendly terrain stretched between them. In her movement in one evening from the "Javanese theatre" to "dinner in the German Village," Gookin was able to experience distant cultures of the world in microcosm, neatly packaged for consumption by the fair, and subtly controlled by its visual and spatial representations of race and ethnicity. On Illinois Day, August 24, 1893, as Gookin notes, a celebratory parade brought all of these "strange" peoples together in one variegated display for the pleasure of a multitude of onlookers:





▲  
Fig. 9. Midway Plaisance, The “Turkish Village” at the World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893, Wikimedia Commons.

There were Turks [sic] Arabs-Soudanese-Dahomeys-Amazons-Bedouins, South Sea Islanders-Singalese Javanese and North American Indians in their war paint whooping and shouting—There were some Chinamen—some were mounted on camels some on horses on donkeys and many on foot—Their music was wild and strange but not unpleasant—All were in Gala attire—Probably such an assemblage of people from the remote parts of the earth will never be seen together again by the most of us at least.<sup>22</sup>

As seen in this entry, it is almost as if the sheer multitude of different peoples was enough to cause them all to run together into one big jumble of undifferentiated otherness. Yet if Elisabeth Gookin had not simply seen the Turks in the Illinois Day parade but had also gone to the Turkish Theater, she would have experienced firsthand the fair’s compromised version of cultural authenticity (fig. 9). For Pierre Antonius and Company, the managers of the Turkish Theater, had contracted with Augusta Olson to hire her daughter, twelve-year-old Christina Olson, to “dance and help the actors in the performances which will be shown in the said Theater in Midway Plaisance” (figs. 10–11). Christina was asked to “begin in her practicing and rehearsing *in the imitation of the Turkish dance and customs* which are requested of her, and to try her best to imitate it as soon as possible.” In other words, she was asked only to *imitate* the Turkish dance and customs, or to provide a reasonable facsimile of “Turkishness.” This is



Fig. 10. Photograph of Cristina Olson, Newberry Library photo, Christina Olson Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago. Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

further emphasized in the contractual stipulations concerning her salary, which state that she will be paid “a salary of \$20 for the first week, then when . . . [she is] able to appear on the stage *just to imitate the Turkish dance or part of it* [she will be paid] . . . \$25 per week,” a salary increase promised to her “as soon as her dance improves.”<sup>23</sup> Christina Olson was contracted to produce on a cultural level what the façade of the fair presented an architectural level: a seamless, well-practiced presentation of a carefully crafted reality, packaged and ready for consumption by all who would choose to partake of it (fig. 12).

By appearing with her pamphlet, then, as a single material and cultural text in the heart of the White City, Wells provides a powerful counter-narrative to the fair’s representations of cultural-difference-on-display. The very existence of the pamphlet and

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We are the undersigned Pierre Antonius & Co.  
 - first party, and Augusta Olson - second party,  
 agreed as follows

(1<sup>st</sup>) The second party Augusta Olson promises to  
 send her daughter Miss Christina Olson to dance &  
 help the actors in the performances which will be shown  
 in the said Theater in Midway Plaisance and also  
 & agreed to come at 9 o'clock P.M. to join our  
 actors in the performances which will be shown in  
 the times appointed P.M. & A.M. by the first party.  
 but the first party agreed to set the second party free from  
 service after nine o'clock in the evening.

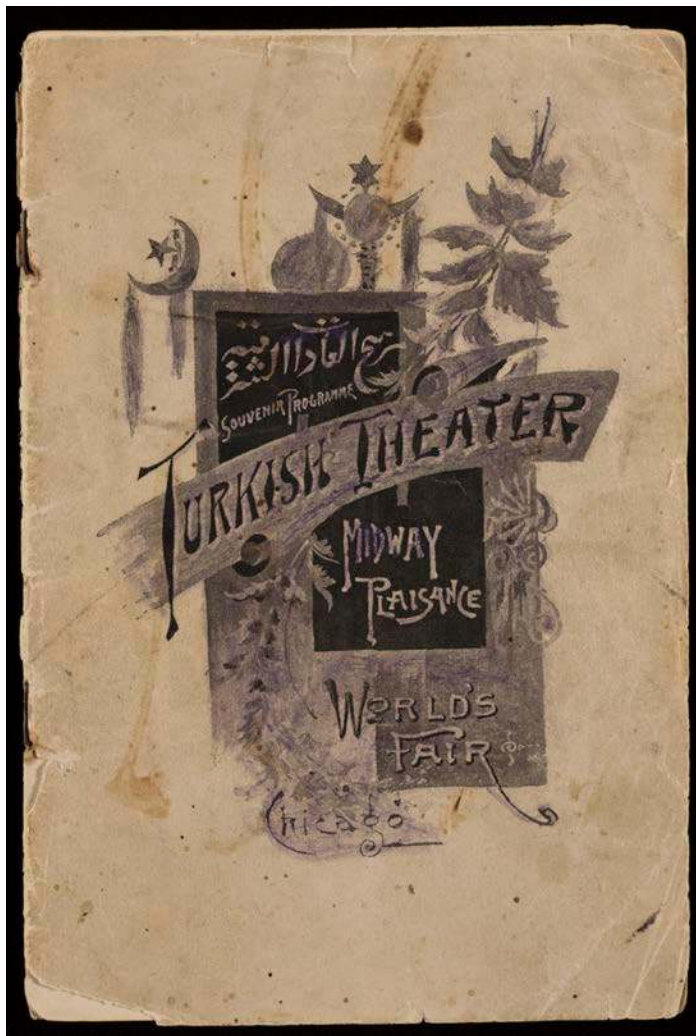
upon this agreement the second party has obliged  
 from thenceforth to begin in her practicing & rehearsing  
 in the imitation of the Turkish dances & customs which  
 are requested of her & to try her best imitate it as soon as  
 possible that she may please the stage manager & promises  
 to be obedient to do what she is requested for

(2<sup>nd</sup>) The first party promises to give the second  
 party a salary of \$20 for the first week; then  
 when the second party will be able to appear on the  
 stage just to imitate the Turkish dance or part of it,  
 the first party agreed to give \$25 twenty five dollars  
 per week & promises to raise the salary as soon as  
 her dance improves

Now after trying her for the first week if she proved  
 successful or a hope of success in future she will  
 continue in the work & her salary will be raised

▲  
 Fig. 11. Cristina Olson, Work Contract, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893, Newberry Library photo, Christina Olson Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago. Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

what Teresa Zackodnik calls its “recirculation” of facts previously printed in Southern newspapers and concerning the egregious practice of lynching creates a shock that the visual and cultural representations of the fair, which created very different roles for “blackness” and “Americanness,” could not absorb (“Recirculation,” 439). The combination of Wells and her pamphlet thus insists on a rapprochement between “blackness” and “Americanness” that denies what is, for Wells, their artificial separation.



▲  
Fig. 12. Program from Turkish Theater, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893,  
Newberry Library photo, Christina Olson Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.  
Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

What is most interesting about the combination of Wells/pamphlet, however, is not its public assertion of the *blackness* of Americanness, but rather its concomitant and implied assertion of the *whiteness* of Americanness, the silent and hidden by-product of its more visible assertion of blackness. In its refusal to remain silent about the social conditions affecting the majority of late-nineteenth-century African Americans, the combination Wells/pamphlet effects a non-verbal re-articulation of whiteness, a radical restructuring of the accepted racial cultural text occurring just below the surface of the visual apprehension of Wells herself at the fair. In addition, the fact that Wells's pamphlet does not stand alone, but rather appears *with her* at the fair, through her own act of placing it in the hands of as many fairgoers as passed by her post in the



Haiti Pavilion, underscores this re-articulation, providing a direct and physical challenge to the cultural forces that would deny her any possibility of translation, on her own terms, into an authoritative public entity in the context of the fair. Through this act, then, Wells reveals that it is in the silence, absence, exclusion, and/or commodification of “blackness” at the fair that its representation of “whiteness” as tantamount with progress, civilization, beauty, and culture—the most important meaning of the public cultural text enacted by the fair—is produced.

Lauren Berlant identifies this silenced yet compelling cultural meaning, the ability to signify without visible effort, as the mark of the hegemonic power of whiteness, which obtains its “legitimacy [in American culture] . . . from the privilege to suppress and protect the body.”<sup>24</sup> This radical silencing allows Wells to “speak” through the cultural iconography of her own physical presence, to “say” what “whiteness” at the fair doesn’t say and doesn’t *want* said—that is, that its own internal contradictions insist that to be “white” is also to be simultaneously “black,” because this form of “whiteness” can only be produced from the black degradation that Wells eschews. This is the moment at which the relation between race and modernism is manifested in the colliding dynamics between racial difference and mainstream cultural understanding made visible, and, therefore, accessible, only within the crucible of modernity. The examination of the *idea of race* in this context leads to a deeper view of the modern as both progenitor and disguiser of this now visible dynamic; the common origin of these two culturally defined racial locations, racial difference and mainstream cultural understanding, must be skillfully hidden within a public space defined by the color line, which symbolically and physically represents them as irremediably separate. Publicly positioning herself in this way, Wells staunchly denies and underscores the artificiality of that color line, which demands her acquiescence to the role of consumer or consumed, but never producer.<sup>25</sup> Yet it is the very publicness of her act that allows Wells to create a culturally unprecedented modern understanding of Americanness, within which “black” and “white” are revealed as inextricably intertwined.<sup>26</sup> Wells’s personal “exhibit” thus becomes the nexus at which the fair’s deepest cultural significance is revealed, as a microcosm of the cultural realities and tensions that had already existed on a national scale and had been made materially visible in the gruesome public spectacle of lynching, against which she had been so valiantly fighting before the fair’s opening day (Davis, *Commerce*, 13).<sup>27</sup>

### Lynching Demystified

By 1893, Wells was already well known for her public battle against lynching, which she had been waging through articles, editorials, and public appearances since the 1892 lynching of three black Memphis businessmen, one of whom had been a good friend. The victims were highly regarded in Memphis as upstanding African American citizens, and although it was generally accepted in 1892 that lynching was the result of white incitement to outrage and a passionate desire for justice as retribution for black male rape of white women, in this case, there had been no imputation of rape.<sup>28</sup> It was this aspect of the event that had startled Wells into shocked understanding, and set her on



62 her long public search for truth and justice, because it had brought to her the undeniable and appalling realization that what Alison Piepmeier has called the “lynch narrative” was, in its American manifestation, actually an artificial excuse for the cultural sanction of violence against African Americans (*Out in Public*, 135). In coming to understand this reality, Wells also accidentally discovered that the lynch narrative was a crucial underpinning of nineteenth-century American, post-Reconstruction culture, that it actually served as what Piepmeier identifies as a “nationalizing narrative” (130).<sup>29</sup> As a “nationalizing” discourse, the American lynch narrative becomes not just a description of a gruesome nineteenth-century American cultural reality; below its rhetorical surface, it also suggests a political ordering that identifies what an American is—and is not—thereby structuring public understanding of to whom the rights of American citizenship should rightfully belong, and to whom they should not. For Piepmeier, the full significance of the lynch narrative cannot be apprehended outside of a nineteenth-century American social and political cultural context, broadly construed:

The lynch narrative is only fully legible when viewed in the context of the chaos surrounding the notion of citizenship in nineteenth-century America. Wells’ work documents the fact that the murders of African Americans by lynch mobs was the material parallel to—or the material enactment of—the legal exclusion of African Americans from American citizenship. (138)

In this context, the combination Wells/pamphlet thus becomes a deeply political act whose symbolic significance rewrites the meaning of Americanness, by providing an alternative vision of American citizenship whose moral truth suggests the modernity of a level of progress matching the utopic promise to which the fair aspired.

Although *The Reason Why* does not focus on lynching, unless the pamphlet is considered in this context, it is impossible to realize its full import. As a cultural instance of lawlessness, anarchy, immorality, and injustice, lynching represented the underbelly of everything the fair purported to be. On the rise in the early 1890s, lynching rudely interrogated the fair’s hold on the idea of civilization, and Wells’s presence there boldly called attention to this failure.<sup>30</sup> While Wells’s strategy was infinitely “civilized” in its use of the written word to strike back at material injustice, the pamphlet depicted anything but a “civilized” cultural condition. By troubling the concept of civilization through the publication of her pamphlet, and by further disturbing the cultural status quo in using the pamphlet as an occasion to make a physical appearance at the fair as its distributor, Wells’s symbolic message both aligned itself with and challenged the hegemonic cultural values of that status quo. Although Wells’s goal in *The Reason Why* was not expressly to protest lynching, still lynching was necessarily conjured in the attempt because it represented the material condition of the fair administrators’ refusal to make any concessions including African Americans in the fair’s organization. Lynching was the brutal material reality of the racial status quo of which the fair was a largely symbolic manifestation, and its hyper-visible, highly public nature, along with its hyperbolic narrative, created the African American male in the public sphere as the antithesis to everything the fair was meant to celebrate.<sup>31</sup> Primarily, what the fair

symbolically signified was a naturalized, normalized understanding of “a particular configuration of the white male body as aligned with civilization” (Piepmeier, *Out in Public*, 151). If the white male body is aligned with civilization, then the fair becomes the public text of that body, in the same way that lynching becomes the public text of the African American male body. Configured within the complicated peregrinations of the lynch narrative, neither the black nor the white public text makes way for the African American female body, which is hidden and silenced within them both. Piepmeier suggests that neither public text can exist without this silencing of African American women’s experience, arguing that Wells’s writing “reveals that white male supremacy, the denigration of the black male, and the domestic idealization of the white woman were all predicated on the erasure of the black female body from the national narrative” (141).

What is silenced along with the African American female body is the historical reality of white male rape of black women. In another pamphlet, this one written entirely by herself, *Southern Horrors* (1892), Wells reveals and powerfully links this issue to the lynch narrative, in describing how lynching of African American men as the result of figurative rape is the public counterpoint of the actual “private” rape of African American women:

To make plain to readers the racist underpinning of the lynching-for-rape myth, Wells described both the “private” crime of rape and the more “public” crime of lynching as systematic wrongs perpetrated by whites against blacks. The press portrayed lynching as something men did to other men in public. . . . By contrast, rape was mundane, usually unnamed, and “private.” It . . . was typically surrounded by silence rather than fanfare. (Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett*, 87)

Because, as previously asserted, the lynch narrative is a nationalizing narrative, the nation it describes is, thus, on the surface, one in which African American and white men are seemingly locked in a desperate and public battle for ascendancy, one in which they, along with white women, have a highly visible role, while, as described above, black women are erased. In this narrative, however, the cultural place of white men is that of the universal—it needs no public display in order to validate its authority. That the African American female in this discourse is both silent *and* invisible is important, in that it is this combination that reveals the deeper, and modern, significance of Wells’s cultural intervention with *The Reason Why*. Silenced within the lynch narrative, the African American female becomes the “cultural repository of excessive sexuality, both the sexuality eschewed by white women and that identified with the bodies of black men” (Piepmeier, *Out in Public*, 153). In other words, once elided from the national text, the African American female body becomes the site of excess, the place where cultural meaning is not made, but, rather, made to reside. According to Piepmeier, African American women’s “erasure from the lynch narrative meant that their experiences were invisible and the effects of lynching and rape on them were erased . . . [ensuring] the perpetuation of the dominant national understanding of white male bodies” (149). And because white rape of the African American female could go on

64 with neither redress nor public recognition, African American women were thus effectively removed from the national equation.

This invisibility of African American female sexual vulnerability both defines the meaning of the national text from which the black woman is elided and hides something about that text, the elaboration of which can reveal much about the cultural struggle Wells waged. As the hidden and silenced site of sexual and cultural excess, the African American female ignored in the lynch narrative may be viewed as the hidden point of origin for the concepts of “blackness” and “whiteness” that are reified within that narrative. Although these concepts are made to seem radically different, it may be argued that they come from the same place, that they are derived from the imputation of uncontrolled sexuality on the part of black women, of which, as identified in the less visible aspect of the American lynch narrative, white men were the alleged victims.<sup>32</sup>

What remains unarticulated within this lynch narrative, then, is the flip side of its visible black male/white female rape scenario, which served to legitimate the public spectacle of the act: the uncontrolled sexuality of black women was such that it could ensnare white men who fell victim to its power, and must therefore be imputed to black men as well, who must naturally have had the same lascivious intentions toward white women that black women had toward white men. But because the cultural *reality* is that black women were hopelessly vulnerable to the sexual advances of white men (and black men helpless to intervene), the flip side of the lynch narrative can be seen to suggest that the unsanctioned rape of black women led to increased anxiety over and desire to protect the virtue of white women. The silencing and erasure of black women from the conventional American lynch narrative serves to hide this crucial problem. As Martha Hodes argues, this became even more pronounced after emancipation, as freedom introduced a new understanding, for both whites and African Americans, of the concepts of manhood, womanhood, personhood, masculinity, and femininity with regard to the African American population—and along with this new sense of these identities came an unfamiliar personal and sexual agency on the part of African Americans that was not easily confronted in mainstream white culture.<sup>33</sup> In keeping with this newfound agency, black men came to be viewed as a sexual threat, and black women, while still vulnerable, were suddenly understood as freedwomen who were no longer completely sexually accessible, and who could therefore not be possessed with the same impunity.

### American Citizenship in Chiaroscuro

This is the cultural situation that faced Ida B. Wells and *The Reason Why* at the fair, in the context of which the modern significance of her pamphlet comes into sharp focus. In the context of the American lynch narrative, it becomes clear that the combination of Wells/pamphlet is a radical performance of American citizenship, a demonstration, in keeping with the fair’s emphasis on the future, of what democratic American citizenship could entail were it to be pursued in its ideal form, and should entail if it were to live up to its own self-understanding. That future would embrace not just black male

citizenship, but black female citizenship as well. Forced by the cultural realities of her time to fight against both racial and gender injustices, Wells nevertheless brought the concerns of African American women to public consideration by subtly manipulating the cultural and public texts by which she was defined in order to create an alternative modern vision of American cultural progress in which the plight of African American women would no longer remain a hidden and shameful secret.

*The Reason Why* is thus both a text and a conscious act—an attempt to use the power of discourse, rhetoric, and cultural symbolism harnessed by the fair against itself in creating a new modern nexus of cultural meaning, an African American female public space and public identity inaccessible by any other means. The difference between Wells's effort and that of other African American women at the fair was that Wells's desired contribution was not one that could find its voice within the cultural parameters sanctioned by the fair officials. Wells created her own space, a flagrantly irreverent fissure in the accepted version of nineteenth-century American culture that had been majestically spread out for public consumption at the fair. Wells was not just looking for a public *space*—she was looking for a kind of public *significance* generally denied to women and certainly denied to those who were also black.

Wells's pamphlet therefore represents a very careful remaking of the cultural narrative that defined African Americans in late nineteenth-century America and whose implications reach powerfully into the modern world of the early twentieth century. Wells's effort reveals a carefully edited narrative of African American wrongs, experiences, endeavors, aspirations, hopes, and accomplishments in the face of unrelenting prejudice and oppression, with Wells herself as that material center—a living, breathing African American woman whose very physical presence belied the American lynch narrative's demeaning characterizations of black women. In Wells's alternative narrative, itself a nationalizing narrative as a result of its situatedness at the fair, the African American woman is placed on display and neatly packaged as the publicly consumable unit Wells/pamphlet—a powerful contradiction to the extant mainstream cultural narratives by which black female reality in that era was described.

It is in this careful packaging of her message that Wells most fully succeeds. Her starting point is the preface to the pamphlet, which she entitles “To the Seeker After Truth.” With this title alone, Wells immediately puts pressure on the fair's internal contradictions, by using its own rhetorical and symbolic ideals and values to reveal its refusal to stand by them. The first lines of the preface lay the foundation for what is to follow:

Columbia has bidden the civilized world to join with her in celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America, and the invitation has been accepted. . . . but that which would best illustrate her moral grandeur has been ignored. . . . The exhibit of the progress made by a race in 25 years of freedom as against 250 years of slavery, would have been the greatest tribute to the greatness and progressiveness of American institutions which could have been shown to the world.<sup>34</sup>

66 With this opening, Wells speaks not simply to America, but to the world, in the voice, she implies, with which America *should* speak, at the same time carefully situating the African American staunchly within American culture and identity and elaborating the role played by black people in that context both before and after slavery.<sup>35</sup> By putting her alternative national narrative *in print* and by distributing it *in person* in the highly visible, international, and public context of the fair, Wells sought to add authority to the discursive and rhetorical power of the narrative and thus to challenge more thoroughly the ideological power of the American lynch narrative. Moreover, by downplaying the problem of lynching, while playing up the role of the African American *as American citizen*, Wells countered the American lynch narrative at its very source: that is, the definition of Americanness, of whom and of what it should consist, and to whom it could be ascribed. By doing so, Wells asserted her view that American citizenship was the right of all who had labored to make America the great nation she had become 400 years after Discovery, without respect to gender or color.

But Wells also sought authority for the pamphlet and its version of the American national narrative through its textual strategies, subtly and invisibly uprooting the American lynch narrative, while seeming only to challenge it on the surface. First, Wells carefully downplayed the problem of lynching by not addressing it until the middle of the text. And then, when she did finally address it, she did so by grounding her assertions upon facts gleaned from both the Southern and the Northern white press. These two strategies worked in two important ways. By discussing the problem of lynching *after* establishing the Americanness of the African American (and therefore full American citizenship along with all rights according to that status), she alters the status of the African American within the American lynch narrative. As possessor of Americanness in terms of full American citizenship, the African American *as victim of lynching* is no longer a naturalized victim, one for whom lynching is the proper and necessary reality. Rather, in this new situation, the African American becomes *an American citizen who is lynched*. Thus, the lynch narrative, which normatively serves to justify the victimization of the African American male, is instead made to express outrage that an American citizen, one who just happens also to be an African American male, can be lynched.

These two strategies were then reinforced by another, one which could be said to have been derived from the days of abolitionist agitation. The strategy of organization allows Wells to completely shatter the lynch narrative's basic premises. As I have noted, the American lynch narrative depended for its existence on the invisibility of the African American female, who is "visible" only as an absence at the bottom of the hierarchical social structure effected by the narrative. Thus, to bring the category of Americanness and the discourse of American citizenship to the African American woman represented the most difficult of Wells's tasks and the one least likely to reach fruition. In appearing physically at the fair on her own terms, in contrast to the physical appearances of other black women like Nancy Green and those who spoke at the Congress of Representative Women, Wells was already well-positioned to disrupt the ideological power of the American lynch narrative. She was an African American woman, and she was not only *visible*, but had made herself so outside of any culturally



authorized context lending credibility to her efforts on either racial or gendered terms. Lacking the cultural authority necessary to uphold the cultural space she created, however, Wells was, significantly, forced to borrow it.

Just as the majority of slave narratives could not stand alone during the days of abolition but were normally introduced by prominent white citizens who attested to the veracity of the fugitive slaves whose stories of escape were related in their pages, Wells's pamphlet faced much cultural opposition that she did not have the cultural authority, alone, to dispel.<sup>36</sup> As a woman, Wells already lacked the authority naturally accorded a man (even an African American man). But as an African American woman, she was even more unable to muster such authority on her own, especially since African American women were invisible, both as Americans and within the American lynch narrative and, when made visible despite its strictures, were so only as representatives of a socially depraved sexuality so out of control that it was thought to pose a dire threat to the moral fiber not just of white men, but of the entire nation. Since in late-nineteenth-century America charges of immorality were often all it took to discredit a woman in the public sphere, Wells had to be extremely careful to position herself and her ideas in such a way that should any such charges be made, they would not be defensible. Her strategy, then, of asking Douglass to write the introduction and including significant contributions by two other prominent African American men, Penn and Barnett, was meant to provide the most solid and authoritative ground possible for the pamphlet. By sandwiching her contributions between the essays of these African American male leaders, Wells obtains the authority she lacks while supplying herself with the necessary credibility to put forward her ideas with some degree of certainty that they will be given a decent hearing.

It is only fitting, then, that in her essay on lynch law for *The Reason Why* Wells further disrupts the American lynch narrative by emphasizing the fact that while that narrative would assert that lynching occurs because of black rape of white women, no such reason can hold sway when it comes to the lynching of *African American women*. Even the simple fact that African American women are lynched, in cases that Wells can substantiate, seems to give the lie to the American lynch narrative's primary justification. By bringing the African American woman into play in the context of the pamphlet in which she has already established the Americanness of the African American male, Wells creates the African American female as an American citizen as well, with all of the same rights and privileges pertaining to that status (except, of course the right to vote!). Through this transformation, then, African American women in *The Reason Why* become *American* women, in the full meaning of the word. That American women can be lynched strikes a mortal blow to the American lynch narrative's notions of "chivalry" and "female honor." If the African American female is a *woman* and not an *absence*, then the American lynch narrative can have no meaning, because the sexuality of both white men and black women must also be made a part of the narrative. When the African American woman is defined as an absence, the rest of the narrative is that white male sexuality is about chivalry, gallantry, honor, and protection, white female sexuality is about virtue and chastity and black male sexuality is about violence and rape. But



Fig. 13. Detail of original photo, Mob Preparing to Lynch Jesse Washington, Waco City Hall, 1916, by Fred Gildersleeve, published by the NAACP as a supplement to *The Crisis* 12, no. 3, *The Waco Horror*, Wikimedia Commons.

when the African American woman enters the equation, this version of the American lynch narrative is destabilized. If the African American woman is raped, who is doing the raping? If it is the white man, where are chivalry, gallantry, honor, and protection in this scenario? If African American men want to protect African American women from rape and guard their honor, how can they be violent, rapacious beasts? If the African American woman has honor to be protected and the right to such protection, if she has the desire to be chaste and virtuous, how then can she be a lascivious creature of constant, insatiable, and bewitching sexual craving, an irresistible temptress to honorable white men? If the white female's honor is not protected, will *she* still remain chaste and virtuous, if indeed she was ever the epitome of chastity and virtue that she was held to be? Once the African American woman is no longer a cultural absence, these and other extremely difficult questions come immediately to the fore. By exploring the experience of black female lynching, Wells thus opens the door to a powerful interrogation of the American lynch narrative and, by proxy, late nineteenth-century American culture as well.

While Wells challenges the lynch narrative, as described above, by producing herself in print in a masculine public space, she also produces herself physically, in an externalized masculine space, by sharing the Haiti Pavilion with Douglass—the only official, authorized public cultural space at the fair where African Americans could participate with any degree of command. The irony was palpable—although Douglass had been asked by the Haitians to be in charge of their building, he had, by his own government, been given no official capacity in which to serve at the fair. This fact made Wells's intervention with *The Reason Why*, and the manner in which she chose to make it,

all the more crucial to the representation of African American cultural advancement. The fair spoke of progress—and the African American wanted to show progress, but was, in America, in his/her own country, blocked at every turn from revealing to the world what he/she could do, given adequate opportunity. Such advancement could only be fully realizable and made entirely visible in its civic manifestation. Yet in the America of 1893, such manifestations of civic participation were not possible for the African American, neither in daily life nor in the fabulous unreal reality of the fair. As an independent republic and sovereign nation—albeit black—Haiti had been, like other nations, invited to create an exhibit for the fair. Thus its building, like the fair itself, represented a civic space, a place where the ideals of citizenship of that country, and of the world, could be proudly displayed. Although this very pride, derived as it was from the forcible recuperation of black freedom, had been a major impetus contributing to a surge of lynchings in planter societies across the Americas and continuing on into the late nineteenth century, Haiti and Haitians were not directly reflected in the lynch narrative as it developed with regard to African Americans in a specifically American context, and as it has been described here. Because of Haiti's proud history, or perhaps even in spite of it, Douglass and Wells, as members of the black diaspora and therefore connected to that history by shared racial heritage, could experience in the Haiti Pavilion a civic freedom and belonging much like a sense of national pride that had been routinely and completely denied them in their native land.

But the meaning of that cultural space also brought home just how far African Americans had yet to go in 1893, in their endeavor to become representative *Americans*, in a new, modern, American world. Unlike the fair's Haiti Pavilion, America's civic spaces—jails, town squares, business districts—were often the sites where the American lynch narrative's nationalizing effect played itself out again and again in horrific and frightening physical detail (fig. 13). They were the places of choice for such “civic” scenes, those ghastly enactments and re-enactments of a fractured American citizenship searching desperately for, yet unable to find, the meaning of modern Americanness envisioned, and so magnificently executed, in Chicago's White City at the 1893 World's Fair.

## Notes

Research for this article has been completed with the generous support of the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts (ISLA) at the University of Notre Dame and from the National Endowment for the Humanities, in the context of a 2013 Summer Institute at the Newberry Library in Chicago, “Making Modernism: Literature and Culture in Twentieth-Century Chicago, 1893–1955, led by Liesl Olson, Director of Chicago Studies at the Newberry Library. Many thanks also go to Professor Donald Pease, all those involved with Professor Hortense Spillers's ICI project, my International American Studies Association colleagues, and especially to my very talented research assistant, Meghan McKinney-Jones.

1. Ann Ardis, “Editor's Introduction,” *Modernism/modernity* 19, no. 3 (2012): v–vii, v.

2. Since the groundbreaking publication of Houston A. Baker's *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), studies of the relation between race, modernism and/or modernity have been steadily increasing in number.

3. David Theo Goldberg, “Modernity, Race, and Morality,” *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993): 193–227, 223. See also David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001); and Robert

70 Bernasconi and Anika Maaza Mann, "The Contradictions of Racism: Locke, Slavery and the Two Treatises," in *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Valls (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005): 89–107.

4. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (2008): 737–48, 744.

5. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "Introduction: Modernisms Bad and New," in *Bad Modernisms*, ed. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–18, 2.

6. Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Phillip Lapsansky, "Introduction: The Theme of Our Contemplation," in *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790–1860*, ed. Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Phillip Lapsansky (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1–31, 2.

7. Teresa Zackodnik, "Recirculation and Feminist Black Internationalism in Jessie Fauset's 'The Looking Glass' and Amy Jacques Garvey's 'Our Women and What They Think,'" *Modernism/modernity* 19, no. 3 (2012): 437–59, 438.

8. Ida B. Wells, et. al, *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition: The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature*, ed. Robert W. Rydell (1893; rpt., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). It is important to note here that the pamphlet itself is made up of several very disparate essays, written by different authors. The essays deal with wide-ranging topics about black life and progress from slave times up to 1893, the year of the fair. Cleverly, Wells flanks her own work on lynch law and the egregious material reality of lynching by that of prominent African American men of the day, beginning with a short preface written by herself, followed by an introduction written by Frederick Douglass, an essay on African American progress since Emancipation by I. Garland Penn, and another essay detailing the thwarted efforts of African Americans to contribute to the fair, written by her future husband, F. L. Barnett. The pamphlet's point is thus to provide a kind of mini-tour of black contributions to American life. Due to the disparate nature of the pamphlet's subject matter, in this article, I seek to emphasize the cultural significance of its material existence, rather than analyzing its content directly. I wish thus to explore only the pamphlet's function as mini-tour, as from this perspective, it becomes almost like an exhibit itself, although textual, and, therefore, only figurative.

9. Norman Bolotin and Christine Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition: The Chicago World's Fair of 1893* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 4.

10. Robert W. Rydell, "Editor's Introduction: 'Contend! Contend!'," in *The Reason Why*, xi–xlvii, xi–xii.

11. "Frederick Douglass's Speech at Colored American Day," in Christopher Robert Reed, *"All the World is Here!": The Black Presence at White City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 193–94, 194.

12. In underscoring the significance of what Wells sought to do, however, it is also important to recognize that she is not the only African American woman to find a public space at the fair. Several other prominent black women, such as Fannie Barrier Williams, Anna Julia Cooper, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, each spoke at the fair's Congress of Representative Women. The difference between their participation and what Wells sought to do, however, was that while they were absorbed into a context whose parameters had been created and established by white women (they had been staunchly refused any kind of decision-making role), Wells created her own parameters and her own public space.

13. James C. Davis, *Commerce in Color: Race, Consumer Culture and American Literature, 1893–1933* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 64.

14. Robert W. Rydell, "The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893: Racist Underpinnings of a Utopian Artifact," *Journal of American Culture* 1, no. 2 (1978): 253–75, 269, 271. Rydell quotes Denton J. Snider, who suggested that the Midway consisted of a "sliding scale of humanity" (269). He writes that nearest "to the White City were the Teutonic and Celtic races as represented by the two German and two Irish villages. The center of the Midway contained the Mohammedan world, Western, and Eastern Asia. Then [quoting Snider] 'we descend to the savage races, the African of Dahomey and the North American Indian, each of which has its place . . . ' at the opposite end of

the Plaisance" (269). "Repulsive and grotesque," Rydell writes, "the Midway made the dream of the future seem all the brighter and present civilization all the more progressive" (271). See also T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Empire*, ed. Pascal Blanchard, et al. (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and *Human Zoos: The Invention of the Savage*, ed. Gilles Boëtsch, Nanette Jacomijn Snoep, and Paul Blanchard (Arles: Actes Sud, 2012).

15. See Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1991), 33–37. Morton writes that "Mammy was a major symbol of the idealization of Jim Crow segregation, like slavery, as an institution promoting racial intimacy and harmony. Her image epitomized the linked romanticization and legitimization of both institutions. Thus, during the turn-of-the-century decades, she became virtually a cult figure . . . Throughout the Jim Crow era she lived on in the stories historians told of the Southern past. But as in Page's *Old South*, their Mammy was never presented as fiction, but rather as fact" (35). See also Maurice M. Manning, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998) and Patricia A. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor, 1994).

16. Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (1928; rpt., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 115–17.

17. For an alternative perspective on international attitudes to late nineteenth-century Haiti, see Julia Gaffield, *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World: Recognition After Revolution* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

18. See Patricia Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Schechter writes that Well's desire to exercise "the freedom to engage fully in public life where the interest of African Americans was concerned" made her action one in which "she scrambled and defied the gender roles and racial categories of a society obsessed with labels" (115).

19. See Judith A. Adams, "The American Dream Actualized: The Glistening 'White City' and the Lurking Shadows of the World's Columbian Exposition," in *The World's Columbian Exposition: A Centennial Bibliographic Guide*, ed. David J. Bartuca, Donald K. Hartman, and Susan M. Neumeister (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), xix–xxix. Adams asserts that the exposition "achieved a plaster actualization of the American quest to create a New Jerusalem, a 'City on a Hill' in the New World wilderness" (xix). She quotes from the 1630 speech of John Winthrop, the leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who said to his followers: "We must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us" (xix); see Bolotin and Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition*, 18.

20. See Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Olson argues that the ordinary, the repetitive, often banal, life of the everyday has an important yet overlooked place in modernist aesthetics.

21. Elisabeth A. Gookin Diary, January 1887–December 1894, box 5, folder 50, Gookin Family Papers 1861–1921, The Gookin Family Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.

22. Elisabeth A. Gookin Diary, World's Columbian Exhibition, 1893, August 24, 1893, box 6, folder 51, The Gookin Family Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.

23. World's Columbian Exhibition, Work Agreements, June 27, 1893, box 1, folder 5, The Christina Olson Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago. Emphases added.

24. Lauren Berlant, "National Brands/National Body: Imitation of Life," in *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*, ed. Hortense J. Spillers (New York: Routledge, 1991), 110–40, 132. See also Karla F. C. Holloway, *Legal Fictions: Constituting Race, Composing Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). Holloway argues that in the United States, racial identity is created by US Constitutional law.



25. Susan Willis, *A Primer for Daily Life* (London: Routledge, 1991). In her analysis of the social role of consumer culture, Willis argues that all racial “others” participate in dominant culture as consumers but not as producers (108).

26. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 3. Hale writes that to “be American is to be both black and white” (3).

27. For Davis, the black female body that Wells produced at the fair was too political to be easily consumable by fairgoers, as was the body of Nancy Green, yet too much of a challenge to the fair’s established cultural text to be appropriated by white concerns. It was, simply put, a cultural anomaly.

28. Alison Piepmeier, *Out in Public: Configurations of Women’s Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 135. Both blacks and whites believed what Piepmeier calls the lynch narrative, i.e., that black men desired and raped white women and that this unbelievable act incited white men to such heights of outrage that they could not help themselves, but sought justice beyond the law, resulting in the torture and death of the Negro perpetrator. Wells states in her autobiography that as “many another person who had read of lynching in the South, I had accepted the idea meant to be conveyed—that although lynching was irregular and contrary to law and order, unreasoning anger over the terrible crime of rape led to the lynching; that perhaps the brute deserved death anyhow and the mob was justified in taking his life” (*Crusade for Justice*, 64).

29. Piepmeier argues that the lynch narrative served as a nationalizing public text because it was “a narrative constitutive of American personhood,” in that it “functioned to set a boundary for American citizenship at the black body, a boundary that excluded black women and men and used their bodies as a way of defining the absence of—and therefore the borders of—Americanness” (*Out in Public*, 130). Hale writes that lynchings “worked by ritualistically uniting white southerners, embodying the community in action” (*Making Whiteness*, 228).

30. Ida B. Wells, “Lynch Law,” in *The Reason Why*, 29–34, 30. Wells carefully documents that in 1890, 100 lynchings took place, 169 in 1891, and at the time of printing in late 1893, already over 100 more had been lynched.

31. An apt description of this problem is found in Hale, who writes, “To make order within the seeming fragmentation of their world, some Americans elaborated spatial mediations of modernity—ways of attaching identities to physical moorings, from bodies to buildings to larger geographies like region and nation. They produced new grounds of difference to mediate ruptures of modernity. In effect, they translated the specific and individualized linkages between identity, place and power that had reigned in an earlier, smaller world into connections between categories of people and imagined spaces that moved far beyond local boundaries” (*Making Whiteness*, 6).

32. Shirley Wilson Logan, *We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999). Logan describes a situation where this perspective was encapsulated, in an 1895 open letter written by John W. Jacks, then president of the Missouri Press Association, declaring that black women were “wholly devoid of morality and that they were prostitutes, thieves and liars” (132).

33. See Piepmeier, *Out in Public*, 239n2.

34. Ida B. Wells, “Preface: To the Seeker after Truth,” in *The Reason Why*, 3–4, 3.

35. Evidence that Wells intended to speak to the world is found in the fact that the English version of her preface is immediately followed by French and German versions. It had been originally intended to publish the pamphlet simultaneously in these three languages, but the necessity for haste and lack of funds prohibited this effort.

36. Schechter writes that Wells’s critics attacked her through her body, by linking her with a questionable sexual and moral character derived from her mixed race heritage; see Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett*, 105.