Stages and Streets:

Space, Race, and Gender in the Experience of Modernity in New York and San Francisco Nightlife, 1890–1930

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the history of urban nightlife in New York City and San Francisco from 1890 to 1930 and charts the manifestation of modernity within these cities. While some urbanites tepidly embraced this new modern world, others resisted. Chafing at this seemingly unmoored world, some Americans fretted about one of the most visible effects of modernity on the city—the encroachment of sex onto the street and in commercial amusements—and sought to wield the power of the state to suppress it. Even those Americans who reveled in the new modern world grappled with what this shifting culture ultimately meant for their lives, seeking familiarity where they could find it. Thus, this dissertation details how both Americans who embraced the modern world and those who perceived it as a threatening menace similarly sought a mediated modernity, seeking out and organizing spaces within modern amusements that ultimately reinforced existing cultural hierarchies.

Using the lens of spatial analysis, this dissertation examines how different groups of Americans used the spaces of nighttime amusement to interrogate how nightlife culture reflected and reinforced dynamics of power in a historical moment when social movements seemed to be upending existing power structures of race, class, and gender. Pioneering works in the field of the history of popular amusements tend to frame the experience of commercial amusements—and by extension modern life—as a liberating force lifting Americans from the staid traditions of the nineteenth century. But this dissertation charts the way Americans sought to moderate the effects of modern life, even as they delighted in it. Even as the modern world seemed on the cusp of overturning social hierarchy, Americans found comfort in amusements that structured space to

reaffirm the status quo; while so much of the modern world appeared to break with the past, existing structures of social power remained very much the same.

To my family, who made this possible,

to my teachers, who saw something in me long before I knew it was there,

and to my students, you can do it too.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, especially urban Americans, the world just seemed so "modern." Life was so fast now, and the physical spaces of the city changed nearly as rapidly as social relations appeared to be shifting. A feverish frivolity gripped American youth; they danced the night away to ragtime in commercial amusements, dances that often originated in ethnic neighborhoods associated with vice, such as San Francisco's Barbary Coast and the Bowery in New York. A sexual revolution brewed, and commercial amusements provided spaces for an emerging culture of *heterosociality*, in which women and men spent time together informally, far removed from traditional courting rituals. Cities moved at a quicker clip, and lit up at night, transforming the night into glittering spaces of amusement. Americans often grappled with modernity through the venue of urban nightlife, spaces where they could view or perhaps join transgressive performances. Americans were often of two minds about this transformation. While so much of modern culture seemed fresh and exciting, Americans experienced apprehension as well. Indeed, much of the modern world suggested a striking departure from the culture of the nineteenth century. Some reveled in the new world, but others rejected it and called for coercive actions by the state to restrict elements of modern urban culture. This dissertation charts how Americans thus sought a mediated modernity, embracing some elements of modern life while attempting to stave off others, seeking to frame their experience of modernity as an exciting thrill rather than a perilous transformation of their lives. Thus, even within this unique cultural moment

when it appeared as if established hierarchies of power might be shifting, spaces within the city ultimately reinforced the existing cultural hegemonies of race, class, and gender.

Making the Modern World

Broadly, modernity is the transition point from the antiquated age to the contemporary one. Based on their field, historians position this point of transition differently. Scholars of world history often mark modernity as beginning as early as the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, suggesting that the advent of the mechanical printing press, the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution, or the discovery of the Americas marks this critical transition from the old world to the modern one.[1] Other scholars frame the modern world as beginning more recently, suggesting that the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution rocked the foundations of the old world and transitioned to the new.[2] Still others contend that modernity evinced during the period roughly bracketed from the 1880s to anywhere from the end of World War I to the 1940s. [3] These scholars

[1] See, for example, Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990); William Barrett, *The Death of the Soul: From Descartes to the Computer* (Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1986). For more theoretical analyses of modernity as a concept, see Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); and Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).

[2] See Krishan Kumar, P*rophesy and Progress: The Sociology of Industrial and Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978).

[3] See, for example, Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009); Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York: Columbia

suggest that the profound and sweeping changes occurring at the turn of the twentieth century—such increased mechanization and rationalization; the birth of mass communication, mass amusement, and mass consumerism; and the explosion of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration—made the modern world. These flexible temporal boundaries make modernity a difficult idea to pin down. This dissertation utilizes the framework of the birth of modernity at the turn of the twentieth century and attempts to chart the spatial experience of this transition.

The modern world heralded a constellation of changes at the turn of the century, which were felt most acutely in the cities. Technological advancements transformed the face of the city and seemingly quickened the pace of life, even as it extended the hours urbanites could enjoy city spaces. Thomas Edison built an electrical generating plant outside of New York City in 1882, and over the course of the next several decades urban America would be lit up at night like millions of glimmering stars winking out into the blackness of space.[4] The introduction of electric light reconfigured nighttime urban public space toward glamorous and sparkling spaces of consumption.[5] A barrage of technological innovations—x-ray, cinema, automobiles, and airplanes—enabled Americans to see and do and move outside of the realm of the previously possible. The increasing rationalization of human labor that accompanied industrial capitalism demanded that Americans obey the "tyranny of the clock" and altered the very way

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University Press, 2012); Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

[4] Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland,* 13.

[5] Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siecle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 7.

Americans understood time.[6] In this modern world it seemed that everything, even things as regular and predictable and indeed universal as time, seemed in flux.

Explosive population growth fueled a similar fluctuation in city life. In the last half of the nineteenth century, the American population as a whole tripled. At the turn of the century, the United States had about fifty cities with populations of more than 100,000. While Americans had long thought of themselves as a rural nation, it was becoming undeniable that the United States was increasingly an urban one. Much of this growth was due to immigration. Between 1870 and 1910, some twenty million immigrants arrived in the United States, about fifteen hundred arriving each day.[7] American cities swelled from this immigration, as well as from rural to urban migration within the United States, including African American migrants to northern cities. As a result, the national urban population rose from ten to over fifty-four million people.[8] New York provides a powerful illustration of this rapid expansion. For example, while only 39,951 Italians lived in Manhattan in 1890, by 1910 their numbers ballooned to 199,757, a number that did not include their American-born children. Similarly, between 1880 and 1910, Manhattan's African American population tripled from 19,663 to 60,534, while the Chinese population expanded from just 171 persons to 1,778.[9] The 1920 census revealed

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[6] Lears, *No Place*, 52. See also Kern *The Culture of Time and Space*, 1–2; Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity,* 17–36; and Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 145–200.

[7] Robert W. Rydell and Bob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869–1922* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 8.

[8] David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.

the significance of the urbanizing trend: more than half of Americans now lived in cities. White native-born Americans broadly perceived much of this growing urban population as cause for alarm, particularly regarding their use of urban space.

Different groups found increased visibility on the street and parlayed this street presence into growing calls for more equal treatment. In particular, a younger generation of African Americans born outside of the confines of enslavement grew increasingly unafraid to highlight the widening gap between the American rhetoric of opportunity and the lived experience for black people at the height of Jim Crow.[10] For African Americans in the city, however, their experience often demonstrated that upending racial discrimination proved difficult.

American women experienced similar challenges, and a revolution in gender and sexuality was underway. By the end of the nineteenth century, women's rising incomes due to their increasing entrance into the wage labor market and growing participation in city life led to *heterosocial* interaction on the street, in the workplace, and in commercial amusements, which brought women and men together in informal settings. These changes connected to Americans' use of public space. Namely, nineteenth-century Americans envisioned space as exclusively public or private in nature; in particular, moral reformers associated the detached, private home with moral uplift. But the closer physical proximity of immigrant working class men and women in tenement and

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[9] Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885–1940* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 23–24.

[10] See Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds., *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892–1938* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

boarding houses—a characteristic of crowded cities—heightened reformers' anxieties about social decay.[11] Women's increasing presence on the public street demanded a cultural renegotiation of older gender ideals that had limited women to the private sphere of the home, and *heterosocial* interaction in public spaces ultimately facilitated an ongoing sexual revolution. Beginning around the turn of the twentieth century through the 1920s, codes of middle class sexual morality transformed, with greater degrees of sexuality before marriage increasingly acceptable and a growing importance placed on sexuality within marriage. Sexuality also increasingly transferred from the privacy of the home to the public street.[12]

Americans spent more time on the street overall at the turn of the century, but they also spent more time in commercial amusements. The continued development of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century meant that greater numbers of Americans than ever before worked outside of the private confines of the home. At the end of the century incomes rose and work hours tightened, which allowed for more leisure time. Middle class white-collar workers often had the greatest time, resources, and energy to partake in the new amusements, though the working class also went, negotiating their resources as necessary to afford the luxury of amusement**.** A "vacation habit" emerged, as youth in particular sought out new experiences—in locations such as dance halls,

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[11] Betsy Klimasmith, *At Home in the City: Urban Domesticity in American Literature and Culture, 1850-1930* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), 30–37.

[12] See John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900–1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

amusement parks, nightclubs, and theaters—and commercial leisure further muddied the line between public and private. Commercial leisure served to reshape how Americans "organized and perceived the most intimate aspects of their lives," as Americans elected to spend their increasing amount of leisure time in public rather than private pursuits.[13] Moreover, many of these popular public amusements further challenged American morality through their looser regulation of sexual norms.[14] Urbanites delighted in the new amusements; New York City boasted more theaters than any city in the world by the turn of the twentieth century, about two million combined stages and theaters by 1910. San Francisco, the leading city of the Far West, saw a combined weekly attendance of more than half a million in their theaters.[15] By 1912, the United States as a whole boasted about two thousand amusement parks.[16]

The modern world effervesced with the excitement of the new, but some beheld a dark potential. While thrilling, the modern world was also perceived "as an epoch of ceaseless change, instability, fragmentation, complexity, and chaos."[17] Those concerned

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[13] Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth-Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), xviii.

[14] For more on American sexuality in the early twentieth century, see Daniel Scott Smith, "The Dating of the American Sexual Revolution: Evidence and Interpretation," in *The American Family in Social and Historical Perspective*, ed. Michael Gordon (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973); Christina Simmons, "Modern Sexuality and the Myth of Victorian Repression," in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, ed. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); and Kevin J. Mumford, "'Lost Manhood' Found: Male Sexual Impotence and Victorian Culture in the United States," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3*,* no. 1 (July 1992): 33–57.

[15] Nasaw, *Going Out,* 3–5.

[16] Rabinovitz, 4.

[17] Singer, 29.

with the implications of the modern age groped for alternatives to what they feared to be a threatening rot festering within modern life. The moderns questioned the traditional values of the nineteenth century, some even going as far as challenging religion and thus all the social values embodied in traditional religion, including sexual norms like constraining sexuality within marriage and the private space of the home. For moral reformers, much of this cultural decay arose from the menace of modern amusements; these amusements and the larger cities in which they were situated created the spaces for the sexual revolution to unfold. By the turn of the century, Americans had seemingly turned away from the values system of the nineteenth century—the self-denial and self-restraint that had previously characterized Americans' moral life seemed increasingly at odds with the new modern world—and for moral reformers in particular, they sought to correct the course by returning Americans to traditional values of self-restraint and faith in God.[18]

Americans mapped these concerns about modern life onto the city. Some Americans envisioned the city—for all its glitter and bustle and noise—as a "weightless" place that was somehow unreal, a den of vapid, anonymous existence unmoored from the foundations that had grounded culture in previous centuries. Disdainful of the transition from a producer to a consumer-based economy, some Americans fretted that the individual self was likewise being commodified through conspicuous consumption. Indeed, the very notion of the self seemed less fixed and sure than it had before. Psychological theories put forth by individuals like Sigmund Freud suggested that clandestine repressed impulses governed individual behavior through the subconscious

[18] Lears, *No Place*, 3–47.

mind, bringing into question the nineteenth-century faith in the power of manly self-restraint, grounded in religious faith. One of the results of modernity was the rise of a fundamentalist movement that sought to return Americans to traditional values, and this movement became a major force of opposition to modern culture by the 1920s.[19]

All of these disparate factors interacted within the space of the city and transformed the world into the modern one; individuals interpreted these changes in different ways. Chafing at this seemingly unmoored world, some Americans fretted about one of the most visible effects of modernity on the city—the encroachment of sex onto the street and in commercial amusements—and sought to wield the power of the state to suppress it. Even those Americans who reveled in the new modern world grappled with what this shifting culture ultimately meant for their lives, seeking familiarity where they could find it. Even as the modern world seemed on the cusp of overturning existing systems of racial, class, and gender hierarchy, Americans found comfort in modern amusements that structured space to reaffirm existing hegemony; while so much of the modern world appeared to break with the past, existing structures of social power remained very much the same.

The Modern Metropolis: New York City and San Francisco

At the turn of the twentieth century, New York and San Francisco were the bicoastal cultural capitals of the United States. Each city—as cities did in general—served as key sites of modernity. These two cities provide useful places for comparison, illuminating how Americans understood and lived both modernity and anxiety about the

[19] Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*.

changes it portended. While each city had its own historical context and unique cultural contours, they shared much in common. New York City was the largest metropolis at the turn of the century, but San Francisco was not far behind, as the 1880 census put it in the top ten.[20] Both cities served as focal points of immigration for their respective coasts during these decades, and each enticed international travelers to come to the locale for the purposes of tourism.

These two cities drew travelers because of their distinctive cultural magnetism. As cultural capitals with the sway to dictate national tastes and trends, they had a broad influence in American values.[21] Indeed, the cities served "larger than local interests" and were more than merely places to live; they were experiences in and of themselves. When people visited New York and San Francisco, the goal was not merely to see the city, but to experience it and then to take "part of the city with them."[22] Borrowing the words of historian Vanessa Schwartz, during this period urban centers such as New York and San Francisco "did not merely host exhibitions," they "became one."[23] Similarly, historian Richard Wightman Fox suggests that Americans journeyed to cities "not just because they had succumbed to the blandishments of modern urban society, but because they felt

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[20] Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4.

[21] David C. Hammack, "Developing for Commercial Culture," *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 38.

[22] Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), xii.

[23] Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities,* 1.

called to experience the world."[24] In essence, New York and San Francisco were not just national cities, they were world cities.

Ineffably spectacular, the cities looked the part of glamorous destination centers. They boasted fantastical architecture, with bright lights shining like stars in the night, with skyscrapers stretching to the clouds, and with ethnic neighborhood enclaves that seemed plucked from the far reaches of the globe. New York City and San Francisco both exemplified the idea of city as spectacle. Media theorist S. Michael Halloran explains the spectacle as,

> [i]n gathering to witness a spectacle, I become part of it. I see not only what I came to see, but also those others who share my interest, and they in turn see me. Together we experience something, and in that shared experience is the germ of a public. We don't just stand there as an assemblage of isolated individuals, each uncommunicatively receiving what the rhetoric delivers. We react to what happens 'on stage,' we see each other reacting, and we react with and to each other, perhaps through nothing more than nods, frowns, fidgets, and murmurs, but even at this minimal level giving public expression to whatever meaning we impute as the event transpires.[25]

Halloran posits the spectacle as not only a fantastical sight, but as one that provokes a shared experience; through the experience of the spectacle, the crowd becomes one. Indeed, Vanessa Schwartz suggests, spectacle creates "a common culture and a sense of shared experiences" which allowed people to "begin to imagine themselves as participating in a metropolitan culture because they had visual evidence that such a shared world, of which they were a part, existed."[26] All manner of spectacle could be

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[24] Richard Wightman Fox, "The Discipline of Amusement," in *Inventing Times Square,* 86.

[25] S. Michael Halloran, "Text and Experience in a Historical Pageant: Toward a Rhetoric of Spectacle," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 5–17, 6.

[26] Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities,* 6.

found in the cities, but in particular, each featured a vibrant nightlife culture, a stamp of modern life.

While nightlife culture might seem superfluous to the important social and economic transformations taking place at the turn of the century, cultural theorist Stuart Hall maintains that because popular culture is intimately connected to larger transformations, popular culture can be a unique window into the assumptions of American society.[27] As historian Abigail Markwyn points out**,** "popular culture and cultural events, rather than being peripheral to political and social debates, are the canvases upon which such struggles unfold."[28] Urban residents and visitors did not merely take in the social, economic and cultural transformations of modernity, they also produced culture, visible in the ways they thought of and used their cities. In effect, they created their cities in a way that was "related to but distinct from the city of asphalt, brick, and stone;" they added "other maps to the city atlas; those of social interaction but also of myth, memory, fantasy, and desire."[29] In this way, Americans experienced the metropolis as it was built, but they also remade it into a fantasy city.

Nighttime especially seemed to be a time for dreaming. Historically, night has a long association in Western tradition with crime and immorality. Historian Peter Baldwin elaborates that "supernatural forces were believed to gain strength under cover of

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[27] Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, ed. John Storey (New York: Routledge, 2013), 508–518.

[28] Abigail M. Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco: The Pacific Rim, the Great West, and California at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 4.

[29] Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.

darkness, while decent, God-fearing folk took refuge inside the home. Both literally and metaphorically, the contrast between light and darkness was thought to represent the division of good from evil, life from death."[30] Night may have had historical associations that made it seem foreboding, but nighttime also seemed to offer different social rules than those that governed the day. While daytime was a time of work and social conventions, nighttime offered opportunities to remake oneself in the modern world. In essence, nighttime was "a complicated new 'space' with its own schedule, its own rules of access, and its own codes of behavior."[31] This dissertation, then, is an attempt to define "the nocturnal culture of the city"—the imagined narratives of those who walked the streets and those who sought to regulate them.[32]

Methods and Madness

This dissertation builds on the work of a diverse range of scholarship and is interdisciplinary in nature, relying heavily on theories of space and power. My understanding of space and spatial organization derive from several sources, including Henri Lefebvre and Randolph Starn. Considered a founder of spatial analysis, Henri Lefebvre theorized a division of space into "representations of space," "spatial practice," and "representational spaces" or the built, experienced, and imagined landscapes of the

[30] Peter C. Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night: Life in the Nocturnal City, 1820–1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 7.

[31] Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night,* 13.

[32] While New York City and San Francisco provide important sites of comparison for understanding the experience of modernity, ultimately, the choice of two cities alone can only be so useful in modeling the experience of the modern world across the United States. While the two cities may have been temples to modernity and reflected aggrandized and exaggerated versions of it, they did not reflect the experience everywhere. However, despite the limitations, the two cities provide important insight into the experience of modernity.

city.[33] The "representation of space," or the built environment, includes the conceptual design of a city and its physical spaces. The "spatial practice," or experienced landscape, reflects the use of city space in daily life as bound by individual social position, for example economic class, race, or gender. Finally, the idea of "representational space," or the imagined landscape, is the most significant for the purposes of this dissertation. According to Lefebvre, the imagined landscape is "space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate."[34] This landscape of "symbols and signs" overlays physical space, as contemporaries mapped their fantasies onto urban space, crafting larger symbolic meaning for spaces outside of their built function.[35] In this way, Barbara Berglund suggests in her history of San Francisco, "spaces were imbued with cultural meaning by discrete local groups that transformed them into locally significant places."[36] She notes that in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, for example, San Francisco economic elites understood the city through the imagined narrative of the triumph of order over the city's rough-and-tumble past.[37] While Lefebvre argues that the social production of space serves to reinforce the existing power structures of capitalism, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate how spaces within the city reinforced existing

[33] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 33, 38–39.
[34] Ibid, 39.

[35] Ibid, xiv.

[36] Barbara Berglund, *Making San Francisco American: Cultural Frontiers in the Urban West, 1846–1906* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2007), 228.

[37] Ibid, 1.

hierarchies of race, class, and gender in the very cultural moment when old systems of power seemed to be crumbling.

While Lefebvre concerns himself with the space of the city, Randolph Starn applies similar theories to interior spaces. In his essay, "Seeing Culture in a Room for a Renaissance Prince," Starn demonstrates how interior spaces similarly reflect and reinforce social relationships and power hierarchies.[38] These works contend that space—the exterior space of the city and the interior space of a room—reflect and reinforce dynamics of power. In *Women and the Everyday City,* historian Jessica Ellen Sewell provides a model that bridges exterior and interior spaces. For example, in the chapter "Sidewalks and Streetcars," Sewell addresses the interior space and physical organization of the streetcar as an extension of the exterior space of the street. Thus, the streetcar functioned as a site of negotiation over space; while the streetcar was on the street (hence, public), it was also an enclosed space, similar to a parlor (and thus envisioned as private), so streetcars required careful calculation over how to use the space, forcing San Franciscans to grapple everyday with the implications of the collapsing spatial boundaries that they had envisioned as imperative in the nineteenth century. This connection of exterior and interior spaces and the similarities in their imagined landscapes frame this dissertation.

But this work most closely follows the tradition set by historians of popular urban amusements. Over the course of the last some thirty years, the field of the history of popular amusements grew significantly. John F. Kasson and Kathy Peiss wrote some of

[38] Randolph Starn, "Seeing Culture in a Room for a Renaissance Prince," *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 205–232.

the first histories that took popular amusement seriously and viewed them within the changing racial and sexual dynamics of New York City.[39] Since then, historians such as Woody Register and Lauren Rabinovitz have situated amusement parks within cultural frameworks such as the experience of modernity. This dissertation builds on this foundation through adding further detail about how the anxieties of modern life shaped Americans' experience of commercial amusement. Indeed, in his history of those who opposed the culture of modern life, historian T.J. Jackson Lears charts some of the responses to modernity, but points out that many other reactions existed as well and calls upon historians to discover in a multitude of cases "who was reacting, in what ways, and why."[40]

Pioneering works in the field tend to frame the experience of commercial amusements—and by extension modern life—as a liberating force lifting Americans from the staid traditions of the nineteenth century. But this dissertation charts the way Americans sought to moderate the effects of modern life, even as they delighted in it. While much of the modern world seemed exciting in its radical possibility, some Americans preferred their dose of modern life tempered by reassurances that existing social hierarchies of race, class, and gender, would remain much the same. This works further broadens the conversation of commercial amusements through comparative analysis. While histories of popular amusements have traditionally focused on New York City, this work additionally examines San Francisco, demonstrating both similarities and

[39] John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

[40] Lears, *No Place*, xvi.

differences in the experience of modernity in each city. In 1964, Marshall McLuhan suggested that the "medium is the message."[41] In this vein, I have tried to discover what meaning is made through space—narratives of space, architecture, and physical proximity—and how different groups of people experienced and were affected by the spaces of the modern city.

Chapter one, "Dream Worlds: Imagining Race and Modernity in Urban Space in Turn of the Century New York and San Francisco," lays out in detail the narratives of space conceived by urban guidebook writers. Indeed, travelogues instructed tourists how to confront the physical space of the city. Guidebook writers widened the physical boundaries of the city through their endorsement of nighttime slumming, which expanded the definition of appropriate neighborhoods to visit, and stretched the temporal boundaries of the time for leisure. In the guidebooks, the discontinuities of modernity—such as the technological transformations of the city and the surge of immigration—were repackaged as thrills that were necessary for the traveler to experience in order to fully understand the city and modernity. Just as travel guides ushered travelers into the city, they likewise encouraged tourists to vacation in the purportedly primitive enclaves of urban ethnics and the working-class. Guidebooks framed the juxtaposition of these experiences—the technological and architectural wonders of modern life to the supposedly primitive neighborhoods of recent immigrants and African Americans—as a modern thrill. Modernity proved to be a powerful elixir, one capable of transforming the

[41] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 7.

individual self by empowering white men and women over the street through slumming excursions, and in so doing, enabling slummers to assert control not only over the city, but ultimately over their experience of modernity as well.

Chapter two, "It's 'an absurd place, of course': Space and Race in the Thrill of the Amusement Zone," examines how amusement zones at world's fairs and then later at standalone parks capitalized on the modern thrills of spectacle, the foreign and unknown, and the bodily peril of "rides," the new-fangled machinery designed to tilt and toss Americans through space. Commercial leisure zones additionally sanitized exotic fantasy locales, associating them with fun and adventure, capitalizing on their alien peoples and architectures to delight American audiences. Thus, amusement zones exploited foreign peoples and employed mechanical rides to produce the thrill, the shock of the modern experience. Both ethnological exhibits and mechanical rides functioned as the core entertainment in the amusement zones, yet while these amusements spoke to deeper anxieties about modernity, entertainment impresarios simultaneously reassured patrons of their security, both of their physical safety on the rides and of the guarantee of their racial superiority in a time of profound social transition in the American racial and ethnic landscape. Americans thus sought a mediated modernity, reveling in the thrills of the modern experience even as they sought assurances that the essential social structures of their lives would remain much the same.

Chapter three, "On the Street and On the Stage: Censorship, Space, and Modernity in New York and San Francisco," focuses on those who battled against the changes modernity wrought in the city, introducing the ideology of the moral reformers. These reformers detested the transformations in American culture, especially the sexual

revolution. They looked to maintain order, which they envisioned as upholding traditional gender and sexual norms of the nineteenth century. They firmly believed the best means to achieve their objective was to preserve or re-establish the distinction of public and private space. Therefore, they sought to regulate a multiplicity of spaces in the city, arguing that preserving moral order required the regulation of the streets, from eradicating prostitution to establishing parameters for commercial amusement.

Reformers made their priority the policing of space, which they viewed within a particular framework: physical proximity between the spectator and the spectacle signaled to reformers the potential for moral depravity. In essence, reformers sought to regulate spaces in which they perceived vice to be physically close to a vulnerable and impressionable public, generally meaning children and women. Reformers envisioned cleansing the street of sex as a means of halting the spread of socially dangerous modern values. Despite the efforts of moral reformers to regulate the space of the street, by the 1920s a profound transformation was firmly in place in public space. America had become modern.

Chapter four, "The Black Man and the Glorified Girl: Bert Williams, the *Ziegfeld Follies*, and Sexual Imagination in the Integration of Broadway" builds a case study of modernity, sex, and race within commercial amusement. Black comedian Bert Williams broke the color barrier on Broadway when he integrated the otherwise all-white revue, the *Ziegfeld Follies,* in 1909. However, he did so amidst unlikely conditions: the *Follies* were a revue that celebrated undraped white womanhood at a period of heightened racial tensions in the United States. While a seemingly isolated incident, Williams' integration of the *Follies* is best understood within the context of the anxieties of modernity. Modern

life threatened to erode the traditional forms of political and social authority in the United States and the turn of the twentieth century witnessed a growing assertiveness of some African Americans, the "New Negroes," who publically critiqued the violence and indignations of Jim Crow.

Modern Americans reveled in the idea of the thrill. For many whites, a black man performing within an otherwise all white show—one overshadowed by white female sexuality—seemed thrilling indeed, particularly as the specter of black male sexuality loomed, envisioned as a threat to white womanhood. However, producer Florenz Ziegfeld insured that Williams' stage characterization and the use of theater space itself assured white audiences that Williams posed no sexual threat to the female performers. To do so, show writers and Ziegfeld undercut the supposed threat of Williams' black masculinity. Emasculating Williams' character—even while audiences thrilled in the spectacle of it—denigrated his symbolic power. Even as audiences embraced the modern thrill, the case of Williams' integration of the *Follies* demonstrates that audiences appreciated assurances that while they embraced some of the changes of modernity, their world was still within their control.

All told, this dissertation details how Americans coped with and sought to wrest power over the insecurities of modern urban life. Modernity promised enormous and exciting transformative potential and suggested the contours of a life fundamentally different from what was possible in earlier centuries. But those uncomfortable with the changes of the modern world envisioned them as undermining the foundation of American tradition. Spaces of the city thus served to reinforce social hierarchy, even at the cultural moment when existing systems appeared to be crumbling. Indeed, even as

Americans embraced modernity and the excitement of the thrill, they often preferred it with assurances that—even as they welcomed some change—their world would not have to change too much. This was a kind of mediated modernity that permitted Americans to see the changes of modern life as an exciting thrill rather than a perilous transformation of their lives.

CHAPTER 2

"DREAM WORLDS": IMAGINING RACE AND MODERNITY IN URBAN SPACE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Urban guidebook writers at the turn of the twentieth century chronicled New York and San Francisco in fantastical, extra-worldly terms, celebrating their unique spaces and enchanting tourists—namely affluent whites, men and women—to explore their labyrinthine depths. From 1880 to 1920, guidebooks encouraged Americans' appetites to explore urban spaces through the practice of slumming, nighttime tours through the dark underbelly of ethnic neighborhoods.[1] Slumming promised entertainment to tourists, but also offered them the prospect of self-transformation. Departing from the nineteenth-century vision of cities as warrens of depravity that could cause personal damage, writers of urban tourist literature borrowed from commercial leisure culture and framed cities as dangerous and thrilling spaces that could provide play and personal fulfillment.

The burgeoning commercial leisure industry affected the way urbanites moved, interacted, and thought about the spaces of their own cities; travel guides contributed to these changes. Tourist literature functioned in a three-pronged fashion: first, tourist literature crafted the metropolis as a spectacle of modernity and invited the tourist to bask in the experience of thoroughly modern life.[2] Travelogues not only reveled in the modern

[1] Guidebooks endorsing slumming tours of the city continued to be written well beyond 1920, but to get a cohesive sense of the guidebooks' relationship to modernity, I looked at tour guides from 1880 to 1920.

[2] For interpretations of bohemian modernity, see Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

experience, they also welcomed tourists to vacation in the purportedly primitive enclaves of urban ethnics and the working-class, spaces they intimated to be the antithesis of the modern world.

Secondly, guidebooks fashioned the city as an experience in and of itself. Travelogues coached tourists how to confront the physical space of the city, pushing out its physical boundaries through the gleeful endorsement of slumming, which expanded the definition of appropriate neighborhoods to visit, as well as who could and should be on the street. Slumming meant that tourism increasingly encompassed spaces associated with supposed moral degeneracy and economic deprivation, such as ethnic and working-class neighborhoods. In addition, the nightlife tourism that guidebooks endorsed expanded the temporal boundaries of leisure, urging urbanites and urban visitors to pursue exhilarating experiences late into the night.

Finally, tourist literature fashioned a narrative of the city, one of adventure, excitement, and the transformative power of the metropolis on the individual. While nineteenth-century notions held the city as a place of debauchery, tourist literature reframed urban dangers into urban thrills; what was threatening before was now repackaged as an amusement, not so dissimilar from the delights one might pay for at Coney Island. Through slumming, the guidebooks suggested, an individual could not only delight in the thrill of discovering the foreign and unknown, but ultimately gain power over the street and its inhabitants.

Through their descriptions of the city sights, guidebooks intended to make the metropolis legible to outsiders, imagined the city as a portal to the experience of modernity, and framed modernity itself as a purchasable commodity. The existence of

travel guides suggests an attempt by the authors (and readers) to assert a control over the seemingly unpredictable modern metropolis: through reading the guide, a tourist could come to know what to anticipate from the city, even one as unpredictable as a modern city. Both the guidebooks and the tourists on the street remade New York and San Francisco into "laboratories of urban modernity," spaces where Americans could test out how much of modern culture they wanted to adopt.[3] While guidebooks and tourists lionized much of the new modern world, they ultimately sought a kind of mediated modernity, using the slumming experience as a means to reassert existing racial and ethnic hegemony.

Modernity and the Metropolis

Tourism as leisure first began in the mid nineteenth century as upper and middle-class Americans celebrated natural spaces through romanticized tours, made possible by Americans' ability to travel, which accelerated at the turn of the twentieth century. By 1915, the work of tour agencies, urban guidebook publishers, travel writers, and city business organizations had built a full-fledged tourist industry. Guidebooks existed for most major American cities, some published independently, though some cities also published their own as a form of boosterism.[4] This chapter contributes to the larger

[3] The phrase "laboratory of urban modernism" was taken from Emily A. Remus, "Tippling Ladies and the Making of Consumer Culture: Gender and Public Space in Fin-de-Siècle Chicago," *Journal of American History* 101, no. 3 (December 2014): 751.

[4] See Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850–1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

history of nightlife entertainment and tourism by placing this within the context of Americans' experience of modernity.

Guidebooks boisterously professed the city as a space for play. Travelogues gushed about the wild sights of the metropolis, the crush of the crowds on the street, the technological wonder of skyscrapers, and the majesty of urban lighting. In her book on "loitering" in New York, Helen Henderson contended that the lights and amusements took on a note of "perpetual fête."[5] Another author maintained that New York was a place where one felt "anything may happen at any moment" and that the city had the sense of "perpetual motion."[6] Still another proposed that New York "is always fresh, always new…constantly changing, growing greater and more wonderful in its power and splendors."[7] The *New York Mail* dramatic critic Julian Street noted this new idea of the city as akin to a place of amusement when he opined that "New York is, after all, the Coney Island of the Nation."[8]

Not to be outdone, San Francisco guidebook writers similarly proclaimed the essential disposition of their city as one of fun. A California tourism guide described San Francisco as having a "spirit of enthusiasm," and a "zest of carnival" that "infects the most casual visitor with the desire to see and do."[9] *Care-free San Francisco* deemed

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[5] Helen W. Henderson, *A Loiterer in New York: Discoveries Made by a Rambler Through Obvious Yet Unsought Highways and Byways* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917), 19.

[6] Mary MacDonald Brown, *Amazing New York* (London: Andrew Melrose Ltd.: 1913), 132.

[7] James D. McCabe, Jr., *Lights and Shadows of New York Life* (Philadelphia, Pa: National Publishing Company, 1872), 14.

[8] Julian Street, *Welcome to Our City* (New York: John Lane, 1913), 80-81.

crossing the Golden Gate was "to cross the threshold of Adventure [*sic*]."[10] A spirit of "roving and adventure" was said to pervade San Francisco's waterfront, and the "laughter and good cheer" of the city "made life both appear and feel, anew."[11] Even as the guidebooks concluded the city was a space for play, however, they also took pains to note the hazards of modern life the traveler could experience there.

Descriptions of urban life in the popular presses seemed hyperconscious of the danger and personal vulnerability one potentially faced on the street, and newspaper reports detailed the new menaces of urban life: the streetcars, the traffic, the perils of tenements, and industrial machinery. Commentators declared that the mental experience of the metropolis likewise proved hazardous to the individual. One social critic professed that a key danger of the city was "hyperstimulous," brought about by excessive exposure to the lights, sounds, and rapid motion of the metropolis.[12] Guidebooks similarly characterized the modern city as fraught with hazards. *New York of To-Day* lamented the "intolerable hustle and bustle" of Broadway.[13] One traveler to New York described the "sinister noise" of the street: car horns sounded "like a groan of despair," while

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[9] *California for the Tourist: The Charm of the Land of Sunshine By Summit, Sea, and Shore* (San Francisco: Southern Pacific Railroad, 1910), 13.

[10] Allen Dunn, *Care-Free San Francisco* (San Francisco: A.M. Robertson, 1912), 3.

[11] Edmund Frederick, *A Merry Crusade to the Golden Gate* (Akron, OH: The Werner Company, 1906).

[12] Howard B. Woolston, "The Urban Habit of Mind," American Journal of Sociology 17, no. 5 (March 1912): 602, 604, quoted in Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press), 65.

[13] Henry Collins Brown, *New York of To-Day* (New York: The Old Colony Press, 1917), 32.

> the steamer's whistle [sounds] like the wailing of a banshee. Overhead, the elevated railway rumbles and tumbles; underneath the subway jolts and wriggles; and on the street the trams and automobiles join in the general hullabaloo.[14]

Even as guidebooks lamented the noise and hazards of urban life and wrung their hands over the vulnerability of the individual in the metropolis, ultimately, they suggested the excitement of the modern city superseded the danger.

Guidebooks framed the cities of New York and San Francisco as the ultimate emblems of modernity, but also as the spaces where the peoples decidedly outside of modern life could be spied. Therefore, even as travelogues lavished attention on the city's modern and sophisticated technological attractions, they also highlighted the dark, supposedly primitive neighborhood recesses of ethnic urbanites, suggesting that to truly experience the city and understand the scope of modern life, the tourist needed to visit each. This focus on the seeming contradiction between neighborhoods inevitably had racial implications in diversifying cities as writers framed ethnic neighborhoods in binary opposition to the technologically and culturally sophisticated regions of the city, which were principally peopled by whites. Moreover, the very tourists for whom guidebooks were written were middle-class white tourists to ethnic neighborhoods. For example, in his book *Chinese in California*, G.B. Densmore posits that a "radical difference between the Caucasian and the Mongolian civilization" set the two groups profoundly apart.[15] Other travelogue writers painstakingly and obsessively documented ethnic neighborhoods as spaces removed from modern life: *Doxey's Guide to San Francisco and the Pleasure Resorts of California* notes that while the "Christian idea of the modern conveniences,

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[14] Brown, *Amazing New York*, 30.

[15] Nyan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 42–43.

though assuredly not an unknown quantity to the Chinese, create…no desire for them."[16] Such depictions suggested that the Chinese—among other ethnic urbanites—were firmly rooted in the past. City officials and travelogue writers both represented urban ethnics "as burdened by the weight of an ancient civilization and impervious to beneficial change."[17] Thus, travelogues characterized urban ethnics as beyond the pale of sophisticated modern life, significant only as spaces for the modern tourists' voyeuristic amusement.[18]

New York and San Francisco at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

The period 1880 to 1920 was characterized by a profound degree of human mobility, and many national and international migrants found themselves drawn to New York and San Francisco. New York was an attractive destination for migrants because it established itself as one of the most important economic centers in the latter decades of the nineteenth-century; by 1870, 57% of all imported and exported goods passed through the city.[19] Simultaneously, the power of local bankers transformed the financial district—

[16] William Doxey, *Doxey's Guide to San Francisco and the Pleasure Resorts of California* (San Francisco: At the Sign of the Lark, 1897), 117.

[17] Shah, *Contagious Divides,* 42–43.

[18] As with any discourse, it is important to read between the lines. As Singer suggests, the discourse on modernity that existed at the turn of the twentieth-century "cannot be taken at face value as an impartial, unembellished record of metropolitan experience—it certainly involved some degree of rhetorical posturing and commercially motivated bombast—but it did not come out of nowhere; it was not fabricated out of thin air. How ever mediated or refracted it may have been, the discourse pointed to a recognized dimension of subjective experience in the modern metropolis." I likewise interpret my evidence in this manner. Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity,* 292.

[19] David C. Hammack, "Developing for Commercial Culture," in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 37.

located on Wall Street—into the premiere site for the buying and selling of stock. Similarly, large mercantile and manufacturing companies headquartered their businesses in New York, and by 1900, some seventy of the largest industrial combinations in the United States were located there.[20] The centralization of economic wealth translated into opportunities for migrants as New York became a magnet for manufacturing industries such as the garment trade, and manufacturing plants needed a steady supply of new labor, though the work migrants ended up doing often included demoralizing sweatshop labor.

In addition to its growing population and status as an economic powerhouse, New York's physical landscape likewise defined it as the preeminent American metropolis. But by the turn of the twentieth century, New York's impressive maze of architecture, proximity to film and theater impresarios, and its almost garish lighting of public spaces such as Union (later Times) Square gave the city a distinctly commercial and cultural appeal. In time, New York became the national headquarters of the advertising and commercial entertainment sector, boasting an impressive collection of theaters, publishing houses, and later film studios, thus positioning the city in a powerful place to shape American cultural tastes.[21] With the birth of motion pictures, New York became the national hub of an emerging culture of celebrity. Indeed, by the turn of the twentieth century, New York was the "national barometer of what was fashionable, what was exciting, and what was new."[22]

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[20] Eric Lampard, "Introductory Essay," *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 18.

[21] Hammack, "Developing for Commercial Culture," 38.

San Francisco, however, had a different urban trajectory. While San Francisco came of age during the nineteenth century, its Gold Rush history and its infamous red-light district, the Barbary Coast, largely continued to define it. It was also a particularly cosmopolitan city. San Francisco actually exceeded cities such as New York, Boston, and Chicago in the number of foreign-born residents.[23] San Francisco boasted a uniquely international population from the start; the lure of quick riches in the Gold Rush enticed migrants from around the globe, and between 1850 and 1860, the majority of San Franciscans were foreign-born, in contrast to an average of just ten percent in other major cities.[24] Disproportionally male, many of these migrants intended to stay in California only long enough to make their fortunes, though ultimately many settled permanently, resulting in uneven sex ratios. The promise of gold attracted South American and Chinese migrants, but others came to California for different reasons: African Americans migrated west not only for the Gold Rush but also to escape slavery in the South and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.[25]

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[22] William R. Taylor, *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), xv.
[23] Barbara Berglund, *Making San Francisco American: Cultural Frontiers in the Urban West, 1846—1906* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 5.

[24] William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865–1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 14.

[25] Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4. In addition to the opportunities California presented for economic opportunity, Americans had long associated the western frontier with freedom. Certainly, its Gold Rush legacy contributed to this, but generally Americans viewed the West with opportunity and personal independence. In his Gold Rush travelogue, Bayard Taylor gushed that in California, "[t]he very air is pregnant with the magnetism of bold, spirited, unwearied action, and he who but ventures into the outer circle of the whirlpool, is spinning ere he has time for thought, in its dizzy vortex." If the entire state of California was a "dizzying vortex" by Taylor's estimation, then San Francisco was its epicenter. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, San Francisco typified this spirit of adventure. But this came with a cost. San Francisco earned its

By the 1890s, however, San Francisco emerged from its rough-and-tumble history as the premier metropolis of the West. The U.S. Census revealed that in 1880 San Francisco became the ninth largest city in the nation, and by the next decade the city had resolved the uneven sex ratios of men to women that had characterized it earlier in the century.[26] The metropolis became an important financial center due to the earlier Gold Rush wealth moving through the region, as well as its ideal location for international trade from Asia. By 1890, San Francisco had established itself as the leading West Coast city, its merchants controlling 99% of all imports to the coast, as well as 83% of its exports.[27] By the turn of the twentieth century, it likewise looked the part of a major urban metropolis. Plate-glass windows ornamented Market Street, the major artery of the city, making it a tailor-made environment to encourage strolling. Key shopping districts could be found north of Market Street, as could the city's renowned Chinatown. The city itself had also taken on a look befitting a metropolis, as skyscrapers could be visible down Market Street.[28]

Both cities boasted vibrant tourism of their modern downtowns and their urban ethnic neighborhoods. Even as residents and moral reformers expressed concern over the hygiene and safety of ethnic neighborhoods, these spaces simultaneously generated a public fascination to tourists. Writers of tourist literature frequently highlighted the

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reputation as a rough frontier city as vice was common and expected, including murder, gambling, lynching, and suicides. Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado* (New York: Putnam, 1861), 14.

[26] Berglund, 13. U.S. Census Bureau, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," Population Division Working Paper No. 27, 2013.

[27] Issel and Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865–1932,* 23.

[28] Jessica Ellen Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890–1915* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xi.

elements that gave their city a visible personality, thereby celebrating (and exploiting) their thousands of residents from all corners of the globe as available for tourist exploration.[29] This commercial celebration of cultural cosmopolitanism allowed Americans to interpret immigrants' distinctive use of public space in less threatening ways, presenting urban ethnics as colorful characters and their neighborhoods as exotic menagerie.[30]

Commercial attention on urban neighborhoods focused on the examination and penetration of these localities. In New York, this included the Lower East Side and the Sixth Ward/Five Points neighborhood, the Bowery, the Tenderloin, Harlem, and Chinatown. A typical travelogue suggested the tourist start their journey in the much more reputable theater district of Broadway, dubbed "[t]he most wonderful street in the universe" and "a world within itself;" here, guidebooks recommended that travelers should take in the sights before moving to the more unseemly neighborhoods of the city.[31] Writers lingered on the dazzling nature of Broadway alight and marveled at its delightful nighttime culture, which could strike "a visitor dumb with surprise."[32] At night,

[29] Cocks, *Doing the Town,* 187.

[30] Slumming, thus, was significant to the development of a commercialized leisure industry, as the experience of crossing racial and sexual boundaries common in slumming replicated a host of other public amusements, like dance halls and amusement parks. This will be discussed in further detail in chapter 3.

[31] McCabe, *Lights and Shadows,* 123.

[32] Hildegarde Hawthorne, *Peeps at Great Cities: New York* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911), 28.

Broadway was described as "a river of light—light of many colors, light in constant motion."[33]

San Francisco boasted a similar legitimate theater district, though far less glamorous than its east-coast counterpart. San Francisco's legitimate theaters concentrated downtown, adjacent to the primary shopping district. San Francisco was a west coast hub for theater, vaudeville, and opera, and national touring companies regularly played the city. Indeed, the San Francisco theater scene was large enough the city could boast their "trade" paper, the *San Francisco Dramatic Review,* which served professional performers, both locals and passers-through. The *Tivoli* offered regular operatic fare to the city, but in true San Francisco fashion, was democratic and unpretentious.[34] But even as travelogues admired Broadway's beauty and excitement or San Francisco's legitimate theater district, many were principally interested in the grimmer neighborhoods.[35]

The Bowery was perhaps New York's most popular slumming district; it ran roughly parallel to Broadway in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. This street was a bustling and vital working-class commercial area, so much so that *Puck* magazine editor Henry Cuyler Bunner called the district "the alivest mile on the face of the earth."[36] Guides described the neighborhood as an "unending stream of the curious minded out for

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[33] Hawthorne, *Peeps at Great Cities*.

[34] See Misha Berson, *The San Francisco Stage: From Golden Spike to Great Earthquake, 1869–1906* (San Francisco: San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum, 1992).

[35] See, for example, McCabe, *Lights and Shadows,* 124.

[36] H.C. Bunner, "The Bowery and Bohemia," *The Stories of H.C. Bunner* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 373.

a good time; soldiers and sailors, boys showing the town to their guests, occasional slum parties, and other flotsam and jetsam of that sort."[37] Others spoke less charitably, characterizing the street as peopled by "[r]oughs, thieves, [and] fallen women," doing "what they call enjoyment."[38] Such enjoyments ranged "from indelicate hints and illusions to the grossest indecency," and included shooting galleries, dance halls, "low-class theatres," and concert saloons.[39]

Like the Bowery, the Tenderloin boasted an unseemly reputation. The Tenderloin was New York's red-light district from roughly 1870 through 1910. And like the Bowery, the Tenderloin promised slummers the opportunity to experience urban iniquity tinged with sexual adventure. North of the Bowery, the Tenderloin was located between Fifth and Eighth Avenues, from Twenty-third to Fifty-seventh Streets. Located close to the Metropolitan Opera house as well as other upscale theatrical establishments, the Tenderloin guaranteed a more upscale experience than the Bowery. The Tenderloin also offered the thrill of cross-racial sexual experimentation, featuring nightspots showcasing African American performers in the "black Tenderloin" or "Negro bohemia" section of the neighborhood.[40]

The fascination with Harlem came slightly later, as the Volstead Act (which enacted Prohibition at the stroke of midnight on January 16, 1920) began driving many

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[37] F.H. McLean, "Bowery Amusements," Yearbook of the University Settlement Society of New York (New York, 1899), 14, quotes in Chad Heap, *Slumming: Racial and Sexual Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 302.

[38] McCabe, *Lights and Shadows,* 190.

[39] Ibid.

[40] For more about the cross-racial sexual experimentation component of slumming, see Heap.

legitimate nightlife spots out of business and urban pleasure-seekers began looking to new neighborhoods for entertainment.[41] Primarily an African American neighborhood and business district, Harlem was located between 144th and 128th Streets and Fifth and Eighth Avenues. More than just a neighborhood, however, Harlem was not only the largest black community in the United States in the early twentieth century, it also spawned a literary and artistic movement among African Americans in the 1920s, dubbed the Harlem Renaissance. Slummers ventured into the neighborhood for the jazz that Harlem Renaissance artists produced. While the stark economic division between blacks and whites was apparent in the daytime Harlem, Chad Heap argues slummers might perceive a different type of race relations in nighttime Harlem, when "the cover of darkness promoted a romanticized sense of toleration, equality, and fraternization among the various types who reveled in the black and tans," resorts that catered to interracial sexual and dancing encounters.[42]

Slummers likewise took in the Chinatowns in both New York City and San Francisco. In New York, Chinatown was located north of Park Row, and "eastward from the Tombs and the Criminal Courts Building, or southward from Police Headquarters," encompassing about a three acre neighborhood, including Mott, Pell, Doyers, and Bayard Streets.[43] In the 1890s San Francisco's Chinatown stretched fifteen square blocks,

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[41] Heap contends that the Volstead Act actually lead to the proliferation of alcohol-related vice in black neighborhoods, as local law enforcement typically permitted the continuation of this activity, so long as it was relegated to a segregated vice district. See Heap, *Slummming,* 55–97.

[42] Ibid, 75. Harlem nightclubs will be discussed in another chapter, since they flourished slightly later in the century. Harlem remained a popular slumming destination through the 1920s.

[43] William Brown Meloney, "Slumming in New York's Chinatown," *Munsey's Magazine*, September 1909, 819.

enclosed by Kearney, Broadway, Sacramento, and Powell Streets.[44] While people of many ethnicities found residence or work within the boundaries of Chinatown, the predominance of Chinese immigrants fixed the identity of the neighborhood.

The use of space within San Francisco's Chinatown came to define the district. Namely, city planners and moral reformers interpreted the cramped, overcrowded, and at times deteriorating conditions of buildings as a sign of moral weakness in the district's residents.[45] Indeed, contemporaries defined Chinatown as "contemptuous, blandly mysterious, serene, [and] foul-smelling" and shrouded in secrecy, "behind that indefinable barrier which has kept the West and the East apart since the centuries began."[46] The neighborhood's population density and the use of space in the quarter played into its perception as unseemly. Reformers literally mapped vice onto Chinatown when the San Francisco Board of Supervisors commissioned an *Official Map of "Chinatown" in San Francisco* in 1885, which demarcated areas of "general Chinese Occupancy" from the defiantly improper nooks of the neighborhood, such as the "Chinese Gambling Houses," "Chinese Prostitution," "Chinese Opium Resorts," "Chinese Joss Houses," and "White Prostitution."[47]

Those writing about Chinatown tended to characterize it as a noxious space, peopled by the morally repugnant. Indeed, historian Nyan Shah contends that Chinatowns were portrayed "as a nexus of infection, domestic chaos, and moral danger" and that "the

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[44] Shah, *Contagious Divides,* 25.

[45] Ibid, 18.

[46] Meloney, "Slumming in New York's Chinatown," 819.

[47] Shah, *Contagious Divides,* 38.

lives of Chinese men and women were depicted as contrary to respectable domesticity and an ominous threat to ideal visions of American morality and family life."[48] Journalists and travelogue writers compiled in agonizing detail the living conditions of Chinatown: the narrow wooden bunks crowded into cramped apartments, the dirty tenants of opium dens, and the unsanitary conditions of the living quarters, where "each cellar [was] ankle-deep with loathesome slush, with ceilings dripping with percolations of other nastiness above, [and] with walls slimy with the clamminess of Asiatic diseases."[49] Thus travel writers portrayed Chinatown as a deeply immoral space, peopled with aimless bachelors, opium fiends, and desperate prostitutes, and posited as the opposite of the clean thoroughly modern neighborhoods of the city, principally peopled by whites.[50]

In addition to Chinatown, points of nighttime interest in San Francisco included the shopping and business district around Market Street. Here, crowds thronged the street, which was the major thoroughfare and bordered the premiere shopping district. The street was a "brilliant panorama of life, energy, [and] enjoyment."[51] *Care-Free San*

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[48] Shah, *Contagious Divides,* 12. One author went so far as to suggest, "opium and Chinese are synonymous words." W.E. Hutchinson, *Byways Around San Francisco Bay* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1915), 104.

[49] Shah, *Contagious Divides,* 17. Some travelogues also detailed the sordid living conditions of tenement houses of the Lower East side, though to a lesser extent than Chinatown. See Harry H. Marks, *Small Change; Or, the Lights and Shades of New York* (New York: The Standard Publishing Co., 1882), 29.

[50] Shah, *Contagious Divides,* 77. Shah's work focuses on the medical community's interpretation of these spaces, who considered them "contaminated" and physically unhealthy. Moreover, these interpretations stressed that intimate relationships between whites and the Chinese were likewise contaminated in that they were believed to contribute to the spread of diseases like syphilis and leprosy.

[51] *California for the Tourist: The Charm of the Land of Sunshine By Summit, Sea, and Shore* (San Francisco: Southern Pacific Railroad, 1910), 13.

Francisco described the scene of Market Street as one of crowded cosmopolitanism, particularly as it picked up at dusk: In the "half light" of the "five-o'clock promenade":

> Playtime has commenced. Actor, soubrette and ingénue, both professional and amateur, soldier and sailor, clerk and boulevardier, workingman and workingwoman, a dozen tongues, a dozen grades of color, a dozen national costumes—miner from the desert, cowboy from the range, chekako or sourdough from Alaska; upper, lower and half world; full of the joy of being, of forming one of the lively throng, exchange greetings more or less conventional, gaze in the brilliant store windows, buy—or hope to—and go to dinner, clubward, homeward, to restaurant and boarding-place.[52]

Such a neighborhood provided ample opportunity for nighttime leisure, with "night electrics that rival[ed] Broadway."[53]

Finally, San Francisco guidebook writers invigorated tourists to take in the Barbary Coast. Historian Nan Boyd suggests that the overlap of ethnic communities, the Gold Rush-era history of lawlessness, and an overall climate of permissiveness earned San Francisco a reputation as a "wide-open town," a term that denoted open acceptance of prostitution, gambling, and drinking.[54] The prominence of San Francisco's thriving sex district contributed to this reputation. Located on the southern edge of the ethnically diverse community of North Beach and bound by Chinatown to the west, the Barbary Coast stretched along Pacific Street from Broadway to Clay streets. The stretch of Pacific from the waterfront to Kearney Street was so rowdy patrons dubbed it "Terrific Street" in the 1890s.[55]

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[52] Dunn, *Care-Free San Francisco,* 19–20.

[53] *California for the Tourist*,13.

[54] Boyd, *Wide Open Town,* 4.

[55] Ibid.

In his history of the Barbary Coast, Herbert Asbury characterized the district as "the haunt of the low and vile of every kind," and peopled by "the petty thief, the house burglar, the tramp, the whoremonger, lewd women, cut-throats, [and] murderers."[56] While much of the neighborhood's earned reputation stemmed from its association with female prostitution, the district also boasted other sexually explicit entertainments such as burlesque and peep shows, as well as tamer dance halls and concert saloons.[57] Here a tourist could take in an exhibition of the latest ragtime dances, such as the "chicken glide" or the "rabbit flip," dances that energized the modern dance craze of early twentieth century. Here was a space billed as free from social convention, where "you may join, an' you will [*sic*]" and "[n]o one will criticize."[58] In addition to an ethnically diverse population of female sex workers, the neighborhood also featured female impersonators who entertained crowds.[59]

Visitors and San Franciscans alike could never quite decide whether San Francisco was respectable, even as its shed its earlier association with lawlessness.[60] Through reform to curtail the brothels of the Barbary Coast in the early twentieth century, San Franciscans attempted to geographically contain "the disorder of the Barbary Coast," and thereby "assert an image—in keeping with the emergence of the city as a metropolis

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[56] Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933), 101.

[57] Asbury, *The Barbary Coast,* 108.

[58] Dunn, *Care-Free San Francisco,* 43.

[59] Boyd, *Wide Open Town,* 25–26.

[60] Kevin Starr, *California*: *A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 240.

in the 1860s—of a well-ordered city that flirted with, yet existed apart from, its infamous vice district."[61]

Thus, both New York City and San Francisco had established nightlife districts by the turn of the twentieth century, and the use of space within these districts proved critical to their being labeled spaces of depravity or delight (or depraved delight, since the two were not mutually exclusive). Working-class and ethnic enclaves, writers contended, juxtaposed with the technologically and culturally sophisticated neighborhoods, were equally essential to the tourist, who should build his (and increasingly, her) trip around the collective experience of these binary districts.

The City as Dream World: Visions of the Nighttime City

Outside of their actual physical spaces, the cities were also imagined spaces. New York and San Francisco participated in a physical restructuring of their urban space into grand spectacles, like the Great White Way of Broadway and the rebuilding of San Francisco's Chinatown following the 1906 earthquake to appear "much more emphatically Oriental," so tourist literature often employed a language of other-worldly enchantment.[62] One writer posited Manhattan as "a thing of wonder and delight."[63] English modern poet Mina Loy declared the New York skyline to be "an architecture conceived in a child's dream."[64] Writers directed tourists to the neighborhoods,

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[61] Berglund, *Making San Francisco American,* 60.

[62] Look Tin Eli, "Our New Oriental City—Veritable Fairy Palaces Filled with the Choices Treasures of the Orient," in *San Francisco, The Metropolis of the West* (San Francisco: 1910), n.p. in Raymond W. Rast, "The Cultural Politics of Tourism in San Francisco's Chinatown, 1882–1917," *Pacific Historical Review*, 76, no. 1: 54.

[63] Henderson, *A Loiterer in New York,* 17.

boulevards, and panoramic views of the city and in so doing helped to create a "symbolic landscape" and a "vocabulary of popular imagery" that ultimately came to define each city.[65]

Through the rhetoric of exploration and spectacle, tourist literature constructed New York and San Francisco as more than physical spaces alone, but as an *experience*. *Puck* editor Henry Cuyler Bunner described the Bowery, "properly speaking," as more "a place…than a street or avenue."[66] Writers thus evaluated the metropolis as the narrative of a voyage through a dreamscape. When Ezra Pound returned to the United States in 1910, he declared nighttime in New York to be of a dream:

> the great buildings lose reality and take on their magical powers. They are immaterial; that is to say one sees but the lighted windows. Squares after squares of flame, set and cut into the aether. Here is our poetry, for we have pulled down the stars to our will.[67]

Other writers expanded the language of enchantment, casting the urban environment as a type of fairylike wonderland, removed from everyday life. *Harper's Bazaar* claimed in 1902 that the city's appearance "startles the eye and dazzles the brain."[68] Such descriptions of New York City were no accident. New York in the early decades of the twentieth century was the center of American filmmaking and the theater capitol of the

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[64] Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1996), 211.

[65] Neil Harris, "Urban Tourism and the Commercial City," in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 69.

[66] Bunner, "The Bowery and Bohemia," 458–459.

[67] Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909–1965* (New York: New Directions Books, 1973), 107.

[68] "New York, the Unrivaled Business Centre," *Harper's Weekly 46* (November 15, 1902), 1673, as quoted in Harris, "Urban Tourism and the Commercial City," 74.

United States, which added to the city's allure.[69] Similar descriptions also extended to San Francisco, which took an additionally mystic turn.

In her book on San Francisco, Katherine Ames Taylor breathlessly exclaimed that it was the "noise and tumult" of the fast-growing city that characterized it as "a magic city, with no past or precedents."[70] Writers tended to focus this narrative of wonder on the architecture; Taylor described the overall effect of Chinatown as outside of reality, calling it "unreal" and claimed that it "stirs the imagination until even the familiar seems strange."[71] Writers largely described this urban enchantment fondly, but they also hinted ominously about the extent of its powers. While "magic created San Francisco," Taylor continued, Chinatown in particular was "mystic."[72] Others elaborated on this dark mysticism. One writer described New York's subway as an "unwieldy noisy chariot bearing lost souls to Hades."[73] Another noted of San Francisco, "the ferry-boats are fairy boats of mystery."[74] A voyage through wonderland, thus, framed an imagined narrative of the city.

This rhetoric of the dreamlike city was projected onto urban spaces through the discussion of light and darkness. In his work on the history of electric lighting, historian

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[69] Harris, "Urban Tourism," 74.

[70] Katherine Ames Taylor, *San Francisco, a Trip Book* (San Francisco: H.S. Crocker Company, 1927), 12.

[71] Ibid, 26.

[72] Ibid, 10, 27.

[73] Brown, *Amazing New York*, 30–31.

[74] Dunn, *Care-Free San Francisco,* 63.

David Nye contends that electric lights helped transform American attitudes about the city generally. He suggests that before public lighting, "the city at night seemed fraught with danger."[75] Public lighting made nighttime space legible and navigable. Furthermore, electric lighting transformed city spaces by drawing attention away from the dark crevasses of urban blight and literally shining a light on the magnificence of architecture: "in the city after dark, artificial light could single out the beautiful and enhance it, while hiding the bleak, the dreary, or the 'garish outlines' of industrial sections."[76]

This technological innovation transmuted the city by making it legible as a night space, but electric lighting also helped the city transcend its nineteenth-century perception as a menacingly dark space to become instead one of celebratory lightness. In short, electrification was viewed as more than simply a measure of technological achievement, but was elevated "to a metaphorical level where it meant novelty, excitement, modernity, and heightened awareness. Anything electric was saturated with energy."[77] The increased use of electric lighting both on the street and to illuminate buildings' exteriors and interiors effectively extended Americans' leisure time deep into the night and crafted nighttime space as a site for leisure deemed less appropriate for the daytime, including sexually suggestive dancing and exploration of the urban underworld. Electric lighting lent a spectacular, theatrical quality to the street, and writers began

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[75] David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880—1940* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 29.

[76] Nye, *Electrifying America,* 59.

[77] Ibid, x.

characterizing the nighttime city as a space for play. Travelogue writers further transformed the nighttime city by highlighting for the tourist both the spaces illuminated and sanitized by electric light as well as the spaces cast in the dark, seemingly outside of the pale of modern technology.

Electric spectacles of millions of twinkling lights such as the Great White Way of Broadway were remarkable only in the dark of night; it was a spectacle that was diluted in the light of day. Carbon bulbs began illuminating Broadway marquees in the 1890s, and the majesty of the spectacle gripped travel writers with its enchanting fantasy.[78] The technological wonder of millions of glimmering lights so mesmerized travel writers that one wrote:

> [o]nly a very stolid person could walk down Broadway by night and remain unmoved by the spasmodic jollity of its myriad lights. Blinking, winking, jumping, leaping, shooting—the fantastic humor of those illuminated advertisements moves one to laughter at the funniness of it all or tears at the folly of it all, according to one's mood.[79]

Electric displays fostered nightlife culture. Travelogue writers noted the pronounced nightlife, particularly in New York, suggesting that at night the street is "alive with visitors. The crowd is out for pleasure at night, and many and varied are the pursuit of it takes."[80] Another echoed this sentiment: "New York as a whole never goes to bed, never sleeps…No matter what hour you are abroad, you will find people travelling about on the cars, walking hither and thither, apparently with no notion that the night was meant to sleep in."[81]

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[78] Lampard, "Introductory Essay," 372.

[79] Brown, *Amazing New York*, 29.

[80] McCabe, *Lights and Shadows*, 154.

Tourist companies played up the nighttime experience, and suggested this as the best time to study the city. Ernest Ingersoll's *A Week in New York* encouraged tourists to take "A Nocturnal Ramble" through various ethnic districts.[82] The nighttime, such literature contended, temporally marked these ordinarily working districts as spaces of amusement. Of New York's Chinatown, one writer declared, "[i]t is in the evening, and preferably late at night, that Chinatown must be seen."[83] Of Broadway, James McCabe likewise described the "throngs" of people crowding the street until midnight, only after which point "New York has gone to bed."[84]

Travelogues of San Francisco echoed this fascination with light and its transformative power over the urban landscape. *By the Golden Gate* recommended that nighttime was the ideal time to tour the city, as the "night is the best time in which to study the life."[85] While discussions of the lights on Broadway tended to linger on the spectacle of their technological innovation, San Francisco guidebooks focused on a different quality of light. Author William Bode described being overtaken by the scene of lit lanterns illuminating the gardens and balconies of Chinatown.[86] He claimed this

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[81] Hawthorne, *Peeps at Great Cities,* 44.

[82] Ernest Ingersoll, *A Week in New York* (New York: Rand, McNally, & Co., 1891), 202–213.

[83] *Seen by the Spectator: Being a Selection of Rambling Papers First Printed in The Outlook Under the Title The Spectator*, (New York: The Outlook Company, 1902), 193-194.

[84] James D. McCabe, Jr., *New York by Sunlight and Gaslight* (Philadelphia: Hubbard, 1882), 153–155.

[85] Joseph Carey, D.D., *By the Golden Gate* (Albany: The Albany Diocesan Press, 1902), 140.

[86] William Bode, *Lights and Shadows of Chinatown* (San Francisco: 1896), n.p.

lighting lent the city the feeling of a "fairy-like panorama" that "was so unlike anything I had ever seen before."[87]

But these buoyant exclamations of light did not often extend to the ethnic quarters. When it came to ethnic districts, writers described both the quality of light and the seemingly impenetrable darkness of these neighborhoods, and defined these neighborhoods as veiled in mystery. Using particularly evocative language, San Francisco guidebook writer Katherine Ames Taylor contended that to

> see Chinatown at is best is to see it at night, with a light mist drifting in to diffuse and soften its swaying lights, to reflect the red and green glow from windows and balcony [sic] upon wet pavements, to veil in further mystery the crooked alleys with dim figures lurking in their doorways, and to heighten the effect of the fantastic and bizarre by intensifying the warmth and color and animation directly before you until its seems like a brilliant picture hung against the drapery of a gray gauze. [88]

Another suggested that in New York at night, while much of city became "luminous," "the lower end is deserted, and looms mysterious and awful in its empty vastness."[89] While they were likewise both tourist destinations, ethnic neighborhoods' interest to the tourist derived from the dark, and particularly what tourists presumed that darkness concealed.

In the cases of ethnic and working-class neighborhoods, the dark became shorthand for danger, itself framed as a type of thrill. In his book on New York's Chinatown after dark, Buck Connors contended that while "[d]uring the day there is little to see or hear," the light of day was ultimately a façade, an illusion through "simulation

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[87] Bode, *Lights and Shadows of Chinatown,* n.p.

[88] Taylor, *San Francisco*, 26.

[89] Henderson, *A Loiterer in New York,* 18.

of decency and order."[90] Even the bright light of day, however, could not fully conceal the "mystery and suggestion of deeds done in the dark alleyways and narrow entrances to backyards."[91] He continued that "[t]hose who do not know what kind of people they are dealing with expect danger from every shadow, and death from every dark hallway."[92] Another travelogue suggested that "light never enters" the sinuous labyrinth that was San Francisco's Chinatown, and "it is dark and dismal, even at noonday."[93] Even the brightly lit areas of Chinatown were viewed with some suspicion. Noting the Port Arthur, a popular Chop Suey restaurant in New York's Chinatown, William Maloney noticed that the street sign

> is lettered in incandescents as large as a Broadway star's in the zenith of a successful season. But the bulbs do not shine with the brilliancy that they have up-town. A bluish haze enshrouds them. It is the same everywhere in Chinatown. Its lights, like its life, must be seen through this haze of punk and opium, and the noisome outpourings of its greasy chop-suey joints and its swarming tenements."[94]

The language of light and dark mirrored guidebook writers' framing of modernity contrasting with supposed primitiveness, both experiences that could be had in the city and both essential to a tourists' exploration of the city.

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[90] Buck Connors, *Chinatown, or New York After Dark* (Isaac Goldman Company, Publisher, no date), 3. While there is no publication information from this manuscript, the Huntington Department of Manuscripts dates this item most likely from the 1890s to the 1910s.

[91] Connors, *Chinatown,* 4-5.

[92] Ibid, 4-5.

[93] Samuel Williams, *The City of the Golden Gate* (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1921), 38.

[94] Maloney, "Slumming in New York's Chinatown," 821.

The Hidden City: Control through Slumming

While the guidebooks reveled in the delight of the modern city, they also hinted darkly at the transformative potential of the metropolis over the individual. One of the perceived threats of modernity was "anomie," or personal hopelessness and isolation resulting from the fragmentation of traditional social mores and individual separation from the community.[95] At its worst, the greatest peril of modern life was "overcivilization," in which an individual, wracked with hopelessness, was rendered psychically impotent. [96] Indeed, guidebooks lingered on the potential loss of the sense of self within the city. *A Loiterer in New York* suggested that the power of the metropolis was such that it lent toward losing oneself: "the consciousness of one's self is easily lost in the presence of our superhuman buildings."[97] Another guidebook added that the influence of the city was such that it could perchance overturn modernity's ill-effects: "If you are feeling more dead than alive go to New York. It will either kill you or cure you."[98]

While unseemly and potentially even dangerous, cities—guidebooks contended—opened up possibilities for greater freedom and personal expression than were acceptable within the boundaries of normal, everyday life. Writers expressed feeling less "restricted" by social conventions within the city and at liberty to express their whims: only within

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[95] Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity,* 24.

[96] T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 30.

[97] Paul W. Bartlett, pref. in Henderson, *A Loiterer in New York,* vii.

[98] Brown, *Amazing New York*, 26.

the city could the traveler "go where he listeth, and at whatever hour he pleaseth."[99] Only in Manhattan, another writer suggested, "[t]he impossible suddenly becomes possible. Dreams and doubts fly in the face of such solid certainties" of the skyscrapers of New York.[100] Travelogues often lingered on the metropolis' potential to transform the individual into something greater than himself. *Amazing New York* suggested that part of that power lie in its astounding, larger-than-life architectural space, noting that "[t]hose who sojourn in the shadow of buildings so stupendous" as the skyscrapers of New York "are surely not as other men are."[101] Charles Sedgwick Aiken contended that San Francisco stood for "untrammeled individuality" and that in the city one could be "free from conventions."[102] In the anonymity of the vast city, this line of thinking suggested, one could potentially act out his impulses, even his darkest yearnings.

San Franciscan-born Jack London mused that the city had the potential to bring out the wickedest impulses in men. He wrote that through visiting bordellos in San Francisco's Chinatown his "most savage natural instincts are unleashed." He continued, "I can be cruel or kind, according to my whim and my pocketbook…There is mastery in it. A feeling of power, a satisfaction of the instinct that inclines us toward beauty."[103] In his *Book of New York,* author Robert Shackleton lamented that while a man might be

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[99] Bode, *Lights and Shadows of Chinatown,* n.p.

[100] Brown, *Amazing New York*, 27.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Charles Sedgwick Aiken, *California To-Day: San Francisco, Its Metropolis* (San Francisco: The California Promotion Committee of San Francisco, 1903), 26.

[103] Starr, *California,* 236.

respectable in his own city, "on Broadway he is likely to get a fifty cent cigar between his teeth and fling extravagant tips, and become arrogant and boastful, and make it clear that he 'has the price.'"[104] The city, travelogues insinuated, could transformation the individual, for better or for worse, into moderns.

To govern the vagaries of modern life, one needed to control the city, which the guidebooks hinted could be accomplished through slumming, the voyeuristic exploration of the neighborhood enclaves of urban ethnics, blacks, and the Chinese. This idea of urban spectacle was not new at the turn of the twentieth century. By the middle of the nineteenth century the tradition of *flaneury* among the male elite had become a well-entrenched part of the urban milieu. According to urban studies scholar Phil Hubbard, "the *flaneur* was a fashionable man of leisure for whom the streets of the city effectively served as a living room, place of work, and source of artistic inspiration."[105] A *flaneur* was a member of the upper classes who reveled in exploring and observing the city, and slumming grew from this tradition.

In his work on the history of slumming in the United States, Chad Heap credits Manhattan as its birthplace, though he suggests that slumming occurred in all major American cities and many smaller ones, progressing from slumming parties formed in the 1880s to explore the Lower East Side and reaching the height of its popularity in the 1920s with the slumming craze in Harlem.[106] The slumming vogues of the late nineteenth

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[104] Robert Shackleton, *The Book of New York* (Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company, 1917), 215.

[105] Phil Hubbard, *City: Key Ideas in Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 102.

[106] Heap, *Slumming,* 1–14, 17.

and early twentieth centuries invigorated white Americans to scrutinize socially marginalized neighborhoods and their inhabitants, which tourist literature enthusiastically endorsed. Tourist companies eagerly mapped out the slumming experience to keen visitors through the suggestion of local haunts, neighborhoods to peruse, and advice on how to procure a guide through the urban underworld. Formal touring companies and individual guides offered specific outings at night, replete with policemen or private detectives to escort tourists through the unseemly parts of town. By 1891, one company had formed in New York, offering tours through "the slums and poorer quarters" where one might see "the poor man in his home, the laborer in his hovel, the opium joint, fan tan games and Italian dens where at times thirty people live together in a room twenty feet square."[107] In addition to their services in navigating slums, one tour agency helpfully provided would-be slummers with a souvenir map of the city, "on which the slums are indicated by dark shading."[108] A short-lived circular, *The Tenderloin*, served as a forum for "expert guides" to advertise their services in guiding "parties wishing to see the interesting parts of New York," including popular nighttime spots in the Bowery and Chinatown.[109]

Slummers could be from the middle or upper classes and were most often men, though some women slummed too. Slummers voyaged the urban wilderness, imagining themselves explorers of mysterious lands and strange foreign peoples. Historian Judith Walkowitz argues that slumming "established a right to the city" and represented "a

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[107] "Life in New York City," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 15, 1891, 13.

[108] Ibid.

[109] *The Tenderloin*, January 28, 1899, 10.

privileged gaze, betokening possession and distance."[110] Slumming, in essence, created a powerful subject in the slummer, who through the power of the gaze evaluated and romanticized urban poverty, transforming "the city into a landscape of strangers and secrets" and himself into a daring adventurer.[111]

Munsey's Magazine described the "typical slumming-party" as composed of tourists from outside the city, except for their local guide. According to the magazine, slummers were "eager, curious, prurient even, to know the worst that lies within."[112] Slummers would arrive unannounced, knocking on doors or even forcing their way into private living quarters.[113] In addition to voyeurism, slumming excursions typically also consumed the sexual activities the neighborhood had to offer. Slummers took in performances at concert saloons, where scantily-clad women danced the high-kick; visited a dance hall, where men and women participated in the emerging heterosocial leisure culture; and for the most audacious, perhaps visited a local brothel.[114]

Moreover, guidebooks suggested that through slumming the tourist would not only come to know all the dark crevasses of the city, but also experience something like a trip to another part of the world. In his guide to San Francisco, William Doxey characterized the streets of the city as "almost the same as may be seen in Pekin or

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[110] Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 16.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Meloney, "Slumming in New York's Chinatown," 820.

[113] Heap, *Slumming,* 31–32.

[114] Ibid, 33.

Canton."[115] *By the Golden Gate* echoed this sentiment: part of the charm of San Francisco lie in the pocket of foreignness within the heart of the city, as one could find a "'little China' in the heart of Anglo Saxon civilisation [sic]."[116] And the people of these neighborhoods, the tourist literature proclaimed, were likewise foreign. Not content to simply suggest a similarity between Chinatown *as like* the streets of China, others asserted that the streets of Chinatown were, in fact, authentically foreign spaces. Hence descriptions of San Francisco's Chinatown as "a foreign country of ten city squares" fit into the public conception of Chinatown as alien even while within the native space of an American city.[117]

Guidebooks accentuated the danger inherent in the ethnic quarters, a characterization particularly evident in descriptions of San Francisco's Chinatown. Travelogues made much of the architecture and structure of the street, suggesting that in addition to the exciting foreignness of the quarter, the physical composition of the space was likewise a menace to the traveler. In particular, some writers noted the twisting and turning streets that might make a trek difficult for the urban adventurer, contending that the neighborhoods were "labyrinths" and one needed caution when navigating the "hidden recesses" of the streets.[118] Tour guides lured slummers to New York's Chinatown with promises of maze-like streets "dart[ing] at crazy angles out of the

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[115] Doxey, *Doxey's Guide,* 116.

[116] Carey, *By the Golden Gate,* 136-137.

[117] Frank Morton Todd, *The Chamber of Commerce Handbook for San Francisco* (San Francisco: San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, 1914), 67-68.

[118] Carey, *By the Golden Gate*, 138.

Bowery and Chatham Square."[119] In San Francisco's Chinatown, dark catacombs supposedly lie beneath the streets, which were reputedly peopled with opium addicts and ruled by tong gangs. One tourist later described visiting San Francisco's Chinatown as "three hours of peering, entering, ascending, descending, crossing, and delving."[120] Similarly, in *Lights and Shadows of Chinatown*, William Bode noted the "tangled maze of narrow streets" and "dubious labyrinth of bad-smelling alleyways."[121] The Chamber of Commerce guidebook likewise cautioned visitors of the "swarming streets and choked alleys."[122]

Travelogues of San Francisco and New York alike lingered in their descriptions of the perceived vice and sordidness of such neighborhoods. Describing San Francisco's Chinatown, writers detailed the "absolute squalidness and misery," and the "[v]ice and hideousness" readily apparent in one's journey.[123] Another described the "lowest dens of degraded bestiality," where one could spy illicit gambling, prostitution, and opium smoking.[124] Another utilized the rhetoric of dungeons, coffins, and dens to describe Chinatown: author Walter Raymond described his feelings of "great nausea" upon entering a Chinatown opium den, where one could experience "all the horrors of a

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[119] Meloney, "Slumming in New York's Chinatown," 819.

[120] Edmund Frederick, *A Merry Crusade to the Golden Gate* (Akron, OH: The Werner Company, 1906), 169.

[121] Bode, *Lights and Shadows of Chinatown,* n.p.

[122] Todd, *The Chamber of Comerce,* 67.

[123] C.M. Bates, "Health Officer's Report," included in *San Francisco Board of Supervisors, San Francisco Municipal Report* (San Francisco:1869–1870), 233, as quoted in Shah, *Slumming,* 27.

[124] California State Board of Health, *Biennial Report of the State Board of Health of California* (Sacramento, 1870–1871):44–47, as quoted in Shah, *Slumming,* 30.

catacomb, packed with a living, disease-breeding flesh, slowly drifting into their graves."[125]

Not to be left out, accounts of slumming destinations in New York were also described in terms of their supposed degeneracy. Just a "few minutes' walk" would take one from Chinatown to the Tenderloin, where one could find "some of the lowest beer saloons in the city, dingy and dirty, [and] frequented by some of the vilest characters of both sexes."[126] Guidebooks detailed the "Niggertowns," "Little Africas," Jewish "Ghettos," and "Little Italies" as ripe to be slummed.[127] In *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, Hutchins Hapgood acknowledged the pervasive perception of ethnic neighborhoods, and particularly the "Jewish quarter" as a site "where 'red-lights' sparkle at night, [and] where the people are queer and repulsive."[128] In *The Real New York,* Rupert Hughes insisted that the neighborhood of Five Points was "full of grogshops and dens of iniquity," and that "Five Pointers killed a policeman every few months."[129] In the Bowery, he continued, "the sailor can find a concert hall or a variety show always going, and he can get his palm read, his forearm tattooed or his pocket picked with the greatest ease."[130] In

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[125] Walter J. Raymond, *The Horrors of the Mongolian Settlement, San Francisco, California: Enslaved and Degraded Race of Paupers, Opium Eaters, and Lepers* (Boston: Cashman, Keating, and Company, 1886), 2.

[126] "Slumming in This Town," *New York Times*, September 14, 1884, 4.

[127] Heap, *Slumming,* 24.

[128] Hutchins Hapgood, *The Spirit of the Ghetto: Studies of the Jewish Quarter in New York*, reprint 1902 (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 5.

[129] Rupert Hughes, *The Real New York* (New York: The Smart Set Publishing Company, 1904), 319.

[130] Hughes, *The Real New York,* 326.

particular, slummers were attracted to spaces where one might find illicit sex: at the Haymarket resort in the Tenderloin neighborhood, for example, "women walked about the place soliciting the different men [and were] not interfered with in any way by anybody in charge of the place."[131]

These excursions into ethnic neighborhoods and red-light districts blurred social and sexual boundaries and complicated the borders between the assumed superior moral respectability of middle-class whites with the supposed depravity of the lower classes and people of color. Rather than upsetting class boundaries and the moral standing of middle-class slummers, Heap contends that the excursions actually served to further entrench slummers' perception of their own respectability. This was because

> the neighborhoods that slummers visited were those that were most clearly marked as nonwhite. As such, these spaces provided white pleasure seekers with an opportunity to shore up their position atop the American racial hierarchy by contrasting any perceived improprieties in their social and sexual activities with the less 'civilized' behaviors of the racialized objects of their amusement. That is, slumming excursions refashioned popular conceptions of race and sexuality in a reciprocal manner that reinforced white middle-class sexual propriety and social respectability by casting racialized immigrant and working-class groups as 'primitive,' highly sexed populations.[132]

As John C. Van Dyke in *The New New York* proclaimed in 1909, slumming provided the opportunity "to laugh at the absurd and the queer, or to get sociological statistics in exaggerated form" before one heads "back to [their] uptown home better satisfied, perhaps, with [their] own quarters."[133] Hence, slumming reinforced existing dynamics of

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[131] *Report of the Special Committee of the Assembly Appointed to Investigate the Public Offices and Departments of the City of New York*, vol. II (Albany: James B. Lyon: 1900), 2004.

[132] Ibid, 102.

[133] John C. Van Dyke, *The New New York: A Commentary on the Place and the People* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 242.

racial and class hierarchy in the city, thus granting the slummer continued assurance of his own supposed superiority.

Slumming offered other opportunities to the tourist; through slumming, individuals assumed a cultural sophistication through knowledge of illicit neighborhoods.[134] Indeed, one guidebook author described San Francisco's Chinatown as "a panopticon of peepshows."[135] By establishing their own cosmopolitan worldliness, slummers were thus able to capture a bit of the modern spirit that made the cities themselves so appealing. Some slummers used the experience as an opportunity to try on, for just a night, a different life. These expeditions allowed slummers to identify not just as pleasure-seekers, but see themselves through the lens of adventure, and their activities as explorations into the urban jungle, echoing guidebooks' characterizations of the city. Through their experience of vice (even if it were merely stylized theatrics), slummers envisioned themselves as more powerful and modern from having had the experience. Moreover, slumming brought tourists into a position of power, whereby they could "know" the seemingly unpredictable and unknowable modern city.

While travel writers speculated on the transformative potential of the city on the slummer, slumming, in fact, did have the power to change the relationship between the individual and the city, particularly in the case of white women. Nineteenth-century Americans conceptualized space in terms of public and private spheres but women's use of the space of the street at the turn of the century reveals their changing social position.

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[134] Harris, "Urban Tourism," 81.

[135] C.A. Higgins, *To California and Back: A Book of Practical Information for Travelers to the Pacific* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1904), 235.

In the nineteenth century, for middle-class women, "the street was primarily a space to be moved through," and therefore

> spending time on the street meant risking being mistaken for a working-class girl or, worse, a prostitute. Polite middle-class women were not meant to be seen participating in the public space of the street: they were to remain as invisible as possible, not to see or hear what went on around them on the street and not to stop and spend extra time in the street.[136]

On the street women endeavored to protect their social respectability, which dictated that women "avoid interaction with strangers, a job accomplished by making themselves inconspicuous, dressing modestly, never walking rapidly or talking loudly," and quickly leaving the public street for the interior space afforded by department stores and other spaces deemed respectable for women.[137]

By the 1890s, however, women began to appropriate public spaces, particularly those associated with shopping districts, like the 'ladies mile' in New York and San Francisco's Kearney Street. While shopping districts were coded female and therefore more socially acceptable for women to occupy those public spaces, historian Jessica Ellen Sewell contends that the city itself and the majority of public space continued to be gendered male through their exclusion of women.[138] Women who engaged in public amusements, whether they be slumming in urban ghettos, shopping at department stores, or "tippling" in ladies' tearooms "pressed against the social and spacial boundaries that ordered Victorian women's lives."[139]

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[136] Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City,* 4.

[137] Ibid, xii–xiii.

[138] Ibid, xxi.

[139] Remus, "Tippling Ladies," 752.

The general exclusion of women from the public sphere had deep roots in the nineteenth century, but concerns about white women in public seemed more acute at the turn of the century. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Americans were wary of the sexual threat they believed Chinese immigrants posed to native-born white women. Twenty-two novels about "white slavery"—tales of white women lured into sexual slavery by devious Chinese or swarthy immigrant men—were published between 1909 and 1913.[140] These ideas, coupled with long-standing gender ideology, kept some women off the street.

However, women's increased presence in the workplace, in higher education, and in social activism began to shift longstanding tradition. In *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, Deborah Parsons contends that a female *flaneur*—a *flaneuse*—likewise walked the city, "botanizing the asphalt," to use Walter Benjamin's turn-of-phrase.[141] Some historians argue that the nineteenth-century sexual division of public and private spheres excluded women from the mastery of the street and particularly the command of the gaze.[142] Rather than conceptualizing *flaneurie* as a gendered position, however, it is more useful to think of it as a state of power: According to Vanessa Schwartz, the "*flaneur* is not so much a person as *flanerie* is a positionality of power—one through which the spectator

[140] Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth-Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 14. See also Katherine Lineham, "Vicious Circle: Prostitution Reform and Public Policy in Chicago, 1830—1930," (PhD diss., Notre Dame University, 1991), 150.

[141] Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2006), 37.

[142] See Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

assumes the position of being able to be part of the spectacle and yet command it at the same time."[143] White women's increased use of the street and in particular the *nighttime* street, increased their access to cultural power and thus their ability to walk the streets, day or night, as a *flaneuse*.

Despite limitations to women's unfettered access to the street, the expansion of commercial amusements at the turn of the twentieth century resulted in more accommodating spaces. Entertainments such as dance halls, movie theaters, and amusement parks actively catered to female audiences and encouraged their use of public space by charging lower admission fees or designing their interior spaces to appeal to women. Simultaneously, women also developed creative strategies to increase their access to costly commercial amusements.[144] Women's increased presence on the street and in urban amusements was a marker of the "New Woman" which "epitomized the profound cultural discontinuity of modern society [in which] traditional ideologies of gender, essentially stagnant for centuries, became objects of cultural reflexivity, open to doubt and revision."[145] Thus, one of the key consequences of modernity was women's increased mobility within public space.[146]

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[143] Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities,* 10.

[144] See Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900–1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

[145] Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity,* 14.

[146] Ibid.

In the nineteenth century, women on the street were vulnerable to attracting public attention—the threat of the gaze—that was associated with prostitutes, whose trade necessitated their visibility on the street; any woman on the street opened herself to the threat of being perceived as a "street walker." However, slumming presented a powerful transformation of women's relationship with the street. Maloney detailed that while the women he toured with initially entered the slums timidly, clinging to one another, after viewing the "opium smokers," "[t]he women have lost their timidity." After slumming, their confidence and their sense of power seemed greater; after slumming, "[t]hey talk loudly; they laugh without occasion." Moreover, "[t]hey no longer turn their eyes away from the impudent glances of the slant-eyed yellow men staring at them from the shop doors and the dark openings of the noisome tenements." Through slumming, Maloney suggested that women harnessed the power of the gaze: "They give back stare for stare."[147] Thus slumming held the potential for white women's power over the street. Slumming involved women's release from the personal restraint that characterized ideal femininity in the nineteenth century and thus contributed to the expansion of women's access to consumer society. By commanding the power of public spaces, women "enacted a new female subjectivity, rooted in consumer culture, which affirmed self-indulgence, self-fulfillment, and self-determination" and "hastened the emergence of the new metropolitan woman who laid claim to public amusements, individual pleasure, and the possibilities of urban consumption."[148] By making the street and the nighttime city

[147] Maloney, "Slumming in New York Chinatown," 823.

[148] Remus, "Tippling Ladies," 754.

legible, guidebooks led women to slumming, granting them power over the street and making them modern.

Yet women's access to the street was not completely free. Even as commercial amusements progressively catered to a mixed-sex audience, limitations on women's access to public space continued. Indeed, certain resorts on the slumming routes took "protective" measures such as requiring women to be accompanied by a male escort or permitting them access only via side or rear "ladies' entrances."[149] Urban tour guide companies used this lingering social anxiety about women in public space to peddle their own or other guides' services in aiding the lady slummer and ensuring her safety. Guidebook writer D.D. Carey cautioned potential slummers of the "ludicrous" mistakes one might make without a guide.[150] Having been advised of Chinatown's "sinister reputation," one British visitor described hiring the services of a "touring car," and despite nothing unseemly occurring during her trip to the neighborhood, she seemed relieved at her decision, for "[n]o wonder nervous ladies turn pale at the name of Chinatown."[151] Such tour guides promised an intimate interior knowledge of these neighborhoods, mitigating the potential danger to women by guaranteeing their protection.

Conclusion

[149] Heap, *Slumming,* 151.

[150] Carey, *By the Golden Gate,* 138.

[151] Brown, *Amazing New York*, 113–116.

Slumming thus promised the tourist, women and men, not only amusement, but transformative potential as well. In his analysis of tourism, Dean MacCannell contends that tourism is a "way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience."[152] Through slumming, tourists sought to understand and even assert authority over ethnic communities, but also over the city and by extension modernity itself through taking control of the street. Travel guides set the tourist and their exploration of the city at its narrative center, framed the traveler as an active agent, and their expedition through the metropolis as an unfolding story of modernity.

Thus, cities did indeed hold the power to transform individuals, for better or for worse, into moderns. Through their excitement, their grand boulevards and purportedly primitive neighborhoods, cities threatened to reshape the individual in both socially liberating and damning ways. In the case of white women, slumming changed the physical landscape of acceptable street space, while it also worked to change notions of gender to modern. For white women especially, but for all slummers, their engagement with the street transformed the metropolis into a laboratory of modernity. Through their discussion of urban transformation of the individual, travelogue writers reflected the uncertainties of modernity, but continued to assert individual control—through slumming—over the metropolis. While bohemians and cultural elites framed themselves as the arbiters of modernity, guidebooks made city space and the expression of modernity legible to the average tourist. While Americans wrung their hands over the anxieties of

[152] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 13.

modern life, guidebooks' fantastical descriptions of the city shared these apprehensions about the unpredictable nature of modernity, but also packaged these concerns as part of the thrill of the experience. Moreover, travelogues sought to mitigate this anxiety by providing the reader a guide to the seemingly unpredictable modern metropolis: through reading the guide, a tourist could come to know what to expect. Indeed, the city became a site to stage a new self, one imbued with power over the street and its peoples. Guidebooks framed the city as, if not fully knowable, then at least navigable. Travel literature, then, served as a handbook not only to the city, but also to the experience of modernity, granting tourists some semblance of control over the discontinuities of modern life.

CHAPTER 3

"IT'S AN ABSURD PLACE, OF COURSE": SPACE AND RACE IN THE THRILL OF THE AMUSEMENT ZONE

Slumming expanded the physical boundaries of the nighttime city at the turn of the twentieth century and the emergence of amusement zones—both as midways at the world's fairs and in formalized parks—promised to explode those boundaries further.[1] Just as American tourists saw cities like New York and San Francisco as "dream worlds," so too did entertainment entrepreneurs begin to build literal dream-like entertainment spaces on earth. American tourists traveled far and wide to these entertainment zones; to bask in the sensational architecture; to delight in the stunning technological rides that wrenched and torqued their bodies in unexpected ways; to gape at ethnological villages; to become part of jubilant crowds; in short, to both witness and become a part of the spectacle of amusement.

Americans flocked to national and international fairs both for their edifying promises and nationalist overtones, but also for their midways. These midways then gave rise to a space dedicated to continuous enjoyment, the amusement park. The amusement park may have been born at Coney Island in the 1890s, but similar parks quickly opened in New Jersey, Kansas, Colorado, Montana, California, and elsewhere. By 1912, there were some two thousand amusement parks in the United States alone.[2] The world's fairs

[1] I use the phrase "amusement zone" to denote the commonalities between the midways of world's fairs and the formalized amusement parks they generated.

[2] Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 4.

were architecturally framed as idealized metropoles, and the amusement zones they engendered seemingly harnessed the world and tethered it to America.

Amusement zones exhilarated audiences by bringing them the unknown—peoples from the far corners of the globe, and new and electrifying machinery—while overwhelming them with a magnificent setting meant to take them to another world. Amusement zones sanitized exotic fantasy locales, associating them with fun and adventure instead of danger, packaged in enclosed spaces that guaranteed patrons' physical safety. Thus, the twin hazards of the racial "other" of the ethnological exhibits and the tangible menace of physical rides and pyrotechnic shows delighted audiences by playing to their desire for exhilarating thrill. Yet amusement zone organizers carefully crafted the spectacle to assure patrons of their safety, both their physical safety on the rides and their racial superiority in a time of profound social transition in the American social landscape. Thus, Americans actively sought a mediated modern experience, spaces where they could bask in elements of modern culture while comforted with assurances of the maintenance of cultural hierarchies that confirmed their place in American society.

"Yes, in truth, all the world was there:" The Amusement Zone[3]

National and international fairs became a staple of American edification and entertainment at the end of the nineteenth century.[4] American world's fairs drew on a

[3] F. W. Putnam, "Introduction," *Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance*, (Chicago: 1893), i.

[4] Eleven national and international fairs were held in the United States before World War I. These included Chicago (1893), Atlanta (1895), Nashville (1897), Omaha (1898), Buffalo (1901), St. Louis (1904), Portland (1905), Jamestown (1907), Seattle (1909), San Francisco (1915), and San Diego (1915–1916).

specific architectural tradition of grandeur and from a particular view of the consequences of urbanization, namely the conviction that cities were evidence of mounting social problems such as crowding and vice. The philosophy behind the Columbian Exposition of 1893—and the expositions that followed—was thus to create "Dream Cities" as "embodiment[s] of public order, cultural unity, and civic virtue, an animating vision of American cultural achievement for an age of disorder, strife, and vulgarity."[5] Such exposition cities were not designed to replicate cities as they were, but to provide an ideal vision for what cities *could be*. By their definition as fairs of world-class caliber, exhibitions were dazzlingly special; indeed, the exhibitions existed outside the world of normative life, on space marked specifically for the significant occasion. In these idealized city spaces, the grounds were walled off to ensure the sanctity of the space as well as control paid access, and uniformed guards patrolled the grounds and ensured adherence to rules.[6] Fairgrounds altered space in other significant ways. At a time when military might expanded American international power, fairgrounds "collapse[d] global space," harnessing the whole world for presentation to American audiences.[7]

While expositions served a number of goals, their chief objective was to demonstrate national superiority in a period of profound competition between European powers as they carved up parts of Asia and Africa as imperial territories; American

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[5] John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 18.

[6] Burton Benedict, *The Anthropology of the World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915*, (London: Scholar Press, 1983), 5.

[7] Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 77.

expositions after 1890 prominently featured the growing military assertiveness of the United States.[8] The displays of goods, products, and architectural splendor lent itself naturally to the competition between nations (as well as between states and even cities) for prestige as rituals of superiority.[9] In this way, then, fairs became "metaphors for power and prestige."[10]

The popularity and regularity of the fairs spoke to a changing public ethos regarding leisure. Indeed, the combination of rising American incomes, declining cost of living, and shortening work hours at the end of the nineteenth century resulted in the emergence of a "vacation habit." According to historian David Nasaw, the ability to "go out" in the evenings and on the weekends "was more than an escape from the tedium of work, it was the gateway into a privileged sphere of everyday life. The ability to take time out from work for recreation and public sociability was the dividing line between old worlds and new."[11] To enjoy urban night life, in short, was modern. Nineteenth-

[8] Numerous scholars have argued that world's fairs functioned as expressions of national and international imperial power, including Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Mona Domosh, *American Commodities in an Age of Empire*, (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869–1922* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005). Abigail M. Markwyn complicated this thesis by demonstrating agency among different groups in opposition to established narratives in *Empress San Francisco: The Pacific Rim, the Great West, and California at the Panama-Pacific Exposition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

[9] Indeed, in his history of world's fairs, Burton Benedict compares the fairs to the Native American tradition of potlatch ceremonies of the Pacific Northwest. The potlatch was a lavish gift-giving ceremony among the Kwakiutl tribe, whereby social status was gained through an elaborate tradition of bountiful gift-giving. He suggests that both "[p]otlatches and world's fairs occur in societies preoccupied with rank and the prestige that rank implies. In these sorts of societies rank is validated by the large-scale display of goods." In Benedict, *The Anthropology of the World's Fairs,* 10.

[10] Ibid, 11.

century Americans, however, valued the virtues of self-control and industriousness and tended to be skeptical and even suspicious of leisure if it was not spent pursuing edifying activities. Distrust of leisure led early midway amusement zones to conceal their commercial operation under the veneer of educational enterprise. Amusements were billed as "scientific" wonders and anthropological displays.[12]

While the stated intent of world's fairs was to be educational in nature, amusement zones within the fairs grew as exhibitions increasingly relied upon the revenue they generated. Amusements at the world's fairs initially began as little more than disorganized groups of concessions but they gradually increased in size and importance. The first amusement zone appeared on the outskirts of the Paris Exposition of 1867, a collection of concessions squatting outside of the fair proper. The United States hosted its first international exposition in 1876, which featured the "Centennial City," an unsanctioned amusement zone across the street from fair itself. The "Centennial City" was unceremoniously dubbed "Shantyville" and "Dinkeytown" for its mile-long ramshackle collection of restaurants, saloons, beer gardens, and absurd sideshow performers, including a five-legged cow, a "fat lady," and the "Man-eating Feejees [*sic*]."[13] When a world's fair returned to Paris in 1889, organizers were much more accommodating to concessions, welcoming a roller coaster and a reproduction of the

[11] David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 4.

[12] Nasaw, *Going Out,* 72–79.

[13] E. McCullough, *World's Fair Midways* (New York: Exposition Press, 1966), 34.

Bastille among other amusements. The Paris Exposition's thirty-two million visitors dwarfed Philadelphia's ten million and American fair organizers took notice.[14]

The Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 moved closer to acceptance of a dedicated amusement zone, set amidst—through distinct from—the utopianism of the world's fair. Unlike the sculpted grandeur of the Court of Honor in the fair proper, the midway offered "Barnumesque eclecticism."[15] As Nasaw writes, the midway was an "interstitial place that defied easy categorization"; it may have been "sanctioned by science," but it was "designed by commerce" as the place where "ethnography as scientific research and ethnography as popular attraction" met.[16] Given that the Chicago Exposition embodied the City Beautiful dream, the fact that it incorporated amusements into its fairgrounds—albeit in an isolated zone—suggests the degree to which the rhetoric of fun and adventure encapsulated by tourist literature at the turn of the twentieth century had impacted Americans' expectations of what the experience of city life should be.

By the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901, Americans both expected and appreciated the presence of an amusement zone. An anonymous writer in *The Spectator* opined that while visitors "bordering on collapse" dragged "their weary limbs through rooms full of things in which they had not the faintest spark of interest," they "then rushed off to the boisterous Midway" for fun and a relief from tedium.[17] The success of the midway amusement zones was not limited just to world's fairs either.

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[14] Nasaw, *Going Out,* 66–67.

[15] Kasson, *Amusing the Million,* 23.

[16] Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference,* 61.

[17] "The Spectator," *Outlook 92* (May 29, 1909), 273.

Amusement zones flourished despite the longstanding American skepticism about the moral implications of amusement. Enclosed and cleaned-up, amusement zones were spaces that could be disassociated from the real working-class and communities of color that many Americans perceived as threatening. Neither the content or quality of the amusements spoke exclusively to new consumer tastes; rather, the "packaging and the environment" mattered to consumers, who desired spaces that promised "clean" entertainment and barred liquor, smoking, and prostitutes from their premises.[18] The architecture, the setting, and the enclosed space were the appeal of the amusement zones, and they frequently borrowed inspiration for some of their exhibits from the exoticized slumming spaces of the city. For those for whom slumming posed too great a moral or safety hazard, amusement zones were more than happy to accommodate.

While the architecture of the main fair was orchestrated and manicured into seeming urban perfection, the midways were architectural chaos: jumbles of towers and minarets of every conceivable architectural form competed with billboards, tents, and carnival barkers of every stripe. Entertainments tended to be brief, light, and cheap, costing fair-goers about a quarter for a fifteen-minute show, allowing visitors to take in a plethora of concessions.[19] Attractions included ethnological exhibits, animal shows, dancing girls, and premature babies in incubators; panoramas of historical or mythological events played next to disaster shows featuring specific historical floods, fires, and eruptions; restaurants tempted visitors with the tastes and smells of many lands; and finally the new-fangled mechanical rides lifted, bounced, and rocketed Americans

[18] Nasaw, *Going Out,* 16.

[19] Ibid, 68.

into new physical experiences. The earliest of the rides offered in the amusement zones elevated riders to provide them a bird's-eye-view of the exposition. Similarly, mechanical marvels like the Ferris Wheel at Chicago in 1893 coupled international interest in mechanical innovation with the thrills of a ride and became a staple feature of amusement zones.[20] In short, amusement zones levied their position *inside* the gates of the expositions to legitimize their carnivalesque atmosphere. In many ways, then, the amusement zones were a parody of the "serious" official fair. While the official fair was meticulous in its architecture and harmonious color schemes, the amusement zones were a chaotic array of styles and forms, driven by commerce more than architectural unity. While government and scientific authorities orchestrated the official fair, which represented an idealized future and functioned primarily during the daytime hours, the amusement zone came alive at night and "dealt with a fantasy world where the pleasure of the moment reigned supreme."[21]

"The Moon for a Plaything": The Birth of Coney Island[22]

The world's fairs embodied the architectural display of national power and the amusement parks they engendered emerged as the architectural backdrop of fun. And Coney Island was the capitol of fun. The success of amusement parks at Coney Island—which then prompted the building of replica amusement parks throughout the United

[20] Benedict, *The Anthropology of the World's Fairs,* 55.

[21] Ibid, 54.

[22] Richard H. Barry, *Snap Shots on the Midway of the Pan-American Exposition* (Buffalo: Robert Allen Reid, 1901), 40.

States and the world—was born directly from their midway predecessors. The financial success of amusement concessions at world's fairs provided the model and even the apparatuses of full-time fun-making at Coney Island. Coney Island had featured a host of disorganized concessionaires along a two-mile strip of beach on the southwestern end of Long Island since long before the 1880s, when Coney was known more for its toughs, pickpockets, and confidence men than its amusement.

The era of amusement parks, however, began in the mid-1890s when Captain Paul Boynton enclosed his Sea Lion Park in 1895 and George Tilyou did the same for his Steeplechase Park in 1897, both in an effort to keep the unseemly characters of Coney Island at bay. Additionally, this decision also granted them greater control over the thematic organization and structure of their parks.[23] Having seen George Ferris' revolving wheel at the Chicago Midway Plaisance, Tilyou built a replica half the size of the original and installed it at Coney Island, declaring it the largest Ferris wheel in the world, in true entertainment impresario fashion.[24] This was the birth of Steeplechase Park, the first of the three major Coney Island amusement parks. Tilyou enlisted Fred Thompson in his endeavor, having seen Thompson's "Trip to the Moon" concession at the Buffalo Exposition in 1901. Thompson's moon voyage proved so successful that he opened his own park—christened Luna Park—the following year, just across the street from Steeplechase.

[23] Kasson, *Amusing the Million,* 57–58.

[24] Robert Cartmell, *The Incredible Scream Machine: A History of the Roller Coaster* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987), 66.

In "Trip to the Moon," Thompson crafted an immersive environment featuring meticulous stage sets, recorded sounds, lighting effects, and a cast of actors, beckoning patrons into a staged voyage to the moon via the airship Luna. In his history of roller coasters, Robert Cartmell described the experience of the "Trip to the Moon":

> Patrons entered a high-ceilinged room and boarded an airship housing 30 passengers. Lights were dimmed and the ship was manually rocked and swayed to simulate a trip to the moon. A spectacular light show took place outside the portholes with scenes of flying over the Fair and Niagara Falls complete with an electrical storm. The landing included a tour of the moon with souvenir chunks of cheese given out by moon midgets. The ride was very convincing, and some passengers actually fainted.[25]

While impressive in its painstaking attention to detail, Nasaw suggests "Trip to the Moon" was further impressive still in its immersive environment which created the "ultimate tourist spectacle," for patrons "not only viewed but became a part of the sight, part of the show, simultaneously insider and spectator."[26]

The amusement parks may have been born from the world's fairs, but by the turn of the century amusement became increasingly central to the fairs. By 1904, organizers for the St. Louis fair abandoned the notion that the midway played a supplemental part to that of the edifying fair. Instead of foisting the midway into a separate district, fair organizers situated their midway directly in the center of the fair, important enough to warrant its own entrance onto the street.[27] Indeed, Thompson's indebtedness to the legacy of the fairs was readily apparent: early on he billed Luna Park "another world's fair."[28]

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Nasaw, *Going Out,* 69.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Richard Snow, *Coney Island: A Postcard Journey to the City of Fire* (New York, 1984), 13–14.

"Stage Illusion": Orientalism and the Fantastic at the Amusement Parks[29]

Amusement parks were thus cities of play, spaces "as full of amusing things as a toy-shop, as astonishing as a conjurer's box, and as exciting as a circus."[30] This excitement could verge into "delirium," as one was hard-pressed to find a "madder, badder place on this side of Bedlam."[31] The architecture of amusement parks heightened patrons' sense that they were in a fantastical realm where the rules of normal life did not necessarily apply. Thompson had some training as a professional architect, but in designing Luna, he claimed the training in classical style and form that had guided the hands of designers of architectural feats like the White City were ultimately unnecessary and perhaps even a hindrance to his overall aim. In designing Luna, Thompson claimed to stick "to no style" which resulted in Luna Park looking "utterly unlike anything else of its kind." The "serious architecture" of the world's fairs, he contended, "should not enter into [Luna] if it will interfere with the carnival spirit."[32] Indeed, this rebuke to seriousness left an impression on visitors, with one reminiscing that her perception of Coney was "as a pasteboard village of pink and white, ornate with towers and turrets and minarets, jeweled with millions of lights, and all a-flap with flags, big and little."[33]

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[29] "Frederick Thompson Tells How Electricity Has Revolutionized Mechanics behind the Scenes, Exemplified in New York's Hippodrome," *New York Herald*, February 12, 1905, 10. Full quote reads: "Almost anything is possible now in the way of stage illusion by utilizing electric force and light."

[30] Hildegarde Hawthorne, *Peeps at Great Cities: New York* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911), 51.

[31] Mary MacDonald Brown, *Amazing New York* (London: Andrew Melrose, Ltd., 1913), 97.

[32] Frederic Thompson, "Amusing the Million," *Everybody's* (September 1908), 385.

[33] Brown, *Amazing New York*, 98.

Thompson's architectural form appealed to a sense of magnificence, meant to transport visitors to another world, not so dissimilar from a "Trip to the Moon." Contemporary scholars have characterized the parks' architecture as one of "Oriental-Moroccan-Renaissance plaster extravaganza" and "Super-Saracenic or Oriental Orgasmic," though Thompson himself denied the park's form could be easily categorized.[34] Even as amusement parks such as his own were clearly the heirs to examples set by world's fairs, Thompson disassociated his creation from its predecessor. He claimed to have

> eliminated all classical conventional forms from [Luna's] structure and taken a sort of free Renaissance and Oriental type for my model, using spires and minarets wherever I could, in order to get the restive, joyous effect to be derived always from the graceful lines given in this style of architecture. It is marvelous what you can do in the way of arousing human emotions by the use you can make architecturally, of simple lines.[35]

Thompson made much of his novel architectural forms, and contemporaries recognized its exotic influences. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* deemed the park an "Oriental dream" and the *New York Times* gushed it was "a pageant of Oriental splendor."[36] Thompson himself later acknowledged his global inspiration. In interpreting his vision, Thompson encouraged critics to

> picture many white steeples, and numerous minarets, and innumerable highly-decorated buildings of every conceivable architecture, from the prototype of a Turkish mosque to the styles obtaining among the more imaginative of the Japanese, with a strain of the architectural fashions which are creditably supposed to obtain in fairyland.[37]

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[34] Cartmell, *The Incredible Scream Machine,* 66; Kasson, *Amusing the Million,* 63.

[35] "The Annual Awakening of the Only Coney Island," *New York Times*, May 6, 1906, 8.

[36] "Luna Park is Opened; 60,000 People There," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 17, 1903, 6; "New Coney Dazzles," New York Times, May 15, 1904, 3.

[37] Frederic Thompson, "Amusing People," *Metropolitan* (August 1910).

Thompson's Luna Park was not the only amusement zone that relied upon exotic and even otherworldly spectacle to craft an environment of wonder. If Steeplechase was the unexpected originator of the amusement park and Luna the logical development of the form, then Dreamland, according to architectural theorist Rem Koolhass, was where the driving philosophy of architectural extravagance was "elevated to an ideological plane."[38] Real-estate tycoon and politician William Reynolds built Dreamland to be the grander, more elaborate vision of spectacle, done up in the French Renaissance style, though "[a]lmost every style of architecture is represented in some building or another."[39] Where Luna had employed 500,000 electric bulbs, Dreamland doubled their own to over one million, 100,000 just for its 375-foot central tower alone, modeled after the Giralda in Seville.[40] Spectators noted the "grandeur" of Dreamland, its fantastical reverie architecture, with sailing ships and giant angels flanking its doors. Like Luna, Dreamland similarly boasted amazing sights, featuring a "Fighting the Flames" show with a cast of four thousand; "Liliputia," a city of 300 little people replete with an independent parliament and fire department; an animal show and monkey theater; a "ghost house"; and railroad, submarine, and airplane rides.[41] Ultimately however, the dream was not to be. Fire broke out in Dreamland the morning of May 27, 1911. Only two days later, fire

[38] Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (Italy: The Monacelli Press, 1994), 45.

[39] "A New Coney Island."

[40] Cartmell, *The Incredible Scream Machine,* 69.

[41] Nasaw, *Going Out,* 85; "A New Coney Island."

also broke out at the Chutes, a San Francisco amusement park.[42] While the Chutes eventually reopened, Dreamland closed its doors forever.

San Francisco had amusement parks similar to those at Coney, though none were anywhere near as grand in scale as their New York counterparts. The success of Steeplechase in Coney Island spawned a series of regional parks based on the original. The profitability of the parks and the growing demand among Americans for commercial amusement guaranteed at least the possibility of financial success, though in actuality not all amusement parks were financially lucrative. George Tilyou financed a San Francisco Steeplechase in downtown San Francisco at 8th Street and Market in 1899.[43] Much in the model of the original park, San Francisco's Steeplechase featured rides such as the "Great Roman Carousel" and an earthquake floor, as well as historical reenactments, including the Battle of Manila. The park staked itself as a primarily evening and nighttime attraction; its hours were 1pm to 11:30pm every day, and visitors could gain entrance to the gates for a dime, which included a ride on the famed Steeplechase horse ride.[44]

San Francisco's Steeplechase met with early and frequent disaster—Tilyou's appointed manager drove the park into financial ruin in 1901. The park secured new financial backing in January 1906, but it was likely demolished in the April 1906 earthquake and fire, which burned much of San Francisco west of Van Ness Avenue. Steeplechase, however, was not San Francisco's only amusement zone. A "New Chutes"

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[42] "Chutes Destroyed Early This Morning," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 29, 1911, 1.

[43] James R. Smith, *San Francisco's Playland at the Beach: The Early Years* (Fresno: Craven Street Books, 2010), 41; "New Amusement Company," *San Francisco Call*, December 20, 1898, 7.

[44] Ibid.

reappeared between Fillmore and Webster Streets in 1909.[45] The new park featured other delights like the "Double Whirl," "Dante's Inferno," and the "Human Roulette Wheel;" feats of daring similarly dazzled audiences, including a female high diver and a bicyclist "enveloped in flames as he rides;" as well as a zoo and theater.[46] It also, however, did not last long. Like its Coney Island counterpart, San Francisco's lasting contribution to modern amusement zones began with a just a few seaside attractions, and was situated by the ocean between Sutro Heights and Golden Gate Park. With the addition of the Looff Hippodrome in 1914, the burgeoning seaside resort gained its first permanent building, but it would not become part of an enclosed park until 1921. Only in the 1920s could San Francisco boast that they too had "a real Coney Island in the making."[47] The new park—dubbed Chutes at the Beach—featured nine rides and some one hundred concessions, a menagerie, a vaudeville theater, and a scenic railway.[48] San Franciscans were proud of their new park, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* boasted that the park "will in time rival the dean of amusement playgrounds on the Atlantic side of the continent."[49] The "Chutes" of the park's name was a reference to its premier amusement ride—"Shoot the Chutes"—a toboggan ride in which a skiff surged downhill through a metal plume. Such

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[45] A *San Francisco Chronicle* article from 1922 suggests that the Chutes park was located near Golden Gate Park, indicating that perhaps the Chutes changed locations at some point. Regardless of its location, the park did not make much of an impression on residents, as the within a few years the site "became more valuable for residential purposes." "Chutes at the Beach Gives San Francisco Great Play Center," *The San Francisco Call*, January 18, 1922, 18.
[46] "New Chutes to be Opened July 14," *The San Francisco Call*, July 4, 1909, 27.

[47] "Chutes at the Beach Gives."

[48] The rides included the "Shoot the Chutes" slide, the Bob Sled Dipper, a figure eight coaster, an "Aeroplane swing," the "Whip," the "Dodge 'Em" bumper cars, the "Ship of Joys," and a Looff merry-go-round.

[49] "Chutes at the Beach Gives."

a ride had initially premiered at the Chicago World's Fair and was gleefully copied and modified by amusement parks around the country for decades.[50]

Two entertainment entrepreneurs, John Friedle and Arthur Looff, pioneered the Chutes at the Beach. Like Boynton and Tilyou before him, Friedle—owner of a small ball throwing attraction near the Geary Street railway terminus—saw an amusement park as a "natural evolution" of the ocean-side park. Friedle established a joint financial venture with Arthur Looff, son of the master carousel builder Charles I.D. Looff. Like its east coast counterpart, the Chutes at the Beach was a day and night resort, but could boast of being open year-round, unlike the amusement parks of Coney, which closed from November to May because of poor weather.[51]

San Franciscans had long noticed and lamented their lack of a proper amusement park. The *San Francisco Chronicle* opined that while "[e]very great city…has a social problem in adult recreation and amusement, and should see that all its citizens get abundant opportunities to indulge in the play spirit," San Francisco notably lacked a park to rival those at Coney.[52] Mentions of the San Francisco amusement parks were strikingly absent from tourist literature about the city, a marked departure from the discussions of Coney that appeared in nearly all New York travel guides. This perhaps suggests that the San Francisco parks before the 1920s remained small and obscure, partly due to repeated fires and other disasters (including a patron being viciously bit by a camel), as well as

[50] Cartmell, 94.

[51] "Chutes at the Beach Gives."

[52] "Ibid.

financial mismanagement.[53] The *Chronicle*, however, put the blame for San Francisco's lack of a significant amusement park on the 1906 earthquake. Just as amusement parks were growing financially stable "where they could be organized on a business basis," San Francisco was devastated by earthquake. After 1906, residents and the business community invested their money in rebuilding the city, tying up financial capital that might otherwise have gone to building an amusement park.[54] Friedle and Looff seemed acutely aware that San Francisco had fallen behind New York and compared their park to their east coast counterpart, calling the Chutes at the Beach "the San Francisco Coney Island" and taking pains to note that the dimensions of their chute ride were "the largest in America…bigger than the one in Coney Island…in length and fall," but added sheepishly "if not in width."[55]

While the San Francisco amusement parks appeared infrequently in city travel guides, contemporary local newspaper accounts raved over this Coney Island of the West, gushing over their parks much in the same language and ideas as New York's Coney. The *San Francisco Call* marveled that the "varieties of entertainment are bewildering" and claimed that "the spirit of festivity…penetrates the very bones."[56] Describing the experience of a former convict at his first trip to the Chutes, the *Call* reveled in the

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[53] See "Seriously Cut at the Chutes," *The San Francisco Call*, July 16, 1901, 5; "Walsh's Murder Deliberate One," *The San Francisco Call*, July 16, 1901, 5; "Called as a Witness Teddy Webb Qualifies as Camel Expert," *The San Francisco Call*, May 1, 1907, 16.

[54] "Chutes at the Beach Gives."

[55] Ibid.

[56] "The New Chutes: Where the City Finds Amusement," *The San Francisco Call*, August 1, 1909, 5.

childlike joy the man experienced. The account reiterated his innocent wonder at the whole experience, and he described his trip to the park as "a new world" of delightful experience.[57]

In particular, visitors delighted in amusement parks at night, whether in New York or San Francisco. According to one, "Coney is a fine place for fun *even* in the daytime."[58] Indeed, the parks dazzled at night, as many were extraordinarily lit. Luna Park featured some 250,000 to 500,000 twinkling lights, depending upon the account, making it visible for miles. By 1909 Luna had over a million lights.[59] Luna boasted so many lights, in fact, that Rupert Hughes in *The Real New York* claimed the park could "turn the night into noon."[60] Accounts of the Chutes in San Francisco similarly noted the importance of thousands of electric lights in creating nighttime atmosphere. In addition to incandescent light, the Chutes boasted searchlights that illuminated shafts of light well into the sky.[61] The later Chutes at the Beach was described as "illuminated with myriads of electric lights, making a glittering and fairy like effect."[62] Light served purposes of illumination but also to dazzle and captivate visitors, who commented on the evening Coney as distinct from its daytime existence:

> With the advent of night a fantastic city of fire suddenly rises from the ocean into the sky. Thousands of ruddy sparks glimmer in the darkness, limning in fine,

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[57] "Lost to the World for Thirty Years," *The San Francisco Call*, August 11, 1901, 1.
[58] Hawthorne *Peeps at Great Cities*, 51. Emphasis added.

[59] Nasaw, *Going Out,* 83; Cartmell, *The Incredible Scream Machine,* 66.

[60] Rupert Hughes, *The Real New York*, (London: The Smart Set Publishing Company, 1904), 312.

[61] "Novel Shows for Patrons of Chutes," *The San Francisco Call*, July 11, 1909, 40.

[62] "Chutes at the Beach Gives San Francisco Great Play Center," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 18, 1922, 18.

> sensitive outline on the black background of the sky shapely towers of miraculous castles, palaces, and temples. Golden gossamer threads tremble in the air. They intertwine in transparent flaming patterns, which flutter and melt away, in love with their own beauty mirrored in the waters. Fabulous beyond conceiving, ineffably beautiful, in this fiery scintillation.[63]

Others described the view of Coney from afar as a "cemetery of fire" where "[e]verything is fire" and it "runs like a musical scale through many octaves, the darkness crowding it, the mist blurring it."[64] Indeed, another contended, "night is the real time for seeing Coney. Then all its tawdriness and vulgarity disappear in the transforming wonder of the lights. Then its make-believe palaces seem real."[65] At Luna Park in particular, Thompson used electricity as a "paraphernalia of illusion" to create "a separate *city of night.*"[66] Light had long been used as a unifying effect at the international expositions—a practice the amusement parks eagerly borrowed—marrying many structures into a singular, common design meant to overwhelm the visitor.[67] And indeed visitors were overwhelmed. One account characterized Coney as something a prophet might "have written in Revelations, if only he had first beheld a spectacle like this!"[68] Albert Bigelow Paine, writing for *Century Magazine,* called Coney "an enchanted garden, of such a sort as Aladdin never dreamed."[69]

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[63] Maxim Gorky, "Boredom," *The Independent*, August 8, 1907, 309.

[64] James Gibbons Huneker, *New Cosmopolis* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), 166.

[65] Hawthorne, *Peeps at Great Cities,* 55.

[66] Koolhaas, *Delirious New York,* 41.

[67] David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 35.

[68] Quoted in Cartmell, *The Incredible Scream Machine,* 66.

[69] Albert Bigelow Paine, "The New Coney Island," *Century 68* (August 1904), 535.

Unlike the slumming tours of the city that employed darkness as a lens to interpret the ethnic and working-class quarters, amusement park impresarios harnessed light to sanitize their spaces, even as they employed exotic or other-worldly architecture. Indeed, Coney became yet another "laboratory of modernity," harnessing the combined powers of science, technology, and illusion to produce a space emblematic of the best of the modern world. In crafting Luna Park, Frederic Thompson consciously meant to create a wonderland—a new frame of architectural other-worldliness meant to elevate Americans out of their everyday existence.

That this architecture was overwhelmingly eastern in its interpretation is not coincidence. Rather, Luna as an "Oriental dream" was specifically drawn from popular Western conceptions of the East as sensual, as less rational, and as offering a release from Western notions of personal self-restraint. *The Chronicle* reported that a walk down the Chutes at the Beach midway "is like a trip down a street of Cairo or Tangiers" and gives one "the feeling of being in a half-barbaric realm of the Arabian Nights."[70] As Edward Said argued in his study *Orientalism*, westerners had long dreamed of the East as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, [and] 'different.'"[71] This perception of the East not only established the psychological groundwork for European and American imperial domination of the nineteenth-century, it also became a critical part of the American imagination of what fun and play should look like. This was a lesson that was quickly learned by amusement parks, but that would also be adopted by the world's fairs.

[70] "Chutes at the Beach Gives."

[71] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 40.

The Last of the Great Nineteenth-Century Fairs: The Panama-Pacific International Exposition

Since San Francisco's amusement parks never rivaled their New York counterparts, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE)—the last of the world's fairs styled in the nineteenth-century tradition—was the true western counterpart to Coney Island. By 1915, amusement zones were no longer a peripheral attraction begrudgingly incorporated into the fairgrounds, instead the more formal fairgrounds often borrowed elements of mystic exoticism from the architecture of amusement parks. In sum, the PPIE was the product of the growth and success of amusement parks.

Much as the expositions that had come before, the PPIE was a display of urban self-confidence and an assertion of San Francisco's importance in global trade, particularly in relation to South America and the nations of the Far East. Similar to other fairs that had come before it, San Francisco's fair was designed to project a unifying vision of San Francisco's optimistic future.[72] The future looked much more optimistic than San Francisco's present, however. Over the last decade, San Francisco had struggled with natural disaster as well as political and social turmoil. In addition to the devastating earthquake, the city's rising immigrant population was viewed with suspicion and was perceived as a nexus of infection, blamed for outbreaks of plague and smallpox.[73]

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[72] The fair may have been designed to project a unified vision of the urban future, but Abigail Markwyn details the strong-arm tactics San Francisco city leaders took to force residents out of the space designated for the fair, forcing hundreds of residents to relocate in 1912. See Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco,* ch. 2.

[73] Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

The PPIE self-consciously became the benefactor of amusement zones pioneered by Thompson and others like him early in the century. By 1910 amusement parks had gained a much greater respectability in American culture. By 1912, some two thousand amusement parks operated nationwide, and every city with a population of more than twenty thousand had its own park.[74] The influence of the amusement park registered in Americans' perception of the fair. Writing for the *San Francisco Bulletin*, Pauline Jacobson characterized the exposition itself less in terms as a "noble educational institution" and more as a "great play-place."[75] She rejected the notion of the fair as educational, proclaiming "Educational bosch! Education only as it lures, as it is had in the spirit of the child at play."[76] Others characterized the fair similarly; a writer for the *San Francisco Examiner* suggested that the PPIE "just won't stand for seriousness. It laughs and wants the world to laugh with it."[77] Official exposition literature offered a similar interpretation, promising visitors the fair would provide that "which they have been seeking eagerly for as far back as history takes us—a chance to renew their youth."[78]

While the world may have just wanted to laugh with the PPIE, the world had to wait a long time to do it. The idea of a world's fair in San Francisco was initially proposed in 1904 by city business leaders and former mayor James Phelan. These

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[74] Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland,* 4, 8.

[75] Pauline Jacobson, "Forty Winks at the Exposition," *San Francisco Bulletin*, February 13, 1915, 13.

[76] Ibid.

[77] "A City of Lovely Light," *San Francisco Examiner*, February 21, 1915, magazine, n.p.

[78] *California Expositions, 1915: Chicago & North Western Line* (Chicago: Poole Bros., n.d.) n.p.

political and economic heavyweights invited Daniel Burnham—architectural director of Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exposition—to submit plans for the future growth of San Francisco in the same year. Such plans met an end following the devastating earthquake and fire of 1906. Plans re-emerged to put San Francisco "once more upon the map," after the 1910 census revealed that bad press following the earthquake and local political turmoil had caused San Francisco to slip from the ninth to eleventh place in national population.[79] San Francisco had held a fair previously—the regional California Midwinter Exposition in 1894—but it was the PPIE that captured Americans' imagination through its celebration of the great feat of building the Panama Canal and the triumphant rise of San Francisco after the shattering earthquake.

In order to fashion San Francisco as the premier progressive exposition city, civic leaders took aim at local businesses they feared would damage the credibility and profitability of the fair, namely saloons and brothels. Alcohol and prostitution raised the specter of vice and criminality, so fair organizers purchased or forced out saloons close to the fairgrounds. Organizers saw no reason to actually ban alcohol sales from the fair itself—which drew profit—but viewed the working-class saloon patrons as a liability who might drive away middle class fair attendants. Historian Abigail Markwyn contends that "[w]hen officials closed the saloons, they remade the city into a place that catered to middle- and upper-class tourists and city residents rather than to the working class."[80]

[79] James H. Wilkins, *The San Francisco Call Bulletin*, February 20, 1915.

[80] Ibid, 84.

Opened on February 20, 1915, the PPIE promised to transform the "waste of mud flats and sand dunes" of San Francisco "into [a] fairyland."[81]

The PPIE was one of the last fairs in the spirit of the great nineteenth-century expositions, but it was firmly entrenched in the age of the amusement park. Indeed, the PPIE embraced its conflicted heritage, incorporating the tradition of orientalist stagecraft and theatrical lighting bestowed by the success of the amusement parks. The PPIE covered 635 acres and was located at Harbor View and the adjacent Presidio, along the Embarcadero. The fair was organized into three concentric bands: the central core was populated by palaces and courts, a middle band of gardens and additional buildings, and a perimeter of amusements and concessions.[82]

As had the fairs before it, the organizers of the PPIE sought to dazzle American audiences with grand spectacle, emphasizing color, lighting, and splendor. The architectural wonder of "the Great White City" of the Chicago fair established a tradition in exposition architecture of using whiteness to symbolize urban perfection, cleanliness, and grandeur. Fair organizers of the PPIE, however, broke with this tradition. PPIE organizers employed watercolor artist Jules Guerin to orchestrate the colors of the fair and ensure the coordination of architects, painters, gardeners and lighting experts to create a harmonized color palette. Guerin orchestrated his "symphony" of colors to work in harmony with the natural landscape of California.[83] Guerin arranged that buildings be

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[81] Mayor James Rudolph, *The San Francisco Call Bulletin*, February 20, 1915, 1.

[82] Gray Brechin, "Sailing to Byzantium: The Architecture of the Fair," in Burton Benedict, *The Anthropology of World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Exposition* (London: Scholar Press, 1983), 97–98.

[83] Ibid, 101.

tinted to appear as if made in travertine, a soft ochre. While the stark, cold whiteness of the Chicago fair had given it the impression of being newly built, by contrast the PPIE's "walls, columns, and statues seem as though several centuries had linked them to the soil," likely a significant choice for a young city such as San Francisco.[84]

The PPIE also broke with traditional lighting of the fairs, which had heavily utilized outline lighting through bare bulbs, a technique borrowed from commercial advertising. Instead, William D'Arcy Ryan, the director of illumination at the fair, pioneered the use of indirect lighting of the buildings, giving them a soft radiance rather than a harsh outline. Ryan imparted a theatricality to the fair through his lighting scheme: searchlights topped the towers and palaces of the exposition, crowning them with illumination, while marines stationed in the Marina executed drills with searchlights, "weaving artificial auroras in the fog."[85]

Color proved essential to the staging of the exposition even at night. Courts and fountains were assigned a color scheme: underwater lights in the Court of the Seasons gave the reflecting pool a greenish glow, while the Court of the Ages was alight in red. Such use of lighting proved only the beginning of Ryan's innovation. The use of sixty-foot glass bases beneath the statues of "The Rising Sun" and "The Setting Sun" allowed them to be lit at night, making them glowing columns of soft white splendor. Even more impressive was the Palace of Horticulture, when a "battery of searchlights hidden in its tropical shrubbery was projected upward against the underside of the dome through

[84] Anon., "The Exposition Color Scheme," *Architect and Engineer 39*, no. 2 (Dec. 1914), 112.

[85] Brechin, "Sailing to Byzantium," 98.

revolving lenses and colored screens, simulating an immense fire opal."[86] At 432-feet, the Tower of Jewels—the PPIE's signature tower—was tall enough to be visible throughout the Bay Area, but in addition to its height, the tower also impressed visitors because of the way it glistened. More than one hundred thousand "Novagems"—mirrors affixed to tiny colored-glass jewels—hung by wires from the surface of the tower, and sparkled with every breeze. Concealed lights gave onlookers the impression the tower was a "living film of light."[87] Thus, fair organizers pioneered strikingly theatrical displays of illumination that made the PPIE a spectacle of the night, dazzling visitors in the tradition of Coney Island.

Unlike the earlier world's fairs, which tended to hearken back to the classical architecture of the ancient Greek and Romans, the PPIE drew from Mediterranean and Asian influences. The PPIE featured fanciful domes, towers, and minarets and Guerin's color palette was self-consciously eastern in interpretation. He characterized the palette as "a gigantic Persian rug of soft melting tones, with brilliant splashes here and there."[88] In part, this "oriental" interpretation of the fairgrounds was meant to mark the significance of the Panama Canal as "the beginning of a new era in civilization…[where] the West has met the East."[89] But this strikingly eastern city also can be seen as an allusion to the "Oriental dream" that made Luna Park a dreamscape of American amusement.

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[86] Ibid, 99.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Elmer Grey, "The Panama-Pacific International Exposition," *Scribner's 54* (July 1913), 48.

[89] *Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco 1915*, souvenir booklet (Panama-Pacific International Exposition Company, n.d.), n.p.

Contemporary accounts celebrated the PPIE's obvious eastern architectural influences. *Scribner's* magazine forecast that the fair "will be Oriental, a brightened Constantinople with Latin architectural strength and character."[90] Another account characterized the fair as "a giant, Oriental city, with its flashing domes and glimpses of brilliant, riotous colors."[91] Yet, despite the clear Mediterranean and eastern influences, Markwyn notes, "fair publicists were careful not to imply that California was a part of this nonwhite Pacific world."[92] Promotional literature linked California to Europe rather than Asia, which served to reassure visitors that California was indeed a part of the modern civilized world.

Visitors to the PPIE spoke of the fair experience much in the same way others had of Coney. In his *Story of the Exposition*, Frank Morton Todd proclaimed the fair to be one of "cosmic grandeur."[93] Another proclaimed grandly that the fair was the "realization of a world-dream."[94] Indeed, the fair took on the sense of other-worldliness. In her article promoting the fair, Katherine Dunlap Carter proclaimed the fair should really be named "Titania's Playground," and insisted that if only a visitor shut their eyes, they could envision "the Fairy Queen and all her fays flitting along."[95] To appeal to Americans'

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[90] Jesse Lynch Williams, "The Color Scheme at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition: A New Departure," *Scribner's 56* (September 1914), 279.

[91] *California Expositions, 1915: Chicago & North Western Line* (Chicago: Poole Bros., n.d.) n.p.

[92] Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco,* 46.

[93] Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Exposition* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921), 300.

[94] *Panama-Pacific International and Panama-California Expositions Souvenir* (Chicago: International Harvester Company of America, 1915), 4.

[95] Katherine Dunlap Carter, "Titania's Playground: A Glimpse of the Panama Exposition, *St. Nicholas 42* (April 1915), 524.

sense of wonder and to surpass the splendor of Luna Park and Dreamland, fair organizers utilized the same frame of reference—Oriental splendor. Indeed, the PPIE was the first fair to be lit like a stage and thus built upon the tradition of theatricality established at Coney Island.

The African Dip and Other Oddities: Race and Gender at the Joy Zone

Nowhere was this theatricality more apparent than on the PPIE's midway, the "Joy Zone." Located adjacent to the fairgrounds, the Joy Zone covered about seventy acres of the eastern edge and its concourse stretched more than a half a mile long and opened onto Van Ness Avenue.[96] The Joy Zone differed from earlier exposition midways in the degree to which it was incorporated into the larger fairgrounds. Multiple entrance sites into the midway from the main fair, as well as the Zone's direct adjacency to an entrance on the street blurred the boundaries between the Joy Zone and the main fair.[97] Additionally, the Joy Zone actually shared a unified color scheme with the larger fair, further suggesting its integration.[98] Moreover, the Joy Zone's orchestrator, Frank Burt, insisted that concessionaires construct "fantastic" facades that could "express without any reading sign if possible, what was offered inside."[99] This resulted in spectacles of the

[96] Woody Register, *The Kid From Coney Island: Fred Thompson and the Rise of American Amusements* (Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 2001), 255.

[97] Sarah J. Moore, *Empire on Display: San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 26.

[98] *Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco 1915*, souvenir booklet (Panama-Pacific International Exposition Company, n.d.), n.p.

[99] "Chief of Concessions Named; Frank Burt of Denver Chosen," *San Francisco Call*, October 17, 1912, 3.

fantastic along the midway, including giant ostriches, the "Bowls of Joy" with human figures sitting inside colossal cups, and a goliath Uncle Sam hawking souvenir pocket watches. This focus on fantastical facades in the Joy Zone resulted in a midway that was "girdled, crowned, gemmed, starred, streaked, arched and rendered a thing of joy and splendor…for each firm or individual employed has been given this general instruction, 'Go as far as you like, but be sure we outshine all the other fellows."[100]

Such official instruction resulted in a midway that was sixty-five acres of pure spectacle. A stroll through the Joy Zone revealed a jester's palace, a fanciful hippodrome, and colossal toy soldiers guarding the entrance to "Toyland," among others. Visitors to the Zone delighted in ten separate motion picture theaters seating four thousand; an aeroscope, an "aerial jaunt" in a giant pendulum; a submarine ride; reenactments of the Battle of Gettsysburg and the Dayton Flood; and working reproductions of Yellowstone National Park and the Panama Canal in miniature, where spectators could watch scaled ships pass through the locks of the Canal Zone while listening to lectures about points of interest.[101]

The most remarkable part of the zone, however, materialized from the imagination of Frederic Thompson, the amusement impresario of Luna Park. Thompson maintained his role as the director of Luna Park until 1912, when his lavish spending habits and propensity for drink led to his removal from his role as the director of the park and instead demoted to a "managing architect" by his creditors.[102] Stripped of his creative

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[100] *California Expositions, 1915: Chicago & North Western Line* (Chicago: Poole Bros., n.d.) n.p.

[101] Ibid.; Moore, *Empire on Display,* 8.

[102] Register, *The Kid From Coney Island,* 141.

control at Luna Park, Thompson then turned his attention to the Joy Zone and developed, in essence, his most fanciful amusement yet. Calling his creation "Toyland," Thompson proclaimed that this was the ultimate "playground for the human race."[103]

Two enormous toy soldiers flanked the entrance to Toyland, where children's toys grew to unfathomable heights. All the typical concessions of an amusement zone—a dance floor, eateries, hotel, and games—were fashioned in the style of children's toys or nursery rhymes. Old Mother Hubbard's cupboard was five stories high, with one floor serving as the main ballroom of the Zone, where couples twirled on a dance floor in the style of a giant plate and the orchestra played from the flute of a champagne glass. Outside, visitors explored Toyland to the tunes of a band who played beneath the shade of a giant mushroom. Visitors looking for something to do could try their hand at navigating Cobweb Lake, a pond covered with a lattice of climbing ropes.[104] Others could investigate the Giant's Kitchen of "Jack and the Beanstalk" or pay for a shave from a Syrian woman, but only if they climbed a rope into the barber's chair twelve feet off the ground.[105] If hungry, sightseers could dine at the "Toyland Sausage Factory," where patrons could pick out a live dog to eat, then a mechanical Chinese character would lead it to the "dog grinder" to transform it into a chain of wienies.[106] While some of

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[103] "Toyland Grown Up," *New York World*, September 28, 1913, 12.

[104] Kasson, *Amusing the Million,* 261–262.

[105] *California Expositions, 1915: Chicago & North Western Line* (Chicago: Poole Bros., n.d.) n.p.; Miriam Ho Ching, "The Panama-Pacific International Exposition Amusement Section: Culture, Morality, Gender, and Race," (M.A. thesis, San Francisco State University, 1991), 35. As quoted in Moore, *Empire on Display,* 7.

[106] Register, *The Kid From Coney Island,* 263.

Thompson's choices seem questionable, observers agreed: "only in some such fairyland as this could [one] ever be a child again."[107] The *New York World* concurred, asserting that Toyland was the ultimate place of play: "none can enter here who is not willing to play, for the G.U. [Grown Up] tin soldiers will guard the entrance against all those nasty modern people who keep on killing the fairies by not believing in them."[108] The *San Francisco Examiner* likewise gave their approval, suggesting that Toyland was "a playful, happy warping and twisting of the set relationships of life."[109]

Toyland signified the logical extension of the orientalist atmosphere embraced by the larger fair. Americans viewed orientalist architecture as the backdrop for the release of self-restraint, but the PPIE embraced orientalism in the structure of the main part of the fair to a much greater degree than previous world's fairs. With the main fair already constructed in orientalism, Thompson could take the logic of child-like wonder to its extreme, putting at monumental scale (a tradition of world's fairs) the emblems of childhood.

The Joy Zone suggested other nods toward the continued orientalism. Notably, the Joy Zone appropriated the narrative of Chinatown slummers. The fair had an official China exhibit (though it was only half completed when the fair first opened), but the Zone featured an "Underground Chinatown" exhibit, a stylized scene of a Chinatown opium den. A visitor to the exhibit described the scene: a white man

> knocks upon a door in company with a white woman and seeks admission to an opium smoking den within which is secreted an imaginary Chinese who demands

[107] Todd, *The Story of the Exposition,* 153.

[108] "Toyland Grown Up."

[109] "Close Watch Kept on Fair Concessions," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 26, 1913, 34.

> to know if policemen are present….When Chinese are not present among the visitors the slave-girl drama is enacted and a revolting scene in which women are inducted into slavery is made clear to the crowd.[110]

In this single scene, the design of this concession drew out the racial fears of Asian immigration upon which slumming tours drew. Additionally, they played into progressive-era fears of white slavery, or the largely false narrative of the forced prostitution of white women by Asian men.

A common concession that united the amusement zones, regardless of whether they were located within world's fairs or in independent amusement parks, was in the display of exotic peoples, set in villages that purported to reproduce authentic native life. True to the tradition set by the world's fairs, the PPIE reflected prevailing notions of Social Darwinism and human evolution. This premise could be seen in the organization of the fairgrounds, which "was a kind of ideological map in which progress was organized hierarchically and directionally" in which the design "functioned as a visual agent of regulation and social meaning, fixing nations and displays along spatial coordinates."[111] Amusement zones incorporated such displays into the culture of fun and play. Dreamland featured an "aborigine" village next to its display of "human oddities" in its "Big Circus Side Show."[112] Luna Park's exhibit of native Igorot (an ethnic group of

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[110] Chen Chi to Charles C. Moore, March 19, 1915, Underground Chinatown, carton 23, Panama Pacific International Exposition. In Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco,* 111. Markwyn also details the ways in which the local Chinese community fought back against these narratives. The exhibit ultimately closed because of fair organizers' fears that it might damage California's relationship with China, though it later reopened as "Underground Slumming" with much of the same staging and scenery to suggest that it was Chinatown.

[111] Moore, *Empire on Display*, 6.

[112] Michael Immerso, *Coney Island: The People's Playground* (New Brunswick: Rutger's University Press, 2002), 135.

the Philippines) had a "genuine American labor strike," when Luna managers purportedly refused to let them eat dog meat. Incensed, they closed up shop at Luna and moved to Dreamland.[113] The Zone likewise featured a host of ethnic villages, including villages of Indians, Mexicans, Africans, Australian "aborigines," and the Japanese. While ethnological exhibits still had a veneer of educational value, the *San Francisco Examiner* was baldly transparent in its assessment of the amusement value of the Samoan village, which it promised would "amuse you with the primitive ways of [the] semi-naked citizens." It continued, "[w]eird, too, are their dances, and one gets a glimpse of the life of a race thousands of years behind civilization."[114] Thus, at the amusement zones—just as in the guidebooks' accounts of the city as other-worldly—fantastic spaces framed modernity, juxtaposed with the seemingly primitive. Indeed, at Coney and the PPIE, it was the so-called primitive spaces that ultimately offered a release from the anxieties and conventions of modern life.

The Zone's fantastical architecture lent itself to racial exploitation. Frank Burt's insistence that the architecture of the Zone convey what concessions lay inside the buildings proved itself to be a popular means by which businesses expressed racism. One concession featured the giant smiling face of a sexless African, beckoning visitors into an enterprise dubbed the "African Dip," in which visitors took turns chucking a ball at an African American performer's head in order to dunk him in a barrel of water.[115] These

[113] "Igorottes at Coney Shift their Campfire," *New York Times*, August 10, 1905, 7.

[114] "Aztec Life is Truly Shown on the Zone," *San Francisco Bulletin*, February 23, 1915, 8.

[115] Lynn M. Hudson, "'This is Our Fair and Our State: African Americans and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition," *California History 87*, no. 3 (2010): 39.

types of skill-based games that included hitting a black person were certainly nothing new. Indeed, comedian Eddie Cantor described his experience working such a game at Coney Island. Beneath a glaring sign that read "Hit the Nigger—Three Balls for Five," Cantor would entice players by bouncing

> a few soft balls on the negro's docile dome until a crowd gathered…The negro would make a slurring remark to irritate some likely sucker in the mob. This sensitive soul, observing the ease with which I struck the negro's shiny pate, would pay for three hard balls to vent his spleen. He missed because the negro was an expert dodger, but his pride would not let him quit before he struck a blow. The negro kept dodging and insulting him, and the heroic pitcher of wasted balls would spend as high as five dollars in the hope of hitting his tantalizing target.[116]

At the amusement zones, whether located at the midway or in a self-contained park, the tradition of containing ethnic minorities and exploiting them for amusement held firm. The very architecture of the amusement zones served to ensure this. Placing "natives" in ethnological villages quarantined non-whites and proved to be a necessary step in transmogrifying "these 'others' into alien objects, 'spectacles' designed to evoke ridicule, contempt, or dread."[117] Moreover, the ethnological exhibits "cultivated at one and the same time, both a sense of the availability and containability of those societies represented," ensuring that the villages "successfully fostered a feeling of geographical proximity, while the sense of 'spectacle' was calculated to preserve the cultural divide."[118] While Toyland may have aimed to twist some of the "set relationships of life," the assessment of race relations in the amusement zones certainly did not. In a larger

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[116] Eddie Cantor, *My Life is in Your Hands* (New York, Harper and Brothers: 1928), 103.

[117] Nasaw, *Going Out,* 92.

[118] Annie Coombes, "Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities," *Oxford Art Journal 11*, no. 1 (1988): 59.

sense, even as Americans seemed in the midst of the vast cultural transition of modernity, amusement zones replicated the racial relations of old.

While the Joy Zone may have reflected few changes in portrayals of race, gender relations saw a decided shift. By the 1890s, women began to demand access to the growing commercial leisure culture, to which business owners obliged. Women's participation in commercial amusements facilitated the transition to *heterosociality*, wherein young men and women expected to spend time with members of the opposite sex outside of the bounds of courtship, a practice amusement zones facilitated. Moral reformers fretted about this informality between the sexes, given the sexualized atmosphere in which these interactions often took place and the emergence of the practice of "treating," whereby working class women—unable to afford amusement on their meager salaries alone—doled sexual favors to young men willing to purchase the woman's entrance fee, drinks, or other small treats.[119] Commercial amusements and even the streets themselves became zones where youths were free to express themselves—in particular their ideas about sexuality—in a more uninhibited way. Many of the new amusements in which American youth partook had a decidedly sexualized flair, the dance craze in particular. So-called "dance madness" swept up American youth at the turn of the twentieth century, and men and women rushed to dance halls to dance the latest steps, including the "hug me close," "the shiver," the "hump-back rag," and "the lover's

[119] For a more detailed explanation of treating, see chapter 3. See also Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900–1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*.

walk."[120] The public objected to the uncensored and explicitly sexualized nature of these dances, which often originated in working class and communities of color.

World's fairs and amusement parks alike capitalized on the dance craze by offering dance hall space within their parks, but salacious ethnographic-type dances on the midway similarly captivated Americans. Dancing girls from Cairo and Algiers populated world's fair midways and Little Egypt's *dance de ventre* made quite the sensation when she appeared in the "Street in Cairo" exhibition at the Columbia World's Fair in 1893.[121] Little Egypt's belly dance proved only to be the beginning. In a time of transitioning sexual values at the turn of the twentieth century, the fair midways "provided white Americans with a grand opportunity for a subliminal journey into the recesses of their own repressed desires."[122] While a more open sexuality within the context of amusements was thoroughly modern, the sexual thrill of Little Egypt's belly dance remained contained and enclosed within the park and doused with exoticism. Her "orientalist" yet contained sexuality posed a striking contrast to the ungovernable sexuality of unruly American youth.

Fairgoers might have enjoyed such sights, but locals worked to morally sanitize their communities to make them acceptable to middle class fair goers. One nervous fairgoer wrote to organizers of the PPIE in 1913 that while the sublime architecture might uplift the visitor, "with that vision, there comes another of the Red-Light way and the notorious Barbary Coast, where the lowest forms of vice and sin, show themselves, in all

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[120] Peiss, *Cheap Amusements,* 102.

[121] Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference,* 47; Rydell, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna,* 60.

[122] Rydell, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*, 67.

their hideousness and deformity."[123] Reformers targeted prostitution, and wielded their political clout to cleanse the selling of sex from the neighborhoods around the fairgrounds. Red-light laws declared nuisances the buildings where prostitution was thought to occur and mandated a building's closure for a year if the owner was convicted, essentially ending the brothels.[124] To craft the ideal city for the exposition, leaders in San Francisco cleansed at least those parts of the city nearest the fair, while fair organizers simultaneously provided a sanitized and controlled experience within their walls. By offering the opportunity for *heterosocial* amusement, amusement zones pressed against the boundaries of acceptable sexuality, yet the artificial atmosphere of the fair midways provided a sanitized and contained sexualized experience.

Modernity, Dis-Ease, and the Experience of the Amusement Zone[125]

Amusement zones, by their very nature, overturned the sense of order foundational to traditional social life. Amusement zones harnessed the power of architecture to create a space distinct from the outside world, such as using monumental architecture to mark their entrances, where passage through would transform the visitor.[126] To inaugurate visitors across the threshold, Luna featured a grand light display of crescent moons, Dreamland presented a vast sailing ship, and Toyland offered the

[123] Frederick P. Church, February 18, 1913, Liquor and Red-Light Abatement, carton 23, PPIE Bancroft Library. In Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco,* 174.

[124] See Markwyn chapter 5; see also Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900–1918* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), chapter 2.

[125] Hawthorne, *Peeps at Great Cities,* 55.

[126] Nasaw, *Going Out,* 86.

colossal toy soldiers. But entrances alone did not architecturally define spaces of play. Entertainment entrepreneurs maintained that the "carnival spirit is not spontaneous…[but must be] manufactured."[127] As "gigantic laborator[ies] of human nature," amusement zones consciously created spaces where people could "cut loose from repressions and restrictions, and act pretty much as they feel like acting—since everyone else is doing the same thing."[128] The amusement zones, as a unique space independent of the cares of the everyday world, were "designed to give the natural, bubbling animal spirits of the human being full play, to give people something new and fresh and unusual, and to afford them respite from the dull routine of their daily lives."[129] For Thompson, architecture should facilitate this psychological transformation. According to Thompson,

> [e]verything must be different from ordinary experience. What is presented to [the audience] must have life, action, motion, sensation, surprise, shock, swiftness or else comedy….[amusement zones should represent] a different world—a dream world, perhaps a nightmare world—where all is bizarre and fantastic.[130]

Amusement zones, in essence, became a stage-set upon which visitors could make themselves something anew. The architectural splendor of the amusement zones served to eradicate the distance between the East and the West; between fantasy and reality; between observing spectacle, and becoming the spectacle. James Gibbons Huneker characterized this experience as "topsyturveydom," where "the true becomes the grotesque, the vision of a maniac…Unreality is as greedily craved by the mob as alcohol

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[127] Thompson, "Amusing the Million."

[128] Edward F. Tilyou, "Human Nature with the Brakes Off—Or: Why the Schoolma'am Walked into the Sea," *American Magazine 94* (July 1922), 19.

[129] Thompson, "Amusing the Million."

[130] Frederick [sic] A. Thompson, "The Summer Show," *Independent 62* (June 20, 1907), 1460–1461.

by the dipsomaniac; indeed the jumbled nightmares of a morphine eater are actually realized."[131]

The act of looking and being a part of the crowd at amusement zones proved to be a main feature of their excitement. Even if one could not afford the rides, many came to Coney "merely for the joy of mixing with the crowds on the public street and catching the live sense of humanity and of good humor that is everywhere."[132] Coney Island's Steeplechase Park capitalized on this "topsyturveydom," muddying the lines between spectator and performer with its notorious Blowhole Theater. Visitors exiting the funhouse would get a shock as a sudden burst of air would blow off men's hats and blow skywards ladies' skirts. After facing the shock themselves, patrons then exited into a theater, where they would watch those following them experience the same treatment. The audience members

> shifted easily between being the object-in-motion on display and a member of the audience watching others assume their former place. Subjectivity at the amusement park—including its theaters—never allowed for the fulfillment of the voyeuristic desire without also subjugating oneself to others' voyeuristic gazes.[133]

The excitement of the amusement zone, thus, was both in seeing and in being seen, observing the spectacle and becoming a part of it.

This uneasy shifting between spectator and spectacle that existed in the amusement zones threatened the power inherent in the gaze. While the spectator was empowered through their gaze over the ethnic "other," the *Art Handbook* for the Pan-American Exposition in 1901 cautioned that visitors "Please remember when you get

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[131] Huneker, *New Cosmopolis,* 162.

[132] Edwin E. Slosson, "The Amusement Business," *Independent 57* (July 21, 1904), 134.

[133] Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland,* 37.

inside the gates [that] you are a part of the show."[134] This sentiment of the spectator actually *becoming* part of the show strikingly threatened the spectator's position of power through observation and detachment.

The subtle notion of threat to one's well-being was actually much of the allure of amusement zones. Indeed, this challenge to personal safety served as part of the excitement, with thrilling mechanical rides and disaster shows as prime attractions. The "manufactured stimulus" of bodily peril on the amusement rides provided the thrill, itself a cultural marker of modernity.[135] Amusement zones were thus not only realms of the "fantastic," but also everything that was "fearsome, horrific, [and] foolish."[136] Visitors to amusement zones could frequently expect "hair-raisers" and "thrillers" to be part of the experience.[137] At a time in which Americans were hyperconscious of urban dangers—particularly the hazard of accidental death by trolley and street car—rides such as

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[134] Sophia A. Walker, "An Art Impression of the Exposition," *Independent 53* (July 18, 1901): 1678, in Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[135] Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity,* 91. Amy Louise Woods in her history of lynching notes that "[u]rban life had certainly increased crime and had generated new forms of shocks and violence, such as industrial and traffic accidents, train wrecks, and riots. But, for the most part, Americans at the turn of the century…were more protected than ever before from the violence and misery of human existence. It was precisely because Americans no longer witnessed death, pain, or brutality in their everyday lives that sensational literature and images, which abounded with scenes of cruelty and suffering, so titillated and fascinated them. These media pandered to fears, desires, and impulses that modern life had otherwise restrained or forbidden. For instance, newspapers began to provide detailed and lurid accounts of executions only once the state began conducting them behind prison walls, away from public view. The less direct access people had to pain and suffering, the more they saturated their lives with images of it." In Amy Louise Woods, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 12.

[136] Brown, *Amazing New York*, 99.

[137] "A New Coney Island Rises,"; "New Chutes to be Opened July 14," *The San Francisco Call*, July 4, 1909, 27.

Dreamland's "Leap Frog Railway" capitalized on the anxiety of bodily harm. The "Leap Frog Railway" featured two passenger cars facing one another on a track, which would hurtle toward one another and appear to "meet head on in a hair-raising fashion."[138] Rather than colliding, however, one car would ascend a rail over top of the opposing car, thus "leap frogging" it. One account of Coney Island describes the feeling as the passengers anticipate the impending disaster, "realizing that their lives are in jeopardy, clinging to one another for safety, closing their eyes to the impending danger." But when

> [t]he cars crash into one another, 32 people are hurled over the heads of 32 others….They are suddenly awakened to a realization of the fact that they have actually collided with another car and yet they find themselves safe and sound…proceeding in the same direction in which they started."[139]

Thus, the impending danger of a trolley crash, which would have been a harrowing disaster of the real world, transformed into a delightful spectacle of near-disaster in the setting of an amusement zone. In essence, peril of disaster—coupled with its safe resolution—was at the heart of the thrill.

Amusement rides frequently transformed the machines of industry into the engines of amusement. Trains and trolleys transmuted into "scenic railways," and from the scenic railways roller coasters descended, which amusement zones featured prominently, as well as giant swings, toboggan rides, and Ferris wheels, among others. Above all, the *San Francisco Chronicle* opined, "[m]otion is the soul of all stunts."[140] One magazine writer noted in 1901 that the goal of the amusement zone was to "toss,

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[138] "A New Coney Island Rises."

[139] *From History of Coney Island* (New York: Burroughs & Co., 1904). In Koolhaas, *Delirious New York,* 59.

[140] "Chutes at the Beach Gives."

tumble, flop, jerk, jounce, jolt, and jostle" the rider "until your digestion is where your reason ought to be, and your reason has gone to who knows whither….If the same thing happened to you the next day on a trolley car, you would in all probability sue the company for a thousand dollars."[141] The *Chronicle* explained the logic of a ride:

> A 'ride' is a device bringing into operation the principle of the thrill. Its design is to unexpectedly shake one up a bit, to jerk one out of one's self, to stir the bile and set the liver going, to start new currents of life in body and mind. By stirring the blood the mind is shaken up into new activities. The whole psychology of the thrill is that the momentary intensity of sensation, the surprise and shock of the unusual, produce new currents of life that are stimulating and pleasurable.[142]

The early decades of the twentieth century were a profound period of innovation in amusement rides, particularly roller coasters. Coasters rose to new heights and moved faster than ever, with some concern that the new coasters perhaps even rocketed at speeds faster than the human body could handle.[143] Contemporary scholars connect the experience of personal danger in the thrill rides with the feelings of escapism that the amusement zones offered. The thrill ride, Tony Bennett suggests,

> addresses—indeed assaults—the body, suspending the physical laws that normally restrict its movement, breaking the social codes that normally regulate its conduct, inverting the usual relations between the body and machinery and generally inscribing the body in relations different from those in which it is caught and held in everyday life.[144]

In essence, the modern thrill proved freeing.

The thrill of danger, indeed, was at the heart of the experience of amusement zones. Amusement zones further relied upon putting spectators in proximity to peril

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[141] Guy Wetmore Carryl, *Munsey Magazine* (September 1901), 811–812.

[142] "Chutes at the Beach Gives."

[143] Cartmell, *The Incredible Scream Machine,* 117.

[144] Tony Bennett, "A Thousand and One Troubles: Blackpool Pleasure Beach," *Formations of Pleasure*, ed. Tony Bennett et al. (London: Routledge, 1983), 147–148.

through depictions of daring reenactments of epic battles or natural disasters. Coney, for example, featured a reenactment of the Battle between the Merrimac and the Monitor, occurring several times a day. Spectators could also witness a Japanese torpedo boat attack on the Russians at Port Arthur featuring an assault "from a hostile sleet on New York Harbor, bombarding the skyscrapers."[145] In Luna Park one could see "real warships manipulated by real men behind real guns in an attack on the skyscraper district of Manhattan Island."[146]

Pyrodramas proved especially popular. In the "Fire and Flame" pyrotechnic show at Luna Park, visitors could watch whole city blocks burn down, as authentic fire engines came to the rescue. Similar shows regularly occurred at other amusement parks. Interestingly, pyrodrama's popularity appeared at the same time that fire proved itself to be one of the most potent urban disasters. San Francisco itself was largely demolished after the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire, which left 521 city blocks in ruin, an area accounting for 98 percent of the most heavily populated parts of the city.[147] While spectators were physically and psychologically separated from the disaster shows, the express purpose of these sights was to "stir the blood."[148]

Notably, the signature tower of the PPIE seemed to hearken to the tradition of the pyrodrama. Fair historian Frank Morton Todd noted that the "Novagems" that gave the PPIE's Tower of Jewels its signature sparkle took on a different effect under the ruby

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[145] "A New Coney Island Rises."

[146] Ibid.

[147] Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco,* 6.

[148] "A New Coney Island Rises."

lights cast upon it in the evening. Calling the effect "the Burning of the Tower," Todd mused that the ruby lights

> seemed to turn the whole gigantic structure into a pyramid of incandescent metal, glowing toward white heat and about to melt. From the great vaulted base at the top of the sphere, it had the unstable effulgence of a charge in a furnace, and yet it did not melt, however much you expected it to, but stood and burned like some sentient thing doomed to eternal torment.[149]

While the "Burning of the Tower" may not have been quite the spectacle as the pyrodramas of Coney Island, the effect remains the same. Meant to dazzle the visitor with an impression of a tower on fire, the lighting effect of the Tower of Jewels was a startling spectacle of theatrical fire, drawing on twin traditions from Coney—pyrodramas and spectacular lighting.

Even as amusement zones incited the thrill of potential danger, they simultaneously assured patrons of their safety. "Fire and Flame" at Luna may have featured the destruction of a whole city block, but it was conducted under the direction of Henry W. Adams, who had twenty-one years' service with the New York Fire Department. Historian David Mayer notes that pyrodramas often featured a body of water as part of the set, which would provide an important safety net in protecting spectators by catching "falling fireworks, debris, and sparks," but also in setting a stage of separation between the spectacle and the audience, making the illusion "at once immediate and remote."[150] Newspapers accounts reassured readers that they would be "just as safe" at the Coney show as at the boardwalk at Atlantic City.[151] Guidebook author Mary

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[149] Todd, *The Story of the Exposition,* 345.

[150] David Mayer, "The Last Days of Pompeii: James Pain," in *Playing Out the Empire: "Ben Hur" and Other Toga Plays and Films, 1883–1908*, ed. David Mayer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 92.

MacDonald Brown assured readers that Luna was "essentially a place for mothers, wives, sisters, and children," and therefore safe.[152] Similarly, the Chutes in San Francisco was hailed as an "ideal place for mothers."[153] The *San Francisco Chronicle* took pains to note that at the Chutes at the Beach, "[t]he latest safety devices are provided in all these sensation-creating stunts, so that there will be no danger to the public."[154]

Ensuring patrons' safety at the ethnological exhibits was another matter entirely. The thrill of the ethnological exhibits derived not from fear of personal safety, but from insecurity in the race for civilization. Americans navigated these concerns about competing in the civilization race through a conviction in their superiority.[155] Ethnological exhibits frequently arranged their subjects in a manner that reflected anthropologists' beliefs about civilization and reaffirmed their faith that their culture represented the apex of human evolution.[156] Moreover, there was an unstated difference

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[151] "A New Coney Island Rises."

[152] Brown, *Amazing New York*, 10.

[153] "Novel Shows for Patrons of the Chutes."

[154] "Chutes at the Beach Gives."

[155] George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968).

[156] At the St. Louis exposition of 1904, for example, ethnological villages were arranged in an evolutionary sequence as dictated by the doctrines of Social Darwinism, a philosophy that held that Western Europe and the United States represented the apex of civilization, while other nations and cultures represented mere stages of evolution through which western cultures had already progressed. Spatial organization of ethnological exhibits was meant to visually demonstrate this progression: departments of anthropology displayed "representatives of all the world's races, ranging from the smallest pigmies to the most gigantic peoples, from the darkest blacks to the dominant whites, from the lowest known culture to its highest culmination." In J. W. Buel, *Louisiana and the Fair* (St. Louis: World's Progress Publishing Company, 1904), vol. 5, iii. See also Rydell and Griffiths.

in status between the exhibitor and the display: the exhibits were there to perform for the watching audience. Ethnic minorities appeared at the fair almost exclusively as exhibits, and were thus symbolically bound to the role of cultural object, rather than that of an engaging subject.[157]

When they did appear at the fair, their roles were circumscribed. Native Americans, for example, may have had a presence throughout the PPIE, but they were found most often in statuesque representation, which—like James Earle Fraser's popular "End of the Trail"—consciously romanticized them as a noble but dying race. In his characterization of Fraser's "End of the Trail," J. James cast the native character in seemingly hopeless terms: "alas! the trail is gone and only despair is his. So it has been with the Indian. His trail is now lost and on the edge of the continent he finds himself almost annihilated.[158] Moreover, the only living Indians at the fair were located in the amusement zone, where they were featured in a Wild West show and in an ethnographic Hopi village display entitled "Life of a Vanishing Race."[159] The peril of losing the race to civilization was navigated by reassuring white spectators of their place in the evolutionary hierarchy.

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[157] African Americans, for example, had only limited representation at American expositions. Significantly, Frederick Douglass and Ida B Wells protested this limited representation at the 1893 Fair, which resulted in some concessions from fair organizers, including a "Negro Day." The Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta in 1895 had a Negro Building featuring crafts and products completely designed and built by African Americans. See Nasaw, 74–79.

[158] J. James, *Sculpture of the Exposition Palaces and Courts* (San Francisco: H.S. Crocker, 1915), 34.

[159] Benedict, *The Anthropology of World's Fairs,* 52.

Conclusion

Thus, the amusement zones framed modernity much as the city guidebooks did, as a thrilling experience set amidst a space that overwhelmed the visitor in spectacle. Just as the guidebooks characterized the city as the release from social convention, the amusement zones were understood as spaces freed from the staid constraints of the everyday world, wrapped in the aesthetics of the Orient. However, they offered the modern world in a contained way. At the very moment the world seemed in flux and the American social landscape remade, amusement zones assured a control over cultural others, even as they utilized the architectural language of far-flung lands. Given orientalist American notions of the Far East as free from civilized convention, amusement spaces accordingly tailored their architectural environments. The prevailing western beliefs about the east at the turn of the century—that peoples of the east were less prone to rationality and reason, were more greatly governed by the body and emotion and were the antithesis of modernity—underscored the architectural language of orientalism in the amusement zones, even as amusement zones were posited as thoroughly modern spaces freed from the constraints of the past. Amusement zones played on Americans' desire for modern thrills by capitalizing on the perception of danger inherent in mechanical rides, pyrotechnic and disaster shows, and the ethnological exhibits. While the thrill may have derived from the perception of danger, amusement zones continually reassured patrons of their safety. With regard to amusement rides, patrons were assured that while the danger may look real, in the end it was all spectacle and stagecraft. They were truly safe all along, physically protected from bodily peril in the rides and pyrodramas, and secure evolutionarily at the apex of the hierarchy of civilization. In the

end, amusement zones themselves proved to be a wild ride, capitalizing on the peril of danger but reassuring Americans that they were safe in the modern world after all.

CHAPTER 4

ON THE STREET AND ON THE STAGE: CENSORSHIP, SPACE, AND MODERNITY

Some Americans, deeply disturbed by the transformations wrought by modernity in general and especially threatened by the changes in sexual norms and behavior, mapped their anxieties about modern life onto commercial amusements. Amusement parks, dance halls, and later the revue emblematized the larger cultural changes occurring in the cities, changes that moral reformers believed starkly illustrated that the old boundaries between public and private life were collapsing. While reformers sought to preserve traditional sexual morality, by the 1920s, the sexual revolution that began in ethnic working-class neighborhoods and commercial amusements at the turn of the twentieth century had spread to white middle-class America. Moreover, by the 1920s, a profound cultural division had emerged within the United States, between those who embraced the new sexuality and those who did not. Modern life, it seemed, had ripped the nation apart.

A powerful movement emerged opposed to the changes brought by modernity, especially those related to sex. Moral reformers began sounding the alarm about sex on the street at the turn of the century (itself connected to the emergence of commercial amusements), and by the early decades reformers successfully wielded the power of the state in cleansing the street of sex, including shepherding legislation to ban red light and vice districts. By the 1920s, even so-called legitimate commercial amusement such as Broadway theater shows were overturning traditional nineteenth century norms regarding

public sex, as chorus girls appeared in greater degrees of undress and were far more sexually familiar with patrons. The sexual revolution that began in the streets now arrived on the legitimate stage, as Americans paid for titillating shows reformers deemed closer to prostitution than respectable entertainment. Thus, the 1920s both witnessed greater degrees of sexuality performed onstage, even within so-called legitimate theater, and the bitter backlash as reformers fought back, trying to legislate a return to older cultural mores.

A particular logic framed reformers' case for cleaning up the city and the stage: namely, physical proximity to perceived vice shaped reformers' understanding of morality. Reformers interpreted the spaces of the larger city, its streets, and various forms of commercial amusement venues within this framework of proximity, and their attempts to regulate each stemmed from this logic of physical proximity. Thus, for reformers, controlling the street went hand in hand with controlling modern urban amusements.

Sex on the Street and the Rise of the Moral Reformers

The turn of the twentieth century was indeed tumultuous, challenging nineteenth century morality, as we have seen in our examination of urban night life. While previous chapters have discussed how Americans sought to mediate the ultimate effects of modernity on their lives—by picking and choosing the parts of modern culture they liked, namely reveling in the thrill of modern life even as they sought to reassert existing dynamics of power—some Americans rejected such thrills, especially those involving sex. At their core, moral reformers lost their faith in the inevitability of cultural cohesion; the many social upheavals of modernity in the city seemed to tear apart the

fabric of American culture. In particular, the religious foundations that had guided middle class Americans in the previous century seemed under assault as the physical boundaries that had separated the so-called morally respectable from the purportedly immoral broke down under the weight of modern life. A cross-sectional group of moral reformers—some conservative, some progressive, some Social Gospel—pointed out the failings of modern life and sought alternatives to the social changes modernity portended. Regardless of their specific objection to modern life, those opposed to modernity projected this sense of dis-ease onto the city, the place where modern life was most visible. In particular, regardless of their group affiliation or ideology, reformers identified the encroachment of sex onto the public street (and later onto the so-called legitimate stage) as one of the key dangers of modern life and thus multiple, multi-faceted reform efforts targeted the visibility of sex. For the moral reformers, regulation was the cure to modern life, legislating space back to older traditions.

In New York and San Francisco in the first decade of the twentieth century, those opposed to modernity primarily targeted the visibility of sex on the street, starting first with campaigns against prostitution but then spreading to commercial amusements, such as dance halls and theater. In the nineteenth century, prostitutes had plied their trades openly within "vice" or "red light" districts in urban centers and rural towns alike, including the Tenderloin in New York and the Barbary Coast in San Francisco. Such separate districts delineated these neighborhoods from the more respectable neighborhoods of the city, giving "police better control over prostitution," but also

keeping "it off the main streets—and out of public view."[1] But at the turn of the century, as Americans spent more time on the street and as slumming took middle class white women and men into the neighborhoods of vice, reformers interpreted the vice districts as posing a greater moral hazard than before. Reform groups endorsed a flurry of legislation aimed at curbing prostitution and ultimately eliminating vice districts altogether. A major victory was won in Iowa in 1909, when the state legislature put forward the Injunction and Abatement Act, a law that targeted brothel owners by closing their property for a year if convicted. Such legislation proved critical in wiping out red light districts across the country.[2] New York effectively eliminated the city's brothels by 1910, considerably earlier than much of the rest of the nation. In San Francisco, support for the act grew stronger until January 1917, when the Assistant District Attorney filed actions against every brothel in San Francisco under the auspices of the Red-Light Abatement Act, and by February local police had raided and ultimately closed the Barbary Coast brothels.[3]

San Francisco's efforts to eliminate its dedicated vice district resulted in driving prostitution underground, scattering it throughout the city, and making individual prostitutes more difficult to identify.[4] Similarly, in New York City, since no official red-light district existed after the first decade of the century, prostitution was likely to be

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[1] Bonnie Ripp-Shucha, "'This Naughty, Naughty City': Prostitution in Eau Claire form the Frontier to the Progressive Era," *Wisconsin Magazine of History 81*, no. 1 (Autumn 1997): 34.

[2] Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 89–90.

[3] Ibid, 253. Similar red-light abatement laws existed in forty-one states by 1919.

[4] See Clement, *Love for Sale*.

found in any of the commercial leisure districts, including near the legitimate Broadway playhouses.[5] While the legitimate stages of Broadway were largely considered morally acceptable—such as vaudeville—theater broadly had a more contentious history, as there was a long connection between the theater and illicit sexual activity. In the nineteenth century, brothels were often located in theatrical districts and theater owners reserved space in the audience for prostitutes to ply their trade. Some brothels were even physically connected to theaters, operating in close proximity to one another (with the brothel located directly behind the theater) and feeding one another clients.[6] High class prostitutes were known to reside in the infamous "third tier," and a few brothels even built catwalks directly connecting the third tier to the brothel next door.[7] The associations between the theater and illicit activity continued into the twentieth century. In the temperance journal the *Union Signal* of 1906, Josiah Leeds expounded on the danger of the theater, suggesting that he had interviewed boys in prison who attributed their lives of crime to "improper companions and immoral girls" they had met at the theater.[8]

New York City was the national hub of theater at the end of the nineteenth century. While in the 1880s and 1890s the theatrical district crowded around Union Square, by the turn of the twentieth century the theater district had moved uptown, to the

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[5] Ibid, 208.

[6] Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, Co., 1992), 111–112.

[7] John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1990), 218 and Clement, *Love for Sale,* 86.

[8] Josiah W. Leeds, "The Theater Route to Crime," *Union Signal*, Aug. 23, 1906, 4.

intersection of Broadway and Forty-Second Streets. Ultimately this became the center of entertainment in New York, and the bright lights of Broadway came to symbolize entertainment not only in the city, but for the whole United States.[9] But even in the twentieth century, theater had not lost its associations with vice. One critic contended in 1905, that the new "white-light" district around Times Square was "nothing less than a re-incarnation of the old time dive and dance halls, only that they appear in a new dress, richly furnished with dazzling lights inside and outside."[10] While some were openly critical, New York did aspire to at least a veneer of respectability. In 1909 the governor signed a bill making it a misdemeanor to "present any obscene, immoral, or impure drama, play, exhibition, show or entertainment, which would tend to the corruption of youth or others."[11]

Unlike their East coast counterpart, San Francisco could not boast an entertainment district as renown as Broadway. Typically, legitimate theater in San Francisco and other cities featured classical and imposing architecture as a way to designate itself as a purveyor of elite respectable entertainment.[12] But even the legitimate theater shared space with illicit entertainments. By the early years of the twentieth century, San Francisco's Union Square neighborhood had become part of the San Francisco Theater District, located conveniently adjacent to the Barbary Coast. Along

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[9] Robert W. Snyder, "Vaudeville and the Transformation of Popular Culture," in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 133–146.

[10] Quoted in Gilfoyle, *City of Eros,* 247–248.

[11] Martin, "Purity in Literature and Art," *Union Signal*, 1909, 334.

[12] Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City,* 98.

the district's streets one could find a "combustible mixture of sex and other entertainments," where "[b]rothels, hot-sheet hotels, and gambling dens were intertwined with semi-respectable dance halls, theaters, cabarets and restaurants."[13] Here, a visitor could find all manner of affordable thrills. Between 1908–1910 alone, San Francisco police chief Jesse B. Cook listed some forty resorts, cabarets, and saloons on a three-block section of Pacific Street in the heart of the Barbary Coast.[14]

Theaters, however, were not the only commercial amusements reformers sought to curtail. In San Francisco, reformers found mixed success in their efforts to reform the dance halls. Sexually suggestive ragtime dances—the "turkey trot," the "bunny hug," the "grizzly bear"—and ragtime music now spread across the United States as a craze that originated amidst the African American community in the dance halls of the Barbary Coast.[15] Advice columnist and moralist Laura Jean Libbey warned girls that "[d]angers lurk at every turn" in the public dance halls, where "the scum of society—the gangster, the idler, the drunkard," and manipulators of girls lurked.[16] For Libbey and other moral reformers, the danger of an evening at a dance hall was the dangerous proximity it posed to prostitution, for in the dance hall "fiends" might "spy out the innocent young girl" and tempt "her to take her first drink," ultimately leading her to succumb to prostitution.[17]

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[13] Peter C. Hennigan, "Property War: Prostitution, Red-Light Districts, and the Transformation of Nuisance Law in the Progressive Era," *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities 16,* no. 1, 124.

[14] Ibid, 124.

[15] Ibid, 76.

[16] Laura Jean Libbey, "The Dangers that Threaten Young Girls," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 29, 1912, 10.

[17] Ibid.

The Civic Department of the California Club (CDCC) likewise connected dance halls to the moral specter of prostitution. For the CDCC, at the heart of every "white slavery" tale was "[a]lways the dance hall, the nickel dance, and youth's perfectly natural craving for amusement."[18] Other organizations sought to abolish the dance halls of the Barbary Coast altogether as a means of protecting youth.[19]

San Francisco reformers gained a victory in 1913 when the Police Commission adopted resolutions in favor of limiting dance halls' ability to sell liquor.[20] This resolution did not go into effect citywide, but rather affected the district bounded by Washington Street, Grant Avenue, Vallejo Street and the bay, or the Barbary Coast neighborhood. In part, this measure reflected the reality that many women employed by liquor-selling establishments also engaged in prostitution on the side.[21] Reformers again saw victory in 1915, as they fought to cleanse the area surrounding the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition fairgrounds of saloons and brothels. In this case, civic leaders

[18] Helen Dare, "Counteract 'Dance Hall' Lure with Clean Fun for Youthful," *San Francisco Chronicle,* January 19, 1912, 7. The issue of the corrupting influence of dance halls on young girls appears with relative frequency in Helen Dare's columns. See also "Safer Safety for the Girl Who Dances," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December, 17, 1910, 7; "Up Against the Municipal Dance-Hall Question Now," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 13, 1913, 7; "This Little Girl Ran Away From Her Home, and Then—," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 9, 1914, 7. Concern over "white slavery" was related to an international anti-human trafficking movement in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. In the United States, the White-Slave Traffic Act of 1910 made it a felony to move women across state lines for the purposes of prostitution.

[19] "Municipal Dance Hall Will Open to Compete with Barbary Coast," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 11, 1912, 7. See also "Interesting Discussions Projected Among the Week's Events," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 9, 1912, 45.

[20] "More Regulations Given the 'Coast," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 18, 1913, 4.

[21] "Doings of the Women's Clubs," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 31, 1913, 7.

complied enthusiastically in the hopes it would draw more tourists to the fair, but also to increase the profitability of alcohol sales inside the fairgrounds.[22]

Much of reformers' desire to cleanse the street and commercial amusements of sex derived from changing sexual mores among American middle-class youth, especially women. Author Julian Street in a 1913 book on New York tourism noted it was becoming difficult to tell the difference between respectable women and those who were not. He marveled at the "great hodge-podge of people in which respectable young married and unmarried women, and even debutants dance, not only under the same roof, but in the same room with women of the town."[23] In essence, he suggested, the old social boundaries separating respectable middle-class women from prostitutes had broken down amidst the zeal for commercial amusements.

Participating in commercial leisure culture cost money, which put women at a distinct disadvantage, due to their lower wages. To enjoy urban amusements, women helped develop a practice, "treating," that encouraged men to pay for women's excursions but, at the same time, increased women's dependence on men. Women who participated in "treating" gifted small sexual favors, such as kisses or petting, to men who furnished them trips to commercial amusements or other trinkets. Women who treated adamantly separated their activities from those of common prostitutes, who traded sex for money in a commercial exchange. Instead they saw themselves as "charity girls." The notion of "charity" "established [these] women as generous and protected them from the assertion that they sold or even bartered things like sex and affections that should never

[22] See Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco,* chapter 5.

[23] Julian Street, *Welcome to Our City* (New York: John Lane, Co., 1913), 10–11.

be assigned monetary value."[24] Charity girls also used city spaces in radical ways. Fearing for their reputations and concerned about being associated with prostitutes, charity girls utilized the anonymity of the city to shroud their illicit acts. Indeed, many of their sexual encounters occurred in public space. Charity girls could not take their dates back to their neighborhoods, and they rejected going to a hotel with their date, as they associated hotels with prostitution. Charity girls started a revolution in sexual mores, which had spread to middle-class culture by the 1920s. Indeed, premarital sex rates among young white women rose to 26 percent in the 1910s, essentially doubling the rate from a decade before. In the 1920s, this rate doubled again, to around fifty percent.[25] In effect, a sexual revolution was underway which could be seen on the streets and in commercial amusements. In modern America, the old boundaries of public and private threatened to collapse, and moral reformers sought to wield the power of legislation to protect those boundaries.

A Dangerous Artfulness: Proximity as a Framework for Moral Reform

Those who regarded the city as a site of disorder were disturbed not only by the cultural changes they witnessed there, but also by the very shape and use of city space. Recoiling from what they perceived as a disordered modern world, moral reformers set out to regulate the public street in order to protect the private home. Reformers unleashed a tidal wave of reform energy, and ideas about space framed their arguments. President of

[24] Ibid, 49.

[25] Ibid, 73, 17. These rates reflected women who engaged in premarital sex, though the studies noted that most women who engaged in premarital sex did so with their fiancés, so within the parameters of courtship.

the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) Frances Willard, for example, thought that improving society required making "the whole world Homelike."[26] Indeed, others framed their desire to reform the city out of their fear that the private family home was in peril: "In the city," Josiah Strong declared, "the home is disappearing…"[27] The *Report on the Social Evil* of 1910 similarly lamented that American youth were "gravitating toward the city, [and] away from the home."[28] Temperance radical Carrie Nation fostered a movement of militant "Home Defenders."[29] Reformers thus framed morality within the space of private domesticity, in opposition to the supposedly polluting influence of the modern public urban environment.

As they saw it, reformers' work involved defending the integrity of the street by controlling the material and experiences available on it, and a censorship movement grew alongside urban reform groups. According to reformers, moral hazard resulted as the boundaries between public and private collapsed. In his survey of recreation in New York in 1911, Michael M. Davis lamented that as dwellings grew increasingly crammed with people in crowded cities, the home ceased to have the space necessary to conduct family life. The public street, then, served as a site for functions that would have previously been private. Davis noted that

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[26] Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 105–149. See also McGerr, 77–94.

[27] Josiah Strong, *Religious Movements for Social Betterment* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1900), 17.

[28] Committee of Fifteen, *Report on the Social Evil of 1910* (New York: Putnam, 1912), xiv.

[29] Carry A. Nation, *The Use and Need of the Life of Carry A. Nation* (Topeka, KS: P.M. Steves and Sons, 1909), n.p.

> [i]n a crowded city there is human pressure upon the street hardly less great than that within the home; offshoots from the street arise to meet this pressure, —the candy shop for the children, the ice cream and soda parlor, the moving-picture show, the vaudeville, the dance hall, the saloon. To these places people pay to go, partly to seek positive pleasure, partly because to remain within the straits of the home or the moil of the street means positive pain or discomfort.[30]

Davis thus argued that the traditional distance between the public street and the private individual family home threatened to collapse under the pressures of urban life.

Ensuring morality, therefore, necessitated keeping moral hazards off the street. To clean up billiard rooms and saloons (both associated with vice), the Pacific Society for the Suppression of Vice proposed that it be unlawful for such businesses to be "open to public view" on the street.[31] The New York branch of the WCTU sought to censure images they considered female exploitation on the street; they complained "to the police commissioners concerning life size pictures exhibited on fences" and successfully had the images removed.[32] In 1902, the WCTU passed a national resolution against women on billboards, suggesting that "the innocence of youth, the purity of middle life and the sanctity of age are alike shocked and degraded by illustrations of the female figure unclothed, or partially and suggestively clothed, upon bill boards and in other public places."[33] Similarly, in their 1880 campaign against the *Police Gazette*—a salacious news magazine—the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice (NYSSV) objected

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[30] Michael M. Davis, *The Exploitation of Pleasure: A Study of Commercial Recreations in New York City* (New York City: Published by the Department of Child Hygiene of the Russell Sage Foundation, 1911), 5.

[31] *Annual Report of the Pacific Society for the Suppression of Vice and Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Animals,* 1898–1899, 54.

[32] Harriet S. Pritchard, "Purity in Literature and Art," *Annual Report of the WCTU of New York*, 1898, 192.

[33] Emilie Martin, "Purity in Literature and Art," *Union Signal*, August 7, 1902, 10.

to the accessibility of these papers, suggesting their availability on the street was a moral hazard. Thus, from the outset, reformers outlined obscenity in terms of its accessibility to the street, rather than its specific topic or intrinsic characteristics.[34]

Reformers frequently characterized vice as threatening to physically infiltrate respectable spaces. The Reverend W.J. Tucker at an annual meeting of the NYSSV "called attention to the fact that [obscenity dealers] are using the very organizations that good people have built up for the defense and security of society…for carrying on their nefarious work."[35] Another took pains to note that "[a] sexton of a church manufactures his licentious photographs in a room separated from the parish school *only by folding doors.*"[36] Reformers fretted when vice seemingly pressed against the sanctity of the home. Reports by vice investigators noted that brothels often shared neighborhoods with crowded tenements, and "[a]t times children were playing in front of doors behind which prostitutes plied their trade."[37] This same account painstakingly noted the number of children living in the neighborhood where prostitution was observed, some 425 children under the age of sixteen.[38] Lest some believe that a separated vice zone ensured the safety of their neighborhoods, the Reverend John P. Peters of New York opined to his congregants, "You doubtless think you are safe. Don't be too sure. It's getting close, it's

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[34] See Alison M. Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873–1933* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[35] New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, *Second Annual Report*, 1876, 3.

[36] New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, *Sixth Annual Report*, 1880, 8.

[37] George J. Kneeland, *Commercialized Prostitution in New York City* (New York: The Century Co., 1917), 27.

[38] Ibid.

creeping up to you. Within a week word has come to me of things you wouldn't like me to tell you about here that are very close to you."[39]

In New York, the efforts of the NYSSV evidenced the significance of proximity to sexuality in the moral policing of the street. NYSSV leader Anthony Comstock effectively provides a case study to understand moral reformers' logical framework. In 1887, Comstock and the NYSSV led a raid on the art gallery of Herman Knoedler—one of the city's leading art dealers—because of a window display that Comstock suggested posed a moral hazard to those on the street. Comstock and a contingent of several officers descended upon the gallery after Knoedler had placed in the window photographic reproductions of several French paintings. Comstock maintained that the photographs placed the morals of youth in danger, and this argument was not without precedent. In the late nineteenth century, the WCTU had appealed to artists "not to make nude portraits" after artist Jean-Francois Millet had noticed a number of youths examining his work in a gallery window, too intently for his comfort.[40]

Comstock's further demonstrated his commitment to winnowing out those he considered to be smut peddlers even among the high art community in 1906, when Comstock learned of the activities of the Art Students League. The league had been distributing a pamphlet, *The American Student of Art*, through the mail, which contained a number of drawings of nude figures. After 19-year-old receptionist Anna Riebley gave a copy of the art school pamphlet to Comstock when he entered her office, she was subsequently charged with "giving away, showing, offering to give away, or having in

[39] John P. Peters, *New York Sun*, October 1901.

[40] Emilie Martin, "The Power of Literature and Art," *Union Signal*, Sept. 6, 1900, 4.

her possession a certain obscene, indecent, filthy, and disgusting book."[41] Riebley retorted that she considered the work to be "pure art" and argued that she could view it without becoming degraded.[42] Ultimately, Comstock confiscated and destroyed 2,500 copies of the offending pamphlet, proclaiming his righteousness:

> We are justified by a dozen court decisions in seizing the catalogues. So long as they keep their nude pictures *in the studios* where they belong, we shall not molest them. Such a work of art shut up in a Salon or studios is one thing, but such a work of art *prowling around in the public street or in the home* where it may suggest impure thoughts, is another thing. Wild animals are all right in their cages, but when they break out, they must be suppressed.[43]

That the material was photographic reproductions of original art pieces exposed the contours of Comstock's distinction between acceptable art and obscenity. While nudes painted on canvasses were not necessarily obscene, the photographic reproduction of such images made these paintings accessible to the street and thus pornographic. According to this logic, while the imagined audience of the art gallery—adult, affluent, and native-born whites—would be presumed to be knowledgeable about art, the masses of people thronging the streets of New York were assumed to lack this knowledge and sophistication and thus, through their eyes the images could only conjure the licentious.[44]

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[41] New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, Arrest Records, 1906. As quoted in Anna Louise Bates, *Weeder in the Garden of the Lord: Anthony Comstock's Life and Career* (Lanham, N.Y.: University Press of America, Inc., 1995), 178.

[42] "Comstock Makes Swoop," *New York Tribune*, 3 Aug. 1906, as quoted in Elizabeth Bainum Hovey, "Stamping Out Smut: The Enforcement of Obscenity Laws, 1872–1915" (PhD. Diss., Columbia University, 1998).

[43] "Art Students Angry," *New York Tribune*, 4 August 1906. Italic added.

[44] Additionally, since photography at the turn of the century largely functioned to reproduce images of life rather than serving as an artistic medium unto itself, Comstock may have reasoned that the transition of the form from the artistic medium to the medium of strict representation also degraded its artistic value.

Ultimately, Comstock and the NYSSV made the same legal argument in both cases: the work could be morally uplifting art only if it was not on the street.

To Comstock, where in the city these images appeared mattered less than their exposure to the public. Comstock noted that while Knoedler's studio was located on Fifth Avenue, a space in New York City associated with the upper class, Comstock announced that "Fifth Avenue has no more rights [to display obscene images] in this respect than Centre Street or the Bowery."[45] Here Comstock indicated that he placed moral value on these two distinct locations—one representing upper class legitimate entertainment and the other, the lowbrow commercial entertainment of the immigrant working-class. However, he appears to suggest, when the offending material reached the street, the distinction stopped. "[L]et the nude be kept in its proper place and out of the reach of the rabble," he said.[46]

Space and Spectacle: The Theatrical Revue

Within the urban context of growing informality of sexual mores and the increasing availability of sex on the street in all corners of the city, entertainment entrepreneurs throughout the 1910s sought to provide sexualized entertainment, competing with one another to offer the most thrilling experience. This trend toward sexualized commercial entertainment further amplified in the 1920s; audiences simply expected to see more sexualized entertainment than in earlier decades.[47] Moreover,

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[45] Heywood Broun and Margaret Leech, *Anthony Comstock: Roundsman of the Lord* (The Literary Guild of America, 1927), 223.

[46] Ibid, 224.

Prohibition—the ban on alcohol enacted by Congress—transformed urban entertainment districts. While legal dry venues (meaning those that did not sell alcohol) flourished in the 1920s, so too did illegal entertainments. Venues that flouted Prohibition not only served alcohol, but also tailored their entertainment to include more risqué material. Movie theaters, amusement parks, and even dance halls abided the law, and their entertainment was oriented toward the youth market. However, other entertainments, like "[b]urlesque houses, taxi dance halls, and speakeasies increasingly functioned as refuges for an older crowd in search of more exciting adventures."[48] In turn, these illicit entertainments then affected commercial leisure overall, leading to a climate of greater permissiveness during the decade.

These entertainments were not only more likely to cater to vice through their sale of alcohol, but they continued an association with sex work. In her book on the history of treating and prostitution, historian Elizabeth Clement notes that a significant shift occurred in New York sex work in the 1920s, as sex work became "more about entertainment than about sexual services."[49] One of the emerging institutions that sold sexualized entertainment were taxi dance halls. Born out of the tradition of dance halls, unlike their more mainstream peers who cleaned up their association with vice and complied with prohibition, taxi dance halls operated on the fringes of commercial amusement, charging ten cents a dance, admitting only male patrons, and functioning as

[47] John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 171–238.

[48] Clement, *Love for Sale,* 177.

[49] Ibid, 178.

one of the most visible new forms of sex work.[50] Thus, during the 1920s, legitimate entertainment, which was itself becoming more salacious over time, and actual sex work converged, and the two forms of entertainment increasingly become more of the same.

This trend toward sexualized performance could be seen most clearly in the revues. Theatrical revues originated in New York City, but they quickly spread to other cultural capital cities such as San Francisco. Unquestionably the leading revue showman of his day, Florenz Ziegfeld owned and produced the *Follies,* and was the originator of the undraped girl show on Broadway. While the *Follies* and its later imitators often prominently featured scantily clad women, the revues were generally classed as at least moderately respectable entertainment. Moreover, Ziegfeld spent mightily to imbue them with the glamour necessary to be seen as something reasonably akin to legitimate theater. The *Follies* debuted in 1907, just one year after the NYSSV's raid on the Art Students League, and Ziegfeld perfected his revue form throughout the 1910s. The *Follies* included comedians, singers, and skits, but it was a glorified girl show, featuring chorines who Ziegfeld claimed to be the most beautiful and glamorous in the United States. Ziegfeld's form of lighthearted entertainment coupled with the suggestive nudity of attractive young white women set amidst spectacular, larger-than-life settings was adopted across the country.

The first revues in San Francisco coincided with the development of the New Orpheum theater between Stockton and Powell Streets on O'Farrell Street (one block south of Union Square).[51] By the 1910s, the theater-going public of San Francisco began

[50] Clement, *Love for Sale,* 179–193.

[51] *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 9, 1909. Similar ads appear all throughout the month.

clamoring for such productions. Revues featured lighthearted takes on the news, accompanied by music and chorus lines. Albert de Coureville of London's Hippodrome reflected on the style of the show: the revue was meant to be a high energy show, "for it is fatal to allow the interest to drag or the fun to drop," where the performer must "grip and hold the audience from the first moment to the last." Thus, the performers should have a "quick, snappy, fireworky [sic] style."[52] The form took off in the 1910s, but by the middle of the 1920s the revue was more popular, so popular in fact that *San Francisco Chronicle* dramatic critic Bide Dudley—who covered the national theater scene—complained in 1924 that New York City faced the danger of being "over-revued." Not only did Broadway boast the inexorable *Ziegfeld Follies*, but also the *Greenwich Village Follies*, George White's *Scandals*, the Schubert brothers' *Passing Show*, and numerous smaller shows such as *Keep Kool, Kid Boots,* Hassard Short's *Ritz Revue*, and the suggestively titled winter show *Get Hot*. Another show, *Charlot's Revue*, was possibly suggestively titled as a reference to "harlot."[53]

Because of the popularity of the revue form on Broadway, a number of San Francisco theaters began their own productions. As the *San Francisco Chronicle* observed, "[a]bout every music hall in town and even in the provinces has a revue," the form was popular enough by 1914 that the *Chronicle* speculated new ones were launching weekly.[54] By the 1920s in San Francisco, revue theaters included the

[52] *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 23, 1914.

[53] Bide Dudley, "New York Is Said to Be Over-Revued," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 28, 1924.

[54] *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 26, 1914.

Alhambra, the Palace, the Hippodrome, the Oxford, the Capitol, the Curran, and the Columbia.[55] Like their New York counterparts, San Francisco staples, such as Will Morrissey's *Music Hall Revue*, featured music, comedy, and an elaborately costumed chorus line. The *Music Hall Revue* in particular boasted of thirty "Midgie Miller's dancing beauties."[56] In addition to home grown revues, San Francisco received touring companies of New York shows. In 1911, for example, Ziegfeld's iconic annual *Follies* revue arrived lock, stock, and barrel with the complete cast, chorus, and production intact.[57] George M. Cohan's *Revue of 1916* was transported to San Francisco's Alcazar with its "$40,000 wardrobe," "all of the fourteen kaleidoscopic scenes," and replete with "30 Cohan Dancing Beauties" as well as "20 Cohan Dancing Men."[58]

Much of the appeal of the revue style in both New York and San Francisco was that it pushed the boundaries of acceptable theatrical performance, namely through racy humor and skimpy costuming for the chorines. *Chronicle* critic Bide Dudley opined that the Al Jolson-backed *Ritz Revue of 1924* was "so off color it would make a black bear blush." He continued that "there doesn't seem to be a clean moment in the show" and contended that it needed to be "cleaned up enough to permit of the presence of patrons who have old-fashioned self-respect." He finished his invective with confirmation that

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[55] *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 26, 1914; San Francisco Chronicle, April 13, 1911.

[56] *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 14, 1926.

[57] In San Francisco, the Ziegfeld Follies played at the Columbia Theater. 1911 marked the first year Ziegfeld's revue played west of St. Louis. See "'Follies' Arrive at the Columbia," The San Francisco Call, April 16, 1911, 63; *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 13, 1911; "This Week Ends 'Follies' Fling," The *San Francisco Call*, April 23, 1911, 30.

[58] *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 30, 1917.

"mire" belonged in the "pigpen," and thus presumably not on Broadway.[59] In 1926, Dudley again turned his resolute gaze against the Schuberts, calling their *A Night in Paris* revue "tawdry," and "merely vulgar."[60] Given the public expectations of revue content, critic George C. Warren had to make special note that the hula dance performed by chorines in the *Hello Hawaii* revue at the Granada in San Francisco in 1926, was "a very modest hula" though the girls did perform in "the latest beach togs."[61] When the Schuberts' *Gay Paree* played at the Curran in San Francisco, reviewers noted that the "platoons of lovely girls" performed "in nothing much but their natural beauty."[62] Not to be outdone, the *Cohan Revue* playing at the Alcazar produced the skit "Dr. Booberang" and a *Chronicle* critic noted that in the 1929 *Marcus Glorified Revue* "the audience is forced to exert little imagination" as the chorines' costumes were quite small.[63]

Trends toward greater nudity were even more amplified in New York City. While reviewers frequently noted the increasing trend toward nudity in most revue performances, some theater critics exempted Ziegfeld—whose *Follies* would emerge as the premiere revue of the 1910s and 1920s—from this trend of commercializing "fleshy

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[59] Bide Dudley, "New York Is Said to Be Over-Revued," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 28, 1924.

[60] Bide Dudley, "Brunettes and Blondes In Merry War," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 8, 1926.

[61] Tog was a slang term for clothing. George C. Warren, "Granada to Keep Denny All This Week," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 29, 1926.

[62] "Schuberts' Revue 'Gay Paree' Coming to Curran," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 8, 1928.

[63] J.V.H., "Marcus, Glorified Revue Shares Honors," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 27, 1929; *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 16, 1917.

charms."[64] *Theatre Magazine* editor Arthur Hornblow opined that while Ziegfeld was "the originator of the undraped girl-show," since then "other managers, realizing the value of nakedness as a box-office draw, have 'improved' on his idea, so that to-day [*sic*] naked girls appear not only as parts of inanimate stage groups…but actually dance and march about the stage in a perfect state of nature."[65] The Shubert brothers owned a number of theaters in direct competition with Ziegfeld, and biographer Foster Hirsch speculates that J.J. Shubert began his yearly revue "as a ruse to inject nudity onto the revue stage."[66] The *New York American* claimed that prior to the Shuberts' *Artists and Models* revue of 1923, "[n]ever before in an American revue has a similar degree of nudity been obtained. Before, virtually unclothed performers have stood immobile or been shaded in dim lights—here they marched and danced in the full glare of the footlights."[67] While some exempted Ziegfeld from this larger trend toward increasing promiscuity, others, however, condemned Ziegfeld as part of the problem. A Baptist reverend in 1920 opined that the *Ziegfeld Follies* "can accurately be described as the world, the flesh and the devil," and contended that "a few more clothes would smother and kill the 'Follies.'[68]

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[64] Arthur Hornblow, "The Editor's Uneasy Chair," *Theatre Magazine* 44, no. 306 (Sept. 1926): 7.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Foster Hirsch, *The Boys from Syracuse: The Shuberts' Theatrical Empire* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 155.

[67] *New York American*, August 21, 1923, as quoted in Hirsch, 155.

[68] "Pans 'the Follies,'" *Variety* 57, no. 8, January 16, 1920, 15.

In addition to greater amounts of nudity, conventions of staged nudity likewise changed. Indeed, producers were innovating ways to bring performers closer to patrons than ever before. Vaudeville entrepreneurs Henry Harris and Jesse Lasky first experimented with connecting audiences and performers in an upscale revue setting in 1911. Their *Folies Bergère* theater featured "an expanding stage [which] slid out over the orchestra pit and put the performers in hand shaking proximity to the first-row patrons."[69] In the "Salad" scene in the *Follies* of 1919, set designer Joseph Urban crafted a unique stage atmosphere:

> A false proscenium narrowed the stage width and height, and the placement of the salad bowl upstage shifted the focus towards the back of the stage thereby suggesting a kind of inner sanctum and creating a sense of intimacy. Unusually, the show opened in pre-set; the audience as they took their seats were immediately invited into the scene.[70]

Reviewers noted how the scenery heightened the intimacy of the show.[71] In 1923 J.J. Shubert began his *Artists and Models* yearly revue, which featured a runway in the Winter Garden theater to bring performers closer to patrons. That same year, Shubert declared he would only hire chorus girls willing to bare their breasts and walk down a runway into the audience.[72] Hornblow related that in the 1925 *Vanities* "during

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[69] Jesse Lasky with Don Weldon, *I Blow My Own Horn* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), 84.

[70] Ibid, 82-83.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Doris Eaton Travis, *The Days We Danced: The Story of My Theatrical Family from Florenz Ziegfeld to Arthur Murray and Beyond* (Seattle: Marquand Books, 2003), 62.

intermission some dozen nicely proportioned chorus girls, not too generously clothed, parade through the audience, acting, ostensibly, as ushers."[73]

The popularity of the cabaret as an entertainment medium further connected audiences and performers. Cabarets grew out of the concert saloons of the late nineteenth century, where the boundaries between performance and sexuality were blurred. Cabarets featured a single dance floor, on which both performers and patrons would dance, sometimes even together. This permitted a greater informality between the patrons and performers, as "customers themselves could not escape becoming involved in the action and spontaneity of the moment."[74] In a theatre, expressiveness was limited primarily to hired performers. In the cabaret, audiences and performers were on the same level, and thus expressiveness spread to the audience as well.[75] Several of the major revue producers built cabarets on the rooftops of their theaters—exposing to the outside world the style of salacious performance that was being conducted inside the revues—including Ziegfeld's *Midnight Frolic* in 1915 atop the New Amsterdam theater, the Shuberts' *Palais de Danse* atop the Winter Garden, and the *Century Promenade* atop the Century Theatre in the mid 1920s.[76] Over fifty establishments billing themselves as cabarets opened in New York City over the course of the 1910s.[77] New York cabarets drew at

[73] Arthur Hornblow, "Mr. Hornblow Goes to the Play," *Theatre Magazine* 57, no. 294 (September 1925), 15.

[74] Erenberg, *Steppin' Out,* 124.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Hirsch, *The Boys from Syracuse,* 155.

[77] Erenberg, *Steppin' Out,* 120–121.

least some of their performers from San Francisco cabaret, and historian Lewis Erenberg notes they brought a number of suggestive dances with them, including ragtime dances that originated in the African American culture of the Barbary Coast.[78]

As cabarets intentionally put performers and audiences in closer proximity, some of the performance numbers were designed specifically to encourage the informal relationship between performers and spectators. In the "Dance and Grow Thin" number at the Century Roof, chorines donning cardboard letter boxes on their costumes circulated among the audience while the lead performer sang the song, "Letter Boxes." Management distributed paper and pencils to the men in the audience so they could write personal notes to the female performers, the *Times* gushing that "you might dash off a note inviting the mail-box to dance with you after the performance."[79] In the "Venus on Broadway" number at the *Palais Royale*, chorus girls tossed balloons to the audience while they sang:

> If you catch the ball
> And throw it back to me,
> Then I'll know, you see,
> That you're my affinity.[80]

Thus, revues and their more intimate rooftop counterparts, the cabaret, collapsed not only physical boundaries between performers and patrons, they also collapsed the psychological boundaries, hinting that performers and patrons could share intimacy.

Prior to the introduction of the cabaret and other staged interactions between the performers and the audience, the revue as a moderately respectable theatrical medium

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[78] Ibid, 76.

[79] "The Century Roof Opens Its Doors," *The New York Times*, January 20, 1917, 9.

[80] Erenberg, *Steppin' Out,* 216–217.

abided by an adherence to staged boundaries. Ziegfeld confined his revue by the notion of the "fourth wall," the imaginary boundary dividing the stage from the audience. When a performer broke the "fourth wall," she self-consciously performed her sexuality for the spectator. For those already uncomfortable with the greater degrees of nudity performed onstage, the increased physical and self-conscious accessibility of female performers would likely have been interpreted as akin to the scandal of prostitution.

The 1920s had become quite the wicked decade indeed. Over the course of the 1910s and especially the 1920s, legitimate entertainment forms like the revues grew more licentious over time, at the very same moment that actual sex work became more about entertainment than sex, and thus stage entertainment and sex work increasingly appeared to be one and the same. For moral reformers already uncomfortable with the growing informality of American sexual mores, the convergence of sex work and the stage confirmed their worst nightmares: the sexual revolution that began on the street had now shifted to legitimate middle-class culture via the stage. For reformers, the time to strike back was now.

Sex on the Stage: Reforming the Theater

The rise of the *Ziegfeld Follies* paralleled the work of the reform organization the NYSSV. The NYSSV's bust of the Art Students League occurred in 1906 and the *Follies* first premiered the following year, establishing a precedent of scantily clad beauties that would reach its zenith in the 1920s and inspiring imitators along the way. Anthony Comstock continued to helm the NYSSV through the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, but after his death in 1915, the NYSSV found itself under the

leadership of John Sumner, who continued the mission of the organization through the 1920s.[81] Indeed, Sumner was at the helm of the NYSSV when it went after the revues in New York City by wielding the threat of censorship and legislation during a decade that seemed, to reformers, almost wholly out of control.

A shocking scandal erupted in 1921 when young Hollywood ingénue Virginia Rappe died four days after she was removed from a San Francisco hotel party hosted by film star Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle. The case was reported nationally. Multiple narratives of Rappe's death offered by various national newspapers revealed differing accounts of what ultimately her untimely death signified. But one storyline imaged the hotel room party in which her demise occurred as an "orgy" and placed the blame for her death squarely at the feet of Hollywood, labeled as one of the lecherous cities of the West. Much as the travel guides of the turn of the twentieth century envisioned New York and San Francisco as sites of modernity, the growing popularity of film by the 1920s meant that Hollywood was now "[s]tanding in as modernity's scapegoat." The public blamed the city for "luring the nation's daughters too far outside the home."[82] William Randolph Hearst—who had his own axe to grind against Arbuckle—carried the story in his newspapers, whose circulation that year reached an estimated one in four families.[83]

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[81] John Sumner continued to serve as the Executive Secretary of the NYSSV until his retirement in 1950, after which the organization effectively disbanded.

[82] Hilary Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2013), 184.

[83] Ibid. Hallett speculates that Hearst proffered such negative coverage of the Arbuckle case to retaliate against Adolph Zukor—head of Paramount Pictures—who Hearst believed was damaging the career of his mistress and aspiring actress, Marion Davies.

While the details varied by the account or witness, the broad contours of Rappe's day were clear. Rappe arrived Sunday morning in San Francisco with her manager and a friend and went to the St. Francis Hotel. There she joined Arbuckle and several others in a booze-filled hotel room for a day of dancing and carousing. Several hours later, someone from the party called down to the lobby requesting assistance because "a woman had become hysterical and was tearing off her clothing."[84] She died some four days later. One witness suggested that Arbuckle had raped her shortly before the incident, causing the injury that ultimately lead to her demise. The San Francisco Police Department drew up charges against Arbuckle after his character had been slaughtered by the national press. The case against Arbuckle was heard in three separate trials; the first two resulted in hung juries but the third acquitted him. The case was a scandal that gripped the nation. National newspapers enthusiastically and sensationally reported the unfolding events of the investigation and trials. Thus, the case against Arbuckle became a spectacle. The public's fascination with the case stemmed from both how it appeared modernly macabre and also because moral reformers could point to it as a sign of what was wrong with the modern world. In particular, reformers could argue that the case highlighted the real dangers faced by young women.

The case ultimately led to growing public sentiment in favor of censorship and legislation to prevent urban debauchery. Indeed, the fact that the grisly case occurred in San Francisco likely bolstered the city's support for their local censorship officer.[85]

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[84] "S.F. Booze Party Kills Young Actress," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 10, 1921, 1–2.

[85] San Francisco did already have a censorship officer, Peter A. Peshon of the Police Morals Squad as early as August of1914.

When the coroner's jury had convened to hear the city's case, they not only recommended that Arbuckle be indicted for manslaughter, but also that local law enforcement "take steps…so that San Francisco shall not be made the rendezvous of the debauchee and gangster."[86] While not directly connected to the theater community, the unexpected death and unparalleled media frenzy surrounding Virginia Rappe's demise was a warning shot across the bow of the entertainment industry and fostered support of the moral reform movement. In the Rappe case, moralists attacked "Hollywood as the scoundrel that had unleashed the evils associated with modernity," but the moral reformers who sought to regulate the New York and San Francisco stages were invigorated, attacking the increasing fleshiness of shows like the revues and the collapsing physical distance between performers and spectators.[87]

One sign of growing strength of moral reformers was that by 1925 moral reformers' patience with the salaciousness of Broadway theater was growing thin. The racy elements of Broadway aroused enough ire by 1922 to institute a "play jury" as a means of avoiding an outright censorship board. This play jury was a panel of 200 citizens under the auspices of the New York Commissioner of Licenses and was charged with the responsibility of reviewing plays thought morally questionable and recommending changes to make them acceptable. But by 1925, the play jury had not once been called to convene, despite the fact that many thought Broadway continued in its path toward indecency.[88]

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[86] "Rid San Francisco of Debauchees, Says Coroner's Verdict," *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 September 1921, 2.

[87] Hallett, *Go West,* 195.

Recognizing that an explicit sexual connection between his performers and the audience could raise the ire of reform groups, Ziegfeld claimed that "the *Follies* does not, and never did, cultivate personal intimacies [such as between performer and audience]. The glorification of the human body…is in harmony with every world acknowledged canon of artistry."[89] Similarly, Ziegfeld took pains to ensure that the sexualized atmosphere of the spectacle not incriminate his performers. Former *Follies* chorus girl Marjorie Farnsworth insisted that "[t]he top-hatted [*sic*], stage-door Johnnie, his arms laden with American Beauty roses, belonged, Ziegfeld said in no uncertain terms, outside, not inside, the stage door and woe to the girl who violated this rule." According to Farnsworth, a chorus girl could not "be glimpsed from any point closer than the first row."[90] Despite Ziegfeld's precautions, his shows—as well as those of the competitor reviews on Broadway—grew more scandalous with each passing year.

The Broadway theatrical seasons from 1925–1927 proved increasingly shocking, and rumors of an official vice censor loomed large. Broadway revues had grown so scandalous they were now barely distinguishable from their salacious distant cousin, burlesque. In 1925, John Sumner and the NYSSV sought to shut down Minsky's, a famous local chain of burlesque houses.[91] Brought to trial, Minskys' lawyer argued that

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[88] "State Censorship Issue Once More Grows Acute," *The New York Times*, 22 February 1925, 16.

[89] Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., rough draft of article, as quoted in Geraldine Maschio, "The Ziegfeld Follies: Form, Content, and the Significance of an American Revue," (Ph.D Diss., University of Wisconsin Madison, 1981), 182.

[90] Marjorie Farnsworth, *The Ziegfeld Follies*, (New York: Putnam, 1956), 43.

[91] Rowland Barber, *The Night They Raided Minsky's: A Fanciful Expedition to the Lost Atlantic of Show Business* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960).

the uptown revues were not dissimilar from Minsky's in the amount of flesh displayed and thus unless Sumner was planning on pressing similar charges against the revues, he had no claim to shut down Minksy's. Significantly, Minsky's won the trial.[92]

The New York press emphasized scandal, perhaps to exploit the surging public craving for details on salacious Broadway, though many activities on Broadway seemed to be growing more wicked by 1926. Revue producer Earl Carroll hosted an exclusive after-hours party at his theater in February 1926 for his most exclusive guest clientele. To the amusement of the guests at the party, Carroll rolled a bathtub onstage, into which a chorus girl climbed nude. The tub was then filled with wine, from which guests began filling their glasses to drink.[93] Two days later, Carroll testified before the grand jury regarding violation of the Volstead Act. Ultimately, Carroll was convicted of perjury and sentenced to a year and a day in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary.[94] While Carroll had not been arrested for his display of female nudity, or for his wild party antics, these became the central focus of the perjury case and obsessive news and tabloid coverage. A media storm surrounded Carroll in the months of his trial. Tabloids and newspapers alike reveled in the reportage of his transfer to the penitentiary and his subsequent emotional breakdown while in prison.[95]

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[92] Ibid.

[93]"Earl Carroll Must Stand Trial," *The New York Times*, May 12, 1926, 30; "Earl Carroll Case Postponed a Week," *The New York Times*, May 18, 1926, 28.

[94] "Carroll Sentenced to a Year and a Day," *The New York Times*, June 4, 1926, 1.

[95] "Earl Carroll Taken to Hospital in Coma," *The New York Times*, April 14, 1927, 1.

Only a few months after Carroll's bathtub fiasco, Ziegfeld declared suddenly in 1926 that he was "[r]enounc[ing] fleshy display for properly draped beauty," and suggested that the days of nudity on Broadway were numbered.[96] Claiming that "imitators" had degraded his vision of the revue form, Ziegfeld set out not only to remove traces of nudity and "vulgarity" in his own shows, he also worked with Sumner and the NYSSV to remove such elements from all Broadway productions. Important to note, however, is that Ziegfeld only condemned the use of nudity on the stage as it had developed in the hands of *other* Broadway producers such as Earl Carroll and the Shuberts. Ziegfeld claimed that his while his shows were artistic, the rival producers had defiled his vision, the "later exploiters" of the style accomplishing only "coarseness."[97] Ziegfeld vowed not to be classed with what he considered such a low form of entertainment and took a firm stance against the use of nudity, decrying the "baring of breasts" and "absolute nude figures dancing around the stage."[98]

Carroll's arrest and trial occurred as part of a larger New York City crackdown on theater vice. The passage of the New York Wales Padlock law in 1927 granted local police the authority to arrest and prosecute those associated with the production of immoral drama. This law empowered police to "make arrests at the conclusion of the performance, taking the manager, producer, and principle actors into custody forthwith."[99] This precipitated the arrests of theater producers and actors involved with

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[96] J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play: 'Glorifying the American Girl,'" *The New York Times*, June 25, 1926.

[97] "Ziegfeld Fights Nudity on Stage," *The New York Times*, June 26, 1926.

[98] "Churches to Help Purge the Stage," *The New York Times*, February 8, 1927, 12.

Mae West's *Sex*, William Francis Dugan's *The Virgin Man*, and Arthur Hornblow, Jr.'s adaptation of *The Captive*. Carroll's show was likewise audited for obscenity in February 1927, though the police attending the *Vanities* attested that there was "no evidence" of "any nakedness sufficient to cause arrest under the law."[100] The lack of evidence against Carroll likely resulted from his self-censoring of his own shows after his arrest and conviction.

The Wales Padlock Law, however, seemed to take direct aim at the revue form. The law significantly banned all "indecent, lewd, blasphemous or vulgar performances," and specifically noted the revue as the cause. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on an editorial in Variety, noting that "[t]he dirt play is an evolution of the dirt musical revue." The law expressly sought to control the use of space within the theater, requiring that "[a]ll performances shall be confined entirely to the stage of the theater or place of amusement, and no runway or parade in the aisles will be permitted, and no performer will be permitted to leave the stage and mingle with the audience either in aisles or boxes."[101] Thus, the reformers' fear of collapsing spatial and sexual boundaries had been safely legislated against; the modern mixing of patrons and performers and the blurred boundaries between stage and sex would cease.

San Franciscans likewise grew increasingly perturbed at the growing salaciousness of the stage by the middle of the 1920s. The *San Francisco Chronicle*

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[99] "Night Clubs Warned of Raids By Police in Clean-Up Drive," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1927, 1.

[100] Ibid.

[101] "Theater Padlock And Dirt Shows Are Criticized," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 24, 1927, 94.

complained bitterly in 1927 about the "smut and filth often accepted as an essential part of the present-day theater."[102] San Francisco had its own theater morality code in place by the early 1920s, though it seemed to be less aggressively applied than in New York. The raciest shows were often those that originated in New York and then toured major cities across the States. When *The Passing Show* played at San Francisco's Columbia Theater in July of 1925, a local minister objected. The minister claimed that while the "living chandelier" scene had been reviewed by the Police Department to ensure its compliance with local censorship codes, the minister protested that the official censor had been duped, as the company performed an alternatively less scandalous (and decidedly more clothed) version of what they would perform when the revue officially opened. The censor's solution was to attend the regular performance with a minister in tow.[103] While the scene may have initially caused a "rumpus," ultimately the show continued without change.[104] Even after the major New York City crackdown, George C. Warren detailed the "swaying figures; glistening flesh; [and] heaving hips" when the Schubert revue *Night in Spain* debuted at the Curran Theater in 1928. He described a "good deal of nudity, and the dance of the Midway done in all its fleshy glory" by some ten chorus girls "trying to out-wiggle one another."[105]

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[102] "Producers Again Looking to 'The Road,'" *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 15, 1927, 9.

[103] "Nudity Faked For Censor, Says Pastor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 3, 1925, 9.

[104] "Comedians, Girls Make Local Hit," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 6, 1925, 16.

[105] George C. Warren, "Schubert Ace Revue Big, Bedazzling," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 25, 1928.

The San Francisco Police Department did have an official censor, Sergeant Peter A. Peshon, who represented the department on the city's morals commission.[106] Peshon wielded his authority with some regularity, ordering supposedly "immoral" plays closed every few years between 1912 and 1925.[107] However, Peshon failed to shutter other plays he considered immoral, such as in 1927 when a court order prevented his closing of the Green Street Theater.[108] He retaliated by arresting (twice) the entire cast of "The Married Virgin," a play judged by city authorities "as too naughty to be legal" and in violation of city ordinance 959, which prohibited "indecent performances."[109] Thus, just as in New York, San Francisco strengthened its censorship office during the 1910s and 1920s. While not nearly as effective as their East coast counterpart in eliminating vice on the stage and bringing theatrical producers to heel, San Francisco shared with New York a revived interest in censoring modern performance.

Ultimately, however, moral reformers could not stop the march of modernity, as modern sexual mores had spread from the cities to broader American culture in the 1920s. Thus, the resurgence of reformers' enthusiasm for censorship during the decade can be interpreted as an anxious bid to turn back the clock on modernity. While they saw some successes with their efforts to censor the New York and San Francisco stages,

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[106] "Miss Miller City Censor," *San Francisco Call*, July 24, 1912, 7.

[107] See, for example, "Show Censored, Yes, And Censor Is Made Happy," *San Francisco Call*, December 5, 1912, 2; "Police Suppress 'Wild Birds' Play," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 26, 1922, 17.

[108] "Police Fail to Halt S.F. Drama," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 17, 1927.

[109] "Court Ban Fails To Foil Officers," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 21, 1927, 1; "Citizen Jury May Pass on Fate of Play," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 20, 1927, 64.

ultimately, the damage was already done. Despite their best efforts, Americans were modern.

Conclusion

Despite moral reformers' efforts, a profound transformation was underway. Reformers fought the slow encroachment of sexuality into the spaces of the street and closer proximity to the public, but the precedent set by commercial amusements at the turn of the century ultimately led in the 1910s and 1920s to a new generation of theatrical performance—the revue—that collapsed the physical and psychological distance between performers and spectators. Moreover, the very foundations of middle-class morality had shifted. While moral reformers had sought to control American society—and by extension modernity—in part through the regulation of leisure, by the 1920s, the body, the street, and the city seemed increasingly out of control.

CHAPTER 5

THE BLACK MAN AND THE GLORIFIED GIRL: BERT WILLIAMS, THE *ZIEGFELD FOLLIES,* AND SEXUAL IMAGINATION IN THE INTEGRATION OF BROADWAY

It is perhaps an irony of history that one of the bleakest times for African Americans—the 1890s—produced one of America's most enduring black performers. Egbert Williams—known professionally as Bert—was a man of many firsts. Williams was among the performers in Broadway's first all-black show; the first black performer to star in an integrated cast on Broadway; the first major black star to be featured in a motion picture; and one of the first black recording artists. As a path breaking black performer, Williams came to fame as part of a minstrel duo with his partner George Walker. After Walker's untimely death, however, Williams joined the cast of the *Ziegfeld Follies,* a show remembered mostly for its white chorus girls; their synchronized kick line dancing, extravagant albeit scanty costumes, and legendary beauty came to epitomize glamour and opulence.

Within this context—the "glorification" of idealized white femininity that characterized the *Follies*—Bert Williams broke the color barrier to become the first black person to integrate Broadway. The idealization of white femininity—coupled with the sexualized nature of the *Follies* that included the increasing use of white female nudity within the show—put Williams, a black man, in a position fraught with racial and sexual tensions. While racial violence in the United States escalated since the end of the Civil War, especially in the South, 1892 marked a high point in the lynching of black men. In

her history of lynching, Amy Louise Wood contends that it was no accident that the height of lynching came at the end of the nineteenth century, just as Americans were beginning to struggle with the transition to modernity. "Racial violence surged at the turn of the century," she suggests, "not because…communities were cut off from modern institutions and customs but because they were undergoing an uncertain and troubled transformation into modern, urban societies."[1] This rapid metamorphosis of American life produced cultural shifts that alienated many Americans, including the erosion of traditional forms of social and political authority. Women's increasing access to the public world of the street challenged men's traditional power over them, and the growing assertiveness of African Americans contested historic white racial dominance. At this historical moment—the turn of the twentieth century—instances of lynching rose.

The racial reasoning underlying lynching purported that the rape of white women by black men justified the vigilantism. The supposed "champions" of white female purity argued that the sexual transgressions of black men were an offence that warranted murder and, in some cases, gruesome mutilation, which could include the castration of the victim, a potent symbol of black men's perceived dangerous sexuality.[2] Despite this raging social tension over black men's sexuality in relation to white women, Williams'

[1] Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 5.

[2] On the history of lynching, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Grace Elizabeth Hale *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999); and Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006). On sexual violence against black men, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 69–86.

inclusion in the *Ziegfeld Follies* met with little, if any, formalized resistance. In fact, Williams headlined the show, and was one of the greatest audience draws over the course of his nearly ten-year run. Given the heightened racial and sexual tensions prevalent in American society in the early years of the twentieth century—particularly after black boxer Jack Johnson's remarkable win over the white former champion Jim Jeffries and his very public liaisons with white women—one might find the *Follies* a rather strange venue to serve as the vehicle for the integration of Broadway.

As this chapter will demonstrate, Williams' stage characterization and the use of theater space itself was specifically structured to assure white audiences that Williams was not a sexual threat to the female performers. Williams' comedic construction within the context of the *Follies* undercut his masculinity and posited him as an inept and fundamentally emasculated male, thereby circumventing concerns over his physical nearness to the "Glorified Girls." Williams' performance within the show was consciously constructed to mediate the potential sexual threat of black male sexual access to white women through Williams' symbolic emasculation. This symbolic emasculation functioned as a means to mitigate the social anxieties surrounding modernity.

The Minstrel Tradition and Social Subversion

Bert Williams integrated Broadway in 1910 through his headlining performance in the *Ziegfeld Follies*, but he was already famous prior to signing with Ziegfeld. Much work has been done on Bert Williams and his key role in the integration of the Broadway stage, as well as work regarding the *Ziegfeld Follies* and the cultural implications of the Glorified Girls. This chapter, however, explores the significance of Williams' sharing of

the stage with white women given the sexual implications of the white female chorus girls of the *Follies*.

While Williams would eventually find immense success in vaudeville and in black theater in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he first perfected his craft and his comedy with partner George Walker through "continuous performance" at San Francisco's Mid-Winter Fair in 1894.[3] At the fair, Williams and Walker found themselves performing alongside dancing girls and ethnological exhibits of native Africans in the fair's midway. Ironically, the Kansas-born Walker and Riverside, California-transplant Williams played "authentic" Africans in the Dahomey ethnological exhibit after the Dahomeyans' ship was delayed.[4] In San Francisco, Williams and Walker honed their comic craft, with Walker frequently playing the dapper straight-man role to Williams' bumbling ne'er-do-well and setting up a dynamic of Walker providing the foil to Williams' comic relief.[5] Following their stint at the Mid-Winter Exposition midway, Williams and Walker took their minstrel show on the road, performing first as a duo on the black vaudeville circuit, and then later in wildly popular shows of their own.[6]

Williams and Walker became the faces of American minstrelsy at the turn of the twentieth century, but the tradition of minstrelsy had roots in an earlier era. White

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[3] Eric Ledell Smith, *Bert Williams: A Biography of the Pioneer Black Comedian* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1992), 11–16.

[4] Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 24.

[5] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 18.

[6] These include Sons of Ham (1900), In Dahomey (1901), Abyssinia (1906), and Bandanna Land (1907).

performers in blackface developed minstrelsy in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Blackface minstrelsy exploded in popularity in the North beginning in the 1830s as national debates over slavery grew heated. At its heart, minstrelsy performance "borrowed" material from antebellum black culture, and collapsed the complexities of black life into simple, non-threatening stereotypes. More than that, minstrelsy dehumanized black life, positing that slavery was "amusing, right, and natural."[7] The minstrel tradition was a white supremacist "racial fantasy" that reinforced the common white belief that blacks were unfit for freedom.

From this tradition emerged two set types of slave presentation, the plantation slave who was characterized by a distinct dialect and tattered clothing, dubbed a "Jim Crow," and the city slave, a slick, fast-talking dandy deemed a "Zip Coon."[8] White minstrel performers depicted African American culture as intellectually simple, and African Americans themselves as lazy and buffoonish. This presentation was dangerous enough to the African American social cause that Frederick Douglass declared white blackface actors to be "the filthy scum of white society," equating them with thieves, "who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their fellow white citizens."[9]

A particular costume—blackface—characterized minstrel performance. To dress in this costume, actors used greasepaint or burnt cork to darken the face and hands.

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[7] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.

[8] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 11.

[9] Lott, *Love and Theft,* 15.

Frequently, the costume also featured thick, red-painted lips and outlandishly oversized, tattered, or inappropriately ill-fitting clothing. Actors added to the costume through their performance, utilizing exaggerated facial features such as bugged out eyes, a drooping frown, and speaking in heavy, ludicrous sounding dialects.[10] In essence, white male performers smeared with greasepaint or burnt cork adorned themselves in outlandish costumes and performed songs, comedic dialogues, and skits in an effort to present African American culture as more ape than human.[11]

Minstrelsy won immense popularity before the Civil War, and following the war some African Americans sought to capitalize on minstrel performance by marketing themselves as "genuine," "real" or "bonafide" "Negroes." Differing from the white tradition, African American performers did not, however, as a rule blacken their faces. Black minstrel performances—often dubbed "plantation shows"—grew in popularity throughout the 1880s and 1890s and offered a voyeuristic peek into the white supremacist fantasy of plantation life in the Old South.[12]

Williams and Walker, however, used their popularity to combat racial types and made a self-consciousness of their method integral to their performance. They sought to engage with and ultimately undermine racism from within the social fiction of the minstrel character. The duo recognized that

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[10] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 11.

[11] Lott, *Love and Theft,* 6. Lott's work complicates the strict interpretation of minstrelsy as a wholly racist endeavor. Rather, he suggests "that the audiences involved in early minstrelsy were not universally derisive of African Americans or their culture, and that there was a range of responses to the minstrel show which points to an instability or contradiction in the form itself." Lott, 15.

[12] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 22.

> "the Negro" being performed and constructed via white blackface minstrelsy was an explicitly racist and politically unnatural fiction and so they engaged the form primarily to erase that fiction *from within*.[13]

Significantly, the Williams and Walker minstrel shows intended to subvert. While they adopted the classic blackface aesthetic, they did so with intention. They sought to make "the break from minstrelsy in the language of minstrelsy," that is, to "transcend the minstrel tradition of representation not by rejecting it but by engaging it."[14] By performing the caricature himself, Williams could take control of that representation by injecting humanity into the performance. Williams reflected, in a 1916 interview, on his desire to give his blackface character a greater depth:

> I try to portray the shiftless darky to the fullest extent; his fun, his philosophy. Show this shiftless darky a book and he won't know what it is about. He can't read or write, but ask him a question and he'll answer it with a philosophy that has something in it.[15]

In his portrayal of the caricature, Williams sought to embody the physical stereotypes of blackface; he wore exaggerated costuming and makeup intended to suggest buffoonery. However, there was also a radical critique inherent in his performance; as a black performer who donned the blackface mask, Bert Williams "appropriated from whites the very right to perform and symbolically possess 'the Negro.'"[16]

Williams' continuation of the blackface tradition—and in particular the speech patterns, mannerisms, and strict conformity to the clownish caricature—allowed him and

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[13] Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darky": Bert Williams, Black-On-Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 6.

[14] Ibid, 27.

[15] Quoted in Mabel Rowland, *Bert Williams: Son of Laughter*, repr. 1923 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 94.

[16] Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darky,"* 5.

his partner George Walker to utilize their comedic routines for social critique. By working within the minstrel character as white America wanted to see it played, Williams created the space to bring in insurrectionary substance—veiled and indirect as it must have been to white audiences. As historian Karen Sotiropoulos observes, "[b]y engaging with stereotyped imagery," Williams and Walker "continually reaffirmed they were not that which they performed."[17] Williams and Walker employed, according to Sotiropoulos, "hokum," or the "putting on the minstrel mask just enough to be seen and heard," and enacting "fictive types onstage to debunk racial mythologies offstage."[18]

In several of their shows, the duo provided alternatives to the dominant, racist portrayals of African Americans. For example, at one point in the Williams and Walker show *The Policy Players*, Williams' character impersonates the "Ex-President of Haiti." As per usual, Williams played a typical comedic routine in which a scheming trickster thinks he's duping an unsuspecting rube, only to have the rube pull a fast one on him in the end. However, the part is an allusion to black people in positions of political power, a highly unusual theme for 1899.[19] A subtle element of political protest also appeared in *Bandanna Land* in 1908, when Williams adapted the song "Somebody Lied:" "Somebody lied, somebody lied you see/ There never was a President that ever resembled me."[20] In a seemingly innocuous line, Williams touches on the issues of black disenfranchisement

[17] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 106.

[18] Ibid, 238.

[19] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 41.

[20] Bert Williams, "Somebody Lied," music by Jeff T. Branen, lyrics by Evan Lloyd. In Smith, 98.

and lack of political power. In such subtle social political critique, the duo used their fame as a platform for vocal opposition to racism.[21]

In addition to their social critique, Williams and Walker both expressed the desire to present themselves, African Americans, and Africans more authentically onstage. This frank aspiration to present "authentic renditions" of Africans onstage is remarkable. Europeans (and later Americans) viewed Africa with suspicion and even fear from the first contact. Europeans interpreted African cultural traditions as savagery and Africans themselves as closer to animals than man.[22] Indeed, world's fairs frequently featured ethnological exhibits that featured native Africans as means to demonstrate supposed African savagery.

In their shows Williams and Walker shows upended American race relations. Significantly, their shows featured skits where black characters could trick whites. The Williams and Walker production of *Bandana Land* demonstrates this well. The storyline detailed the negotiations of white amusement park operators' intent on purchasing a nearby tract of land owned by African Americans Bud Jenkins and Skunkton Bowser, played by George Walker and Bert Williams respectively. Recognizing the increased value of their property, Jenkins and Bowser resolved to increase their profit margin by making "themselves as objectionable as possible as neighbors."[23] In the context of a single show, "Williams and Walker addressed segregated public space, white racist

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[21] See, for example, "George W. Walker's letter to the Thirteen Club," *New York Age*, February 20, 1908, 6.

[22] See Jordan, *The White Man's Burden.*

[23] *Variety*, February 22, 1908, 30.

stereotypes, and African American exploitation of stereotype for economic gain," while situating this social commentary within a show that celebrated the black protagonists' fleecing of white land buyers because of the buyers' own racism.[24]

Part of Williams and Walker's ability to inject socially transformational material into their shows derived from their courting of the audience. The duo's style of humor relied upon complex and multi-layered references and, in a sense, they actually spoke to two audiences. Spatially, audiences were separated because of segregation policies that required black patrons to watch the show from a separate balcony area. But spatial separation was not the only cause for Williams and Walker to speak to two audiences. Williams and Walker tailored different jokes and comedic bit to appeal to black and white audiences. Reviewers frequently noted that white and black audience members tended to laugh at different jokes. Whites expected jokes at the expense of the "plantation darky" character, but black audiences expected more from the performances. They wanted performers to critique racism, which black minstrel players often did through jokes that white audiences often just did not "get." Literally and figuratively these jokes went "over the heads" of white audiences.[25] Black performers, then, had to negotiate a

[24] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 66.

[25] For example: one Williams joke involved a black character peddling a wagon full of watermelon. Another fellow, trying to appear smart, picks over the watermelons, remarking, "These are powerful small apples you've got here, Uncle," to which the peddler replied: "Son, you must be a stranger around here and you don't know much about fruit. Those aren't apples. Those are gooseberries." The younger fellow admiring the watermelons was most likely played by a black actor, even though he used the term Uncle, which was a derogatory term often used by whites. The focus of the joke—what makes it funny—is that both of the characters are ridiculous—everyone in the audience can tell that the fruit is watermelons—these characters must be stupid not to know, so white audiences would laugh at the seeming ridiculousness of the two black characters. However, there was also a second level to this joke—blacks in the audience would have understood that the feigned ignorance was a conscious refusal to identify the fruit as

delicate space—not offending white audiences and appealing to racist stereotypes enough to satisfy them, but at the same time offering to black audiences a humor that critiqued the stereotypes, even as they utilized them.

Historians and literary critics term this device of "double speak" *signifying.* Through signifying and adopting the trickster role, black performers could critique white oppression, using their comedy as a mirror to reflect back to white audiences their own ridiculousness. The cakewalk—an outrageous high-stepping dance that typically ended every minstrel performance—was one such means of signifying. The cakewalk derived directly from the experiences of enslaved Africans in America. The dance developed when enslaved blacks were forced to perform for their owners, and in response, the slaves mocked their white audiences by lampooning and exaggerating the pretentious European styles.[26] Following this tradition, Williams and Walker wielded humor as a mirror, playing on white audiences' insecurities and encouraging those audiences not only to laugh at them, but also to laugh at themselves and their own outrageous behavior. By using humor as a way to advance black social critique, Williams and Walker "turned the world of popular theater into a black public sphere—a social space that facilitated discussion of public concerns."[27]

Williams and Walker's dedication to racial advancement was evident not only through their performances onstage, but also in their activities outside of it. Both

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watermelon and thus an implicit critique of the stereotype of watermelon-eating "darkies." Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 66.

[26] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 75.

[27] Ibid.

performers vocally dedicated themselves to racial advancement. As the most popular black performers in the United States and as producers of their own shows, Williams and Walker were in a position to engage meaningfully in social conversation about African Americans' place in American society. Indeed, the pair viewed themselves as representatives of the race. Walker articulated the duo's "love for the race" as more important than "the money and the prestige," underscoring that the pair felt responsible for representing the race.[28] When the African American community critiqued Williams and Walker for their stereotyped presentation of blacks, they responded that until recently African Americans had been confined to demeaning minstrel shows whose sole goal was to "please the non-sympathetic, biased and prejudiced white man." They, however, as producers of shows as well as stars, were proud that their shows "required some thought and very careful deliberation before attempting to present them before the public." The partners acknowledged that they were, in effect, caught between two audiences, who had distinctly different visions of the performance they wanted to see. While white audiences wanted to see them portray "antebellum 'dark[ies],'" black audiences wanted to see richer portrayals of African American life. While straddling these two competing visions, Williams and Walker strove to present black life authentically and sympathetically through "characters most familiar today."[29]

While Williams and Walker used the space of the stage to launch a subtle yet significant critique of American racism, the pair could only push white audiences so far.

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[28] George Walker, *Chicago Inter Ocean*, 1909, as quoted in Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 42.

[29] Bert Williams and George Walker to Albert Ross, October, 18, 1907. Reprinted in *Variety*, December 14, 1907, 30.

Walker's wife Aida Overton—who occasionally performed with the duo as well as with other acts—suggested that danger lurked behind every social critique. She noted that "[e]very little thing we do must be thought out and arranged by Negroes, because they alone know how easy it is for a colored show to offend a white audience."[30] Williams and Walker actively played with and even broke racial stereotypes in their shows, but they always had to do so to white audiences who did not necessarily accept new social roles for African Americans. The pair embodied in a literal sense the "twoness" that W.E.B. DuBois described in *Souls of Black Folk:* Williams and Walker not only lived, but also performed with the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."[31]

Together Williams and Walker constructed a subversive show on the stage and a supportive community for African Americans off the stage.[32] They carried a heavy burden of responsibility, both to their audiences and to the African American community:

> the men and women of the popular stage became, in a sense, the artistic arm of race leadership at the turn of the century—a veritable Bohemian Tenth. They struggled to interpret the souls of black folk through modern cultural forms, all

[30] Aida Overton Walker, undated clipping from the Chicago Herald, Williams and Walker clipping file, Billy Rose Theater Collection, the New York Public Library, as quoted in Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 67.

[31] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. David W. Blight and Robert Gooding-Williams (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 38.

[32] In an era in which African American performers typically faced professional isolation amidst a sea of white performers, Williams and Walker strove to foster a supportive community of black performers. Williams and Walker were two of the founding member of the black theatrical organization The Frogs, which included not only other black actors, but also songwriters, musicians, and playwrights. Founded at a time in which African Americans were excluded from white theatrical clubs, the Frogs' mission was to foster a black theatrical community, as well as to the educate the public about African Americans' achievements. See Smith, *Bert Williams,* 105–107.

> the while maintaining a commitment to presenting traits that were 'strictly Negro' and demonstrating an incipient black nationalism.[33]

While the pair shouldered the great responsibility of being the representatives of the race upon the stage, they were also a dominating critical and financial success, with several hit shows in the early twentieth century. Sadly, their success was ultimately short-lived. Walker began stuttering and experiencing memory loss in 1909, both symptoms of syphilis. He retired shortly thereafter and by 1911, he was dead. America had lost its most popular black comedy partnership. Walker's death left Williams with the devastating tasks of figuring out how to go on in theater without his partner and to reinvent himself as a solo performer.

Stages and Streets: Bert Williams Integrates the *Ziegfeld Follies*

Without a partner, Williams had to re-establish and reinvent himself as a performer. Eager to continue the legacy began during his tenure with Walker, Williams tried his hand at organizing an all-black show featuring himself as a principal, *Mr. Lode of Coal* (1909). However, of the two of them Walker had been the keen businessman, doing the organizing work necessary to stage and manage a show. The resulting show was a critical success but an economic flop, leaving Williams feeling that he would rather delegate the organizing and booking work.[34] Banking on Williams' star power, Broadway revue producer Florenz Ziegfeld began courting Williams for participation in the 1910 *Follies.* Williams was well aware of the historic opportunity to be the first black

[33] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 121–122.

[34] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 112–122.

entertainer to integrate a regular, full-length Broadway revue, believing that he "could best represent [his] race by doing pioneer work."[35]

Williams, however, had reason to be cautious about joining the otherwise all-white show. One factor was the rise of white violence directed at African Americans in northern cities as well as the South. Earlier, in August 1900, Williams faced racial violence after an interracial fight at a police funeral sparked a race riot in New York City. Five hundred white New Yorkers prowled the nighttime street with clubs, shouting alternatively "get the niggers" and calling by name for the heads of black performers Bert Williams, George Walker, and Ernest Hogan. Elsewhere in the city that night, a gang "of small boys armed with sticks and rocks…savagely thumped and whacked" a billboard for a Bert Williams show, ultimately, "dragging the board from its moorings."[36] The mobs ambushed streetcars looking for African American victims. They ripped George Walker from the streetcar at Thirty-Fourth Street and beat him mercilessly; Walker escaped with his life only because he was able to duck into a nearby hotel.[37] This incident was sparked by a particular altercation, but across the city racial tensions were rising, largely the result of white tension over the growing urban population, and the influx of black migrants in particular. Between 1890 and 1900, the black population of New York City grew by more

[35] "Bert Williams Turns Philosopher," *New York Age*, December, 1, 1910, 6.

[36] "All Coon Photos Alike to Boy Jeffs," *New York Telegraph*, undated clipping, Williams and Walker clipping file, Billy Rose Theater Collection, The New York Public Library, as quoted in Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 42.

[37] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 42–43.

than forty percent.[38] After 1910, much of this population was concentrated in Harlem, which became officially designated as a black neighborhood.[39]

The rise of lynching—tightly coupled to modernity—was yet another factor that called for Williams to be cautious as he considered Ziegfeld's offer to perform in the *Follies*. Historian Amy Louise Wood notes that most cultural critics at the time observed that lynching most frequently occurred in the rural South. They assumed this was so because they perceived the southern country sides as regions that "were disconnected not only from American ideals but from modern civilization."[40] Such critics assumed that lynching would disappear once these rural regions were more fully incorporated into American social and political life. However, many cases of lynching occurred not in isolated, rural areas but instead in rapidly growing cities and towns, the very spaces experiencing rapid modernization.[41] Wood contends that in these cities lynching functioned as a reactionary anti-modern action: "If urban life had threatened white authority by bringing whites and blacks together on streetcars, sidewalks, and markets, lynchings performed on city streets and courthouse squares reclaimed urban, public spaces as decidedly white spaces."[42] Lynching worked as a means of controlling space and marking African Americans as interlopers subject to vigilante violence. In addition to

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[38] Ibid, 43.

[39] While the entire black population of Manhattan was 60,534 before World War I, Harlem claimed 49,555 of those. Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 201.

[40] Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle,* 5.

[41] Ibid. Lynching occurred predominantly in the south but was not an unknown phenomenon across the United States as well.

[42] Ibid, 13–14.

the physical threat that lynching posed, much of the power of lynching derived from its symbolic value.[43] Lynching offered a means for white men to claim control over white women through the rhetoric of preserving white womanhood's alleged sexual purity at a time in which women were moving outside of the cultural boundaries that that historically defined women's rights and roles. Similarly, lynching allowed white men to claim ownership over the black male body just as a younger generation of African Americans, who eagerly sought to embrace their rights and challenge white supremacy, came of age. Not surprisingly, the numbers of those who died at the hands of lynch mobs rose. Between 1880 and 1940 some 3,200 black men in the South were lynched by white mobs.[44] The greatest danger that Williams and Walker faced that night in New York was—if they had been caught by the angry mob—they might have been lynched.

As popular acts among both black and white audiences, performers such as Williams and Walker seem unlikely subjects for racial violence. However, they faced a particular problem. As recognizable black names and faces, performers such as Williams and Walker became targets for white mob aggression that eagerly looked for vengeance

[43] Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Street: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 42.

[44] Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle,* 3. Interestingly, some Americans assumed that access to modern forms of popular commercial amusement would decrease lynching. Instead, lynching rates rose dramatically at just the same historical moment that commercial amusements emerged. Lynching was a form of spectacle. Woods argues that "even as lynching represented a revolt against modernity and its effects, lynch mobs made use of new modes of spectacle to enact and perpetuate their violence. With the heightened sensationalism and publicity surrounding them and their masses of eager spectators, the most public lynching resembled modern theatrical entertainment." In Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle,* 10.

against black people, especially famous black people. In this way, as long as Williams and Walker

> remained on stage, objectified and confined by their role as entertainers, they found some amount of safety and commercial success. Once these same performers stepped offstage, however, no 'coon' act would protect them from white violence or exempt them from the manifestations of Jim Crow.[45]

As the power of the urban black population grew, performers like Williams and Walker became the visible sign of that success, particularly as their popularity increased. Outside of the safety of the theater stage, the street actually became another sort of stage for African Americans, "one where whites expected them to perform 'properly.'"[46] In the South, where the pair's star power held less sway among whites, they were expected to perform on the street no differently than other African Americans. For example, while performing in Georgia, a group of whites accused Williams and Walker of being dressed too nicely for blacks, thus implying the pair had pilfered their expensive clothing. As a result, Williams and Walker were accosted and their clothes stolen; faced with leaving the town dressed in nothing but burlap sacks, they vowed never to tour the South again.[47]

Incidents like this, in New York and other northern cities as well as the South, indicate the degree to which African Americans were expected to perform subservience for whites in all aspects of their lives. Because each black person was interpreted by white society as a representative of the race, the street was always a stage for all African Americans. Black elites indeed viewed the street as a stage upon which all blacks should perform the standards of behavior white America deemed representative of racial

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[45] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 43.

[46] Ibid, 52.

[47] Rowland, *Bert Williams,* 156.

advancement. In particular, black elites encouraged all African Americans to never descend into vulgar manners, particularly on the street. Rather, they should always strictly perform respectability, aiming to promote the full citizenship rights of the race.[48]

In addition to the physical altercations, Williams faced prejudice in New York from white performers. In 1908, when Williams and Walker were given headline billing above any of the white acts for a benefit at New York's Academy of Music, performer Walter C. Kelley (who was apparently not even performing in the show), mounted a protest by encouraging other acts to drop out. While two acts withdrew in protest, the benefit was a success regardless, and "when Williams and Walker appeared, the galleries went wild."[49] In April 1910, Williams again faced opposition from headlining an otherwise all-white slate of performers at Hammerstein's Victoria Theater. An organization of white vaudevillians protested Williams' position as headliner, declaring that "no colored artist [should] head a bill over a white vaudevillian" and that "the progress of the colored vaudevillian should be retarded."[50] The Hammerstein management bowed to pressure and removed Williams from his headlining position, though they left his name in larger type than his replacement headliner.[51]

Within this context Williams joined the cast of the *Ziegfeld Follies* in June of 1910.[52] As the sole black member of an otherwise all-white cast, Williams restructured

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[48] Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 182 -188.

[49] Lester A. Walton, "Controversy over Williams and Walker," *New York Age*, March 5, 1908, 6.

[50] Lester A. Walton, "Bert Williams in Vaudeville," *New York Age*, April 21, 1910, 6.

[51] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 124.

his routine to perform alone or with Caucasian blackface performers such as Eddie Cantor. In Williams' previous performances with Walker, he had wrested some control over the cultural construct of "the Negro" and in this way preserved the core of his subversive performance. But in the *Follies,* Williams lost much of his authority over his scripts, performing comedy routines that were produced for him by *Follies* writers and jammed within the constructs of a show structure that valued its chorus girls more than its comedians.

In addition to a frustrating lack of quality comedy routine, Williams faced additional difficulties during his tenure in the *Follies*, including discrimination from the other cast members. Some of the cast members recoiled at the announcement of his casting and expressed resentment about sharing the stage with a black man. Williams referred to this indignation as "a tremendous storm in a teacup."[53] He continued that "[e]verybody [in the *Follies*] threatened to leave; they proposed to get up a boycott if [Ziegfeld] persisted; they said all sorts of things against my personal character." According to Williams, although much of the cast threatened to leave the show, Ziegfeld was determined to cast him, saying, "Go if you want to. I can replace every one of you, except the man you want me to fire." Williams suggested that the experience did affect him, claiming that he "always [got] on perfectly with everybody in the company by being polite and friendly *but keeping my distance*."[54]

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[52] "The Follies of 1910," *New York Times*, June 19, 1910, 11.

[53] Bert Williams, "Comic Side of Trouble," *American Magazine* (January 1918), 58.

[54] Ibid. Emphasis added.

Keeping his distance may well have been strategic, a tactic of racial preservation. This is made clear from Williams and Walker's instructional booklet to their company players in 1905:

> the bond of prejudice is drawn so tightly about us, and that the eye sees everything we colored folks do is ever ready to magnify and multiply many times over the value of the most innocent deed committed by us, we write you this letter to warn you to so conduct yourself that your manner and mode of life will disarm all criticism and place you above reproach.[55]

The booklet continued that "We can't afford to let our people do anything wrong—it would spoil all our efforts to build up a decent reputation."[56] For Williams, performing race occurred both on and off the stage. Biographer Eric Ledell Smith suggests that Williams' determination to break the color barrier on Broadway motivated him to continue to perform, even under uncomfortable working conditions. While there are no records of any performer quitting the show because of Williams' inclusion, as late as three weeks before opening night, Williams still had not been assigned any roles within the show. Smith indicates that even if those in the company "consented to his presence, they withheld their acceptance."[57] Significantly, because of Williams' presence within the show, Ziegfeld modified the Follies' yearly touring routes to exclude southern cities, indicating either Ziegfeld's concern over a white backlash to the integrated performance or Williams' reluctance to travel again to the South.[58]

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[55] New York Globe and Commercial, October 27, 1905, Robinson Locke Collection, folder 2461, Billy Rose Theater Collection, as quoted in Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 180.

[56] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 180.

[57] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 133.

[58] Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darky,"* 20.

In a seemingly unrelated event—though prescient to Williams' integration of the *Follies*—just a scant few weeks before Williams' debut in the *Follies*, black boxer Jack Johnson won the world heavyweight championship, beating out his white competitors. In her book on the construction of masculinity in the United States at the turn of the century, Gail Bederman notes that a majority of white Americans found it unthinkable that a black man could best a white man in a boxing match because whites understood this event to mean that "a black man had been crowned the most powerful man in the world."[59] Unable to concede the title of world champion boxer to black man, the search began for the "great white hope," a white boxer who could best Johnson.

This racial spectacle culminated in a match between Johnson and retired white boxer Jim Jeffries in July 1910. Johnson trounced Jeffries.[60] As soon as the results were announced, rioting broke out in several New York City districts as well as across the United States.[61] Newspapers had promoted Jeffries as the vindicator of Anglo-Saxon manhood, and Jeffries himself explained his decision to fight Johnson as an attempt to prove the superiority of white manhood. Ultimately, Bederman suggests, "the Johnson-Jeffries fight was framed as a contest to see which race had produced the most powerful, virile man."[62] White Americans, already incensed over Johnson's demonstration of his

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[59] Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 2.

[60] Interestingly, the fight was originally slated to take place in San Francisco, but the governor was concerned that bad publicity might jeopardize the California's ability to secure the right to host the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. See Abigail M. Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco: The Pacific Rim, the Great West, and California at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 298.

[61] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 139.

physical prowess by besting white boxers, became even more enflamed when Johnson married a white woman. In public appearances after the fight, Johnson was often greeted by crowds of white men shouting, "lynch him!"[63]

The controversy over Johnson's win and particularly his relationship with white women is significant to the story of Williams' integration of the *Follies* because of the sexualized nature of white female performance within the show and Americans' historic fear of black sexuality.[64] Johnson's victory occurred within a month of Williams' introduction into the *Follies,* but potentially scandalous sexual activities ran closer to home for Williams. Despite Williams and Walkers' earlier instructions to their touring company to avoid reproach at all possible costs, Walker himself was linked to sexual infidelity with at least one white woman, Eva Tanguay, a dancer and comedian of wide renown for her salacious singing.[65] Indeed, the very nature of a touring show (such as the *Follies*) seemed to be a breeding ground of indecent behavior: frequent travel

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[62] Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization,* 2.

[63] "Mob Threatens Johnson," *New York Times*, October 20, 1912, 12.

[64] While there was little public outcry over Williams joining the cast, reviewer Lester A. Walton did connect Williams and Johnson, suggesting that Williams was so funny that Bert Williams "makes the need of a White Hope on the Jardin de Paris stage as imperative as Jack Johnson did in the squared ring." Lester A. Walton, "A Star among Stars," *New York Age*, July 6, 1911, 6. Interestingly, Williams actually lampooned the Johnson-Jeffries fight in a skit titled "A Scene in Reno." In the skit, Williams portrays Johnson and Billy Reeves played Jim Jeffries. The Washington Post described the scene: "At Reno Bert Williams and Billie Reeves burlesque the fight in which Mr. Jeffries whipped Mr. Johnson so decisively—until they got into the ring. Williams and Reeves do a really legitimate imitation of what actually happened." "Offerings at the Local Theaters," *The Washington Post*, December 27, 1910, 11.

[65] Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000),110. Tanguay sing titles included "It's All Been Done Before But Not the Way I Do It," "I Want Someone to Go Wild With Me," "Go As Far As You Like," and "That's Why They Call Me Tabasco."

"compounded the problems of ensuring 'respectable' private behavior of performers, since life on the road inherently challenged the conventional separation of public and private spheres."[66]

Williams recognized the significance and the potential for the white public to perceive a sexual threat inherent in his place within the *Follies*—a black man in a production that emphasized the performances of the white nearly nude chorus girls—and he took steps to mitigate the potential for scandal. Williams' physical proximity to these white women, particularly sexualized as they were, provided ripe conditions for fears of sexual transgression. Ziegfeld, the self-proclaimed glorifier of the American girl, a reputation with which many theater critics and popular culture commentators agreed, publicly proclaimed his chorus girls to be the most beautiful and alluring white girls in the country. Williams recognized the precarious position his place within the *Follies* entailed, asserting, "[t]he people must become gradually accustomed to my appearance on the stage among white people. You've noticed there is not a white woman on the stage during my appearance in the Follies [*sic*]. I had that put into the contract."[67] Williams accepted Ziegfeld's offer to join the *Follies,* a decision in which he no doubt calculated the many racial dangers that he faced, but he also weighed the racial opportunities. Ziegfeld no doubt saw the profitability of Williams in his production and, as we shall see, took his own steps to thwart racial controversy.

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[66] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 183.

[67] Sylvester Russell, "Musical and Dramatic: The Bert Williams Interview," *Chicago Defender*, October 8, 1910, 2.

The *Ziegfeld Follies* as a Glorified Girl Show

Over the course of the tenure of the *Follies*, the "girls," the young women performers in the show, were the main attraction, and their bodies a recurring theme of the show. By 1910, the season that Williams began his tenure with the *Follies*, Ziegfeld began referring to his annual "girl show."[68] Displays such as one in the *New York Times* attest to the centrality of the chorus performers to the show: "Girls! Girls!! Girls!!! Girls!!!!" is the main headline, rather than performers' names or other attractions.[69] The girls' performances often served as the central organizing principle of the shows, evidenced in their increasing importance and time onstage. While *Variety* flatly panned much of the rest of the 1912 edition, the reviewer noted the role of the glamorous girls:

> Ziegfeld can pick 'em. He's got 'em in this season's Follies. And he better had, for there isn't much else there, excepting some settings, comedians who are wasted, a book that is nil, and music the same. But the girls![70]

Follies principle Will Rogers likewise reflected this sentiment in a stage joke: "All these beautiful girls I am the contrast [*sic*]. Somebody has to do something while [the] girls change clothes even if they dont [*sic*] have much to change."[71] Williams himself reflected similar sentiments. Mabel Rowland claimed in her 1923 biography of Williams that he used to joke: "I'm just out there to give the *gals* time to change."[72] Such comments highlight the show's allure, its promise of sexuality and exposed female bodies.

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[68] Linda Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 19.

[69] *New York Times*, July 18, 1914.

[70] *Variety*, October, 25, 1912, 22.

[71] Arthur Frank Wertheim, ed., *Will Rogers at the Ziegfeld Follies*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 15.

Linda Mizejewski suggests that Ziegfeld mediated the scandal of the heightened sexual atmosphere of the shows that depended on the performance of female nudity by imbuing the shows with an ambiance of opulence and regulating the chorus girls' behavior offstage. While some social commentators described the revue's working-class counterpart burlesque as ignoble, critics considered Ziegfeld's revues to be the "blue-blood" counterpart to such theaters.[73] While Ziegfeld's revues were seen as generally respectable, revue and burlesque performances were often similar in structure and the presentation of female sexuality. In the hierarchy of nightlife performance, Ziegfeld's chorus shows were decidedly more respectable than burlesque, but were uncomfortably almost-but-not-quite-legitimate theater. Chorus performers aspired to "make it" and rise in their success by transitioning to the "legitimate" theater.[74] However, Ziegfeld achieved an ambiance of upper class status, even quasi-respectability, through elaborate expenditure on scanty costumes and lavish staging. While the chorus dancers were working-class, Ziegfeld gilded them in finery, "repackaging…the chorus girl as bourgeois body."[75] The various states of dress and undress in which Ziegfeld presented

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[72] Rowland, *Bert Williams,* 88. Emphasis original.

[73] In their book on Ziegfeld published shortly after his death, Eddie Cantor and David Freedman describe the American "aristocracy" who attended the shows "in a dignified but eager scramble to see and be seen." Cantor and Freedman describe the shows as so popular as to command spectacularly high admission prices, relating that tickets for individual seats at the 1923 premiere commanded $22 apiece. Cantor claims that for a laugh, he brought a hammer, wrench, and saw with him. After having created a ruckus, he supposedly shouted, "I paid twenty-two dollars for my seat and I'm going to take it home!" Further demonstrating the outrageously high prices, Cantor relates that his family could not come to see the show, even at a reduced price: "they figured for that money they could get a ton of coal and a piano." In Eddie Cantor and David Freeman, *Ziegfeld, the Great Glorifier* (New York: Alfred H. King, 1934), 53 and 103.

[74] Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl,* 16.

[75] Ibid, 31.

the girls were fodder for public commentary. Will Rogers reportedly claimed that if the *Follies* did not glorify the American girl, then it "certainly exposes her."[76] Describing the performance of chorus girl Kay Laurel, a *New York Times* reviewer described the scene: "Miss Laurel…was disclosed standing on a parapet of one of [Joseph] Urban's exotic scenes wrapped in gauze and stage sunlight."[77] One can only surmise that the gauze was essentially all she was wrapped in. This nudity—both actual and suggested—garnered the attention of the nation and the disapproving gaze of reformers.

Both religious reformers and the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice actively sought to curtail perceived stage indiscretions. The Baptist Reverend Dr. Boynton of Chicago sermonized in 1920, reprinted in *Variety*: The *Ziegfeld Follies*

> can accurately be described as the world, the flesh and the devil. Color, music, movement and noise are also planned as to work together to delight the eye, fill the air and feed the senses. It is the passing transient world of the sensual which appeal is constantly made. There is a very skillful and subtle presentation of the flesh. Nudity is constantly suggested, though never absolutely resorted to. The approximation, however, is so close as to leave nothing to the imagination.[78]

Boynton drove to the heart of both the *Follies'* success and to its, albeit limited, public reprimand—its promise of female nudity. As Boynton suggests, often this nudity was "skillful" and "suggested." Rather than necessarily displaying their bodies outright, "Ziegfeld titillated the audience by showing his chorus girls off in situations where the possibility of seeing them unclothed was a continual hope."[79] Describing a scene in

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[76] "Man Behind the Plays IV. -- Florenz Ziegfeld Jr.," *New York Times*, February 11, 1923, 2.

[77] "Winfield R. Sheehan Weds," *New York Times*, May 12, 1916, 11.

[78] "Pans 'the Follies,'" *Variety* 42, no. 8, January 16, 1920, 15.

Ziegfeld's 1906 show in which seemingly nude performers stood behind painter's easels only to emerge wearing strapless dresses with the skirts pinned up, former *Follies* chorus girl Marjorie Farnsworth articulated the appeal of such performance tactics, claiming that the audience "wanted to believe that the girls were naked, and Ziegfeld graciously and profitably was only too glad to supply the impression."[80]

While some perceived the amount of nudity in the *Follies* to be scandalous, Ziegfeld endeavored to protect the respectability of shows by presenting the chorus girls as elite ladies and as symbols of American patriotism. To do so, Ziegfeld exercised strict control over the girls' public conduct and forbid behaviors on and off-stage that might tarnish their collective reputation. Comedian Eddie Cantor described Ziegfeld's overbearingly paternalistic role: "No seminary students were ever under closer surveillance. When the girls went on the road he would get detailed reports about all of them from his company manager and then wire each according to her transgression, 'Don't get fat…Don't stay up late…Don't go to wild parties.'"[81] Similarly, Farnsworth described how working for Ziegfeld functioned as a girl's "finishing school"; he mandated that they "be well-groomed in the streets, hotels, restaurants, or wherever they were seen by the public."[82]

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[79] Rosaline B. Stone, "The Ziegfeld Follies: A Study of Theatrical Opulence from 1907-1931," (PhD diss., University of Denver, 1985), 50.

[80] Marjorie Farnsworth, *The Ziegfeld Follies* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1956), 25.

[81] Cantor, *Ziegfeld,* 64.

[82] Farnsworth, *The Ziegfeld Follies,* 84.

Through such action, the girls were meant to relay the *impression* of elite status through staging and costuming. To accomplish this, both the shows and the girls themselves, as public representatives of the shows, necessitated an association with upper-class opulence. Through lavish expenditure on the costuming, scenery, and sheer spectacle, Ziegfeld "managed to package feminine stage sexuality in such a way that his audiences connected the *Follies* not with the working-class sexuality of burlesque but with the cosmopolitan worldliness of Paris."[83] The sheer amount of money that Ziegfeld spent on spectacle signified the aura of elite class ambiance that he sought to connect to the girls' performance, using finery to gild the fact that he drew girls from the working-class ranks of society and paid them to display their bodies. Indeed, while the 1890s chorus girls were "only marginally respectable," Ziegfeld sought to distance his performers from associations of indecency and the historical connotations of "working girl" as prostitute by bathing them in spectacle.[84] *New York Times* theater critic J. Brooks Atkinson suggested that Ziegfeld succeeded, at least in crafting a veneer of respectability, claiming that Ziegfeld "endows [the chorus girls] with the style and poise of good breeding that make for illusion as they decorate the stage."[85] This illusion of class and respectability was one that Ziegfeld sought to render both on and off the stage.

This pretense of opulence and aspirations of upper-class culture, even as the shows were structured around female sexuality, also helped to shield the *Follies* from

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[83] Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 245.

[84] Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl,* 69-71.

[85] J. Brooks Atkinson, "A New Theatrical Season Slowly Gathers Momentum," *New York Times*, September 18, 1927, 1.

public rebuke over Ziegfeld's choice to include Williams. While the chorines performed cosmopolitan privilege, Williams' minstrel character was steeped in the exaggerated stereotypes of impoverished rural black culture. Here again Jack Johnson's story becomes significant. The boxer made no secret of his preference for white women. After his championship win his liaisons with white women became all the more infuriating to the white public—South and North—who, given the eugenicist concerns of early twentieth century America, worried that Johnson's physical prowess made him a superior specimen of manhood, usurping white men's place at the top of the imagined racial and civilization hierarchy.[86] Johnson appeared publicly with dozens of white women and flaunted his liaisons. The implications of Johnson's boxing victory coupled with his public sexual relations with white women ultimately proved too transgressive for public forgiveness. The Bureau of Investigation concocted an elaborate scheme to arrest and imprison Johnson for violation of the Mann Act, meant to prevent white women being trafficked across state lines for the purposes of prostitution, called "white slavery."[87]

The types of women who Johnson associated with, however, did not have much in common with the Ziegfeld girls. Since Johnson's consorts often had links to prostitution and were thus susceptible to public derision for their supposed licentiousness, they fit into public beliefs regarding the sexual wantonness of economically destitute women.

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[86] Concern over Johnson's sexual habits concerned Northerners as well as Southerners, and Northerners also took out their vengeance symbolically. Bederman notes that in Johnson's hometown of Chicago in 1912 effigies of Johnson were hung from trolleys and electric poles around the city, and Johnson himself was accosted by an irate man, who threw an inkwell at him. Randy Roberts, Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes (New York: Free Press, 1983); "Mob Threatens Johnson," *New York Times*, October 20, 1912, 12.

[87] Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization,* 3–5.

Ziegfeld, however, actively sought to construct the collective stage persona of the Ziegfeld girls as one imbued with class opulence and respectability, thus women of a fundamentally higher class than the women of Johnson's affairs. This became all the more critical a distinction to make in the *Follies* after Williams joined the cast. When Williams was breaking ground in the *Follies,* he played characters such as gardeners, porters, and taxi drivers, all working class roles far away from the spectacular affluence of the *Follies* girls.[88]

Another mechanism that Ziegfeld employed for positioning his chorus girls as above reproach was making their bodies emblematic of national and racial pride. Linda Mizejewski argues that Ziegfeld emphasized the girls' whiteness and critically connected this to concepts of nationalism and the "ideal" American womanhood. Without question, Ziegfeld chose only women of lighter complexion, who could be presented as Anglo-Saxon. Indeed, he suggested that the audience should invest national pride in the beauty and implicitly the body (thus nudity) of the chorus girls. While Ziegfeld never explicitly restricted the chorus line to white women only, in practice, no Asians or African Americans graced the line, and those with ethnic-sounding names appeared under suitably Anglo-sounding stage names.[89] To dispel his fears of perhaps "glorifying" any girl of insufficiently white American stock, Ziegfeld continually reiterated their nationality—"100% American"—and thus established the white national and eugenic pride one should feel in viewing them.[90] In a sense, the presentation of the girls and their

[88] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 140.

[89] Ibid, 133.

bodies would likely have been interpreted by audiences as further assurance of the "quality" of their women, and the superiority—indeed perfection—of the white female form over the bodies of women of color. The "Glorified Girl," then, "publicized as 'select' and true to American 'types,' was a high-profile site of such cultivation and nativist/eugenicist concerns."[91]

Bert Williams and the Black Body

As a result of Williams' choices as a performer and Ziegfeld's careful management, white Americans overwhelmingly embraced Williams' presence within the show. Indeed, surprisingly little outrage occurred. A reporter for the African American newspaper, the *New York Age,* suggested whites had concerns about Williams in the show, but praised Ziegfeld, who

> a year ago decided to take Mr. Williams into the '*Follies of 1910*,' despite the protests of a bunch of weak-kneed friends and prejudiced white performers, who excitedly informed the producer that to put a colored comedian in a show with a large galaxy of white performers would never do; that such a step would create consternation and provoke a race controversy.[92]

The journalist further contended that such controversy was merely "incendiary rubbish" and that "there is no record of anyone having left the 'Follies of 1910'" due to Williams.[93] On the subject of Williams' sharing the stage with white women in the *Follies*, Sylvester Russell, a journalist for the black paper *Chicago Defender,* contended

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[90] Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., "How I Pick Beauties," *Theatre Magazine*, no. 223 (September 1919), 158.

[91] Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl,* 119.

[92] Lester A. Walton, "The Star Among Stars," *New York Age*, July 6, 1911, 6.

[93] Ibid.

that, to the audience at least, his race did not matter: "Now according to Williams' contract, how is he going to ever be able to play his dear old character on the stage with white women? The public don't care three straws who appears on the stage with Williams at all."[94] But although the black press roundly denied that any "race controversy" occurred, other papers suggested otherwise.

In 1912, Ziegfeld theater rivals, the Shubert brothers, began printing the *New York Review*, a paper dedicated to the promotion of Shubert shows and panning those of rival producers. In one article, the *Review* contended that tensions related to the integrated performance delayed the 1912 *Follies* opening. Dramatic editor of the *New York Age,* Lester A. Walton, responded that while the *Review* alleged "Ziegfeld has not produced his follies [*sic*] this season…because he had not been able to get white performers to work under this colored man," the delay of the *Follies* was actually due to competition, rather than racial conflicts between the cast.[95] He continued: "No white performer or chorus girl ever had cause to feel they had sacrificed their self-respect by working in the same company as Bert Williams."[96]

He went on to reflect on an interaction he witnessed between Williams and "some southern ladies," in which "one of the ladies of the real southern aristocratic type addressed him as 'Mr. Williams.' She told me afterwards that he was the first Negro she had ever called mister."[97] When Walton prompted her, "[s]he replied because I recognize

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[94] *Chicago Defender*, October 8, 1910, 2.

[95] Lester A. Walton, "White Is as White Does," *New York Age*, July 25, 1912, 6.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

in him a real man and a gentleman, and this made me forget my prejudice and habit," leading Walton to conclude "for this reason no manager has ever had any trouble because of the dark brown of Bert Williams' skin."[98] Some white newspaper critics, by contrast, voiced their concerns: "Bert Williams, a natural comedian," a Washington theater critic opined late in 1910, "is generally amusing, but the producer is lacking in taste and discretion when he engages a colored man to appear in the same company with white men and women."[99]

Despite some audience apprehension about a black man sharing the stage with white performers, Williams' position as a key performer in the show indicates his enduring popularity over the course of his nearly ten-year tenure with the *Follies*. Several reviewers highlighted Williams' star power: "Mr. Williams' three appearances were applauded to the echo and he was easily the star of the show."[100] In a review of the 1911 season, the *New York Times* cited Williams as one of the reasons that the show seemed to "have more fun and more specialties…than those of former years."[101] Others, such as performer Leon Errol recalling his days working with Williams, noted that Williams was so well liked in the *Follies* that some perhaps even ceased thinking of him as a black man, calling Williams the "Black man with the White heart."[102] While Errol intended this

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Ralph Graves, "Drew, Ruth St. Denis and Marshall," *The Washington Post*, January 1, 1911, magazine sec., 2.

[100] R. W. Thompson, "Theatrical Chit-Chat of Washington," *Freeman*, January 14, 1911, 5.

[101] "Girls and Glitter in 'Follies of 1911,'" *New York Times*, June 27, 1911, 9.

[102] Rowland, *Bert Williams,* 121.

as a compliment to Williams, his comment undercut African Americans as a group by positing whiteness as the standard for goodness, even as he singled Williams out as exceptional.

After two seasons of integrated performance, Ziegfeld, seemly satisfied that no significant racial backlash would ensue against Williams, took steps that integrated, to a limited extent, Williams' performances with white women. While the original contract between Ziegfeld and Williams stipulated that Williams would not appear onstage with the female performers, by 1912 his creative freedom was expanded to include performing with white female cast members. The *New York Times* did not even find it worth mentioning that Williams now appeared onstage with white women, but the *New York Age*, an African American paper, made it a point to note that

> [t]he first two seasons he [Williams] had scenes with men, but was not permitted on the stage whenever any of the females around [*sic*] for fear of inciting a riot. When he finished his work he retired to his dressing room, and he left the theatre in his street attire long before the show had closed. Things are very different now. Mr. Williams, by his gentlemanly conduct, has convinced the white performers that a colored person is human and can be cultured and refined just like the Caucasian. In the 'Follies of 1912' the colored comedian has lines with women and at the finale of both the first and second acts is seen with the principals. When the curtain goes down in the second act Mr. Williams is located on the end of the first line next to Miss [Rae] Samuels…"[103]

This report by the *New York Age* indicates that, while some white audience members may have felt apprehension at first, this dissipated relatively quickly. Thus, despite some initial public apprehension, Williams' importance within the show is clear. He was a major box office draw across the country and an invaluable figure within the *Follies*.

However, as an essential figure of the show, Williams' presence was specifically crafted to diminish the threat of black male sexuality, so apparent in the specter of

[103] Lester A. Walton, "The Follies of 1912," *New York Age*, October, 24, 1912, 6.

Johnson. Several scenes in the *Follies* of 1916 demonstrate the careful construction of Williams as an emasculated character. This *Follies* included a skit meant to mock the New York arrival of internationally famed dancer and choreographer, Vaslav Nijinsky. He was most famous for his portrayal of a black slave who woos Scheherazade in a 1910 ballet adaptation of the tale. Commenting on Nijinsky's performance, a reviewer expressed his disgust with the part: "The part of the Negro who makes love to the princess is a repulsive one, but he [Nijinsky] tones down some of its unpleasantness. The impulse to jump the stage and thrash him must be suppressed."[104]

For the parody of Nijinsky's performance, Ziegfeld daringly chose Williams to portray the slave. Williams played opposite Fanny Brice, a female Jewish comedian. Similar to Williams, Brice—a brash comedian of impeccable talent—consistently played a singular comedic caricature. Mizejewski suggests that comedic performances, such as Brice's ethnic act and Williams' blackface, comprised an essential component of the show because "Jewish, ethnic, and African American comedy, including blackface, in effect functioned as the 'contrast' to the Glorified American Girl."[105] For this parody, Brice's portrayal of an unsophisticated ethnic character proved crucial for the scene. According to theater historian Susan Glenn, Brice's particular style of humor emphasized an awkward "excess of ethnicity" which was posed as irreconcilable with femininity. This tempered the potential transgressiveness of the scene.[106] Glenn suggests that female performers often relied on excess for their comedic niche:

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[104] Richard Buckle, *Nijinsky* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971), 360.

[105] Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl,* 6.

[106] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 179.

> [e]xcess has historically been an important element in popular comedy. Too-muchness—too much fat, too much noise, too much physicality, too much political or worldly ambition, too much of whatever exceeds the normative standards of femininity—has provided the comic grist in many different societies.[107]

This grotesque "too-muchness" helped "to create comic tension by transgressing the standards of acceptable behavior and comportment."[108] Reviewers tended—while discussing her comedy—to highlight her physical appearance, in particular her lack of a conventional female attractiveness. For example, the *New York Sun* review mused that while Bryce was "rather comely," the spectators delighted in her "grotesqueness."[109] Indeed, Bryce's comedic aesthetic and her "grotesqueness" were linked as both were critical to her style of humor. Much of Brice's comicality depended upon ethnic caricatures and the performance of stylized Hebrew impersonations. While Brice was the American born daughter of immigrant parents and spoke no Yiddish, she adopted a stereotypical Yiddish accent and cast herself as a "Lower East Side New York ghetto girl."[110] With her femaleness thus contained within a caricature of awkward excessive Jewishness, Brice seemed an improbable Scheherazade. Ziegfeld constructed a role for his chorus girls far from Brice's persona. Distancing herself from the glamorousness of the Scheherazade character, Brice's intentional indelicacy and low-class ethnic persona safely isolated her from the glamour and desirability of the idealized chorus girls. Indeed, she seemed their fundamental opposite, thus preserving the *Follies* construction of

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[107] Glenn, *Female Spectacle,* 43.

[108] Ibid.

[109] *New York Sun*, June 21, 1910, 9.

[110] Glenn, *Female Spectacle,* 118-119.

idealized white femininity as inaccessible to a potential threat by Williams' black manliness.

A second skit further served to distance Williams' character symbolically from the chorus girls. As the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death approached, theaters around the country staged performances in honor of the occasion. Not to be outdone, the 1916 edition of the *Follies* included homage to *Othello*, with Williams performing the title role.[111] The scene, titled "The Bedroom in Mr. and Mrs. Othello's Apartment," parodied the dramatic play. In the scene, Othello questions Desdemona about "running around" with another man, to which she replies, "Not a single soul, excepting the 72nd Regiment."[112] This highlights, of course, that the Desdemona of the parody was a promiscuous woman, outside of the sexual control of Othello. Incensed by her libertine behavior, Othello attacks Desdemona. The *New York Times* described the physical aspect of the comedy routine: "[Othello] chokes his Desdemona…till he is tired and then beats her with a sledgehammer, but it only irritates her."[113] Tellingly, a male comic (Don Barclay) played the role of Desdemona. The casting of men in female comedy roles built upon established traditions in theater, but the casting of Desdemona likely also reflected concerns about how the audience might perceive the scene. As Walker, some eight years earlier, explained, "[n]o matter how carefully written [African American love scenes

[111] The terrible irony that lay behind Williams' presentation of the comic Othello was that Williams actually longed to break out of comedy and into dramatic performance. See Smith, *Bert Williams,* 134.

[112] Program, Ziegfeld Follies of 1916, New Amsterdam Theater, clipping files of the Billy Rose Theater Collection, New York Public Library, as quoted in Smith *Bert Williams*, 178; see also *Variety*, June 16, 1916, 13.

[113] "The 1916 Follies Full of Splendor," *New York Times*, June 13, 1916, 9.

were] they must not be otherwise than amusing."[114] The scene established a romantic relationship between white Desdemona and black Othello, and ended with Othello physically accosting her. Audiences would have found this scene amusing only in that Desdemona—the woman—upended expectation and proved to be the more "masculine" of the two.

The implications of the choice of a male actor to play Desdemona are resounding. The story of an interracial relationship where the part of Othello was played by an *actual* black man (as opposed to a white man in blackface) had transgressive potential enough, but to put a white woman (even an ethnic comic like Fanny Brice) on the stage in this sexually and violently charged story was apparently too controversial for Ziegfeld's taste. Indeed, even when Williams previously performed with white women onstage, his presence was decidedly non-sexual, often relegated to bellhops, narrators, and taxi drivers. In giving Williams the title role as Othello, the audience inevitably confronted the realization of Williams' sexuality. Furthermore, the particularly violent nature of the scene—when Othello throttles Desdemona—would again force the white audience to uncomfortably connect black male sexuality and violence to a white woman. Thus, for the character Desdemona's role to be played by a white man in drag further served to signify Othello's emasculation. Williams' part was stripped of aggressive male power, removing any final lingering concerns about the sexual implications of the scene.

Just as lynching assumed symbolic power as a visually sensational spectacle of a black male being stripped of his physical power, sometimes literally castrated and losing his life, so too did the construction of Williams' character. Williams' minstrel character

[114] "Says Negro on the Stage Cannot Be Serious," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 4 January 1908.

was systematically stripped of physical power and his threatening sexuality, the twin menaces suggested by the specter of Jack Johnson. Many whites may have felt reassurance of their place in the social hierarchy by seeing black men's masculinity undercut. This manifested in its most extreme form in the south, where mobs abducted men and murdered them in a grisly interpretation of what they called vigilante justice. However, this same impulse could be seen even in those urban spaces, north as well as south, that celebrated themselves as fully modern. Just as lynching became a means to psychologically challenge the changes of modernity and strip down the growing assertiveness of African Americans, urban Americans likewise required Williams' emasculation.

Space and the Spectator: African Americans in the Audience

Given the significant racial and sexual implications of the *Follies*, a discussion of the position of the spectator is especially significant here. As was highlighted in earlier sections, Ziegfeld constructed white female sexuality in ways that invited the audience's investment in the girls' beauty and bodies. Ziegfeld effectively solicited this investment in his showgirls by constructing the character of the Glorified Girl as unmatched in physical perfection, and thus, as Mizejewski suggests, representative of national and racial superiority. However, by making the character of the Glorified Girl as one to which the audience would feel personally connected, Ziegfeld constructed a significant problem. Allowing the audience to feel *too close* to the girls could invite a sexual intimacy that would disrupt the clean, presumptively elite entertainment that Ziegfeld sought to provide. Additionally, Williams' physical presence onstage served as a further element

requiring careful negotiation. His onstage body necessitated a strict asexuality given the context of the girl-show. Indeed, Ziegfeld recognized the need to emphasize space and distance, particularly with regard to the myriad of men related to the show, including performers, stagehands, stage door johnnies, and to an extent, the male audience members themselves.

While reviewers may have noted the heightened feeling of intimacy between the stage and the audience, Ziegfeld asserted that such feelings of intimacy, ultimately, were false. Ziegfeld himself conceded this, claiming that "the *Follies* does not, and never did, cultivate personal intimacies. The glorification of the human body…is in harmony with every world acknowledged canon of artistry."[115] Ziegfeld took pains to ensure that the sexualized atmosphere of the spectacle was guarded both from the reach of the male audience and from its black star, protecting the integrity of the fantasy:

> The top-hatted [*sic*], stage-door Johnnie, his arms laden with American Beauty roses, belonged, Ziegfeld said in no uncertain terms, outside, not inside, the stage door and woe to the girl who violated this rule. His beauties, statuesque, stately, and aloof, did little but move across a stage with elegance and grace. That illusion, and it wasn't always an illusion, was not to give way in the hustle and bustle of backstage life, nor were the mascara-lashed eyes and near-nudity to be glimpsed from any point closer than the first row.[116]

In her autobiography, former chorus girl Marjorie Farnsworth rightly points out the vital role that fantasy and illusion played in generating a sense of intimacy, but she also highlights the importance of sustaining that illusion by preventing actual physical contact between the audience and the performers, maintained by the physical boundary of the

[115] Maschio, "The Ziegfeld Follies," 182.

[116] Farnsworth, *The Ziegfeld Follies,* 43.

stage. Still uncomfortable with Ziegfeld's display of nudity onstage, *Theatre Magazine*'s Arthur Hornblow expressed his frustration with the perceived hypocrisy:

> They [the chorus girls] do not, we are informed, object to exposing their persons to the view of the entire audience—spectators, as we know, of fine artistic taste and culture, quite incapable of harboring an improper thought while gazing on nudity—but when it comes to the stage-hands, back of the curtain, they modestly draw the veil. The management, we are told, takes precautions that no stage-hand shall get as much as a glimpse of pink epiderm.[117]

Although *Theatre Magazine* hinted at the hypocrisy, Ziegfeld continuously insisted on a strict physical separation of the audience and stagehands from the female performers.

Racial segregation further defined this strict physical separation. The New York Theatre (the *Follies* played in this rooftop theater, the *Jardin de Paris,* until 1911) refused to admit black patrons, a practice which began a year before Williams' debut. According to a *New York Age* journalist Lester Walton, the refusal to admit black patrons began after several black men were seen flirting with white women during the show, whose "conduct aroused the wrath of a few observing white men who were seated nearby."[118] In response, the theater managers changed their policy regarding the admission of black people. Walton summed the story: "Since that time a colored applicant for a ticket to the Jardin de Paris has been getting a reception at the box office akin to that usually accorded the first act on a vaudeville bill—very much a la cold storage."[119] Similarly, Smith notes that Joe Jordan, songwriter of one of Fanny Bryce's greatest hits of the show, "Lovie Joe," wept as he listened to her perform it from outside the theater, since, as a black man, he

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[117] Arthur Hornblow, "The Editor's Uneasy Chair," *Theatre Magazine* 42, no. 296, (November 1925), 7.

[118] Lester A. Walton, "Responsibility of Theatre-Goers," *New York Age*, August 26, 1909, 6.

[119] Ibid.

could not enter.[120] The theater—run by production duo Marc Klaw and A.L. Erlanger—effectively sealed off any potential for the black patrons' interaction with white women in the audience, let alone their gaze upon the white female flesh displayed in the show.[121]

Segregation was explicitly illegal in New York State Penal Code, which made it "a misdemeanor for any person to exclude from full enjoyment of an inn, tavern, restaurant, public conveyance, theatre or other place of amusement a citizen by reason of race or color."[122] Yet theaters frequently excluded black patrons in violation of the law. Historically, segregated theaters confined African Americans to the balconies, which gave a measure of security to white audiences, who could laugh at racist representations of black people while assured that they would be laughing only with their white peers. [123] Their separation from black performers and black audiences perhaps solidified not only the racial social distance that Jim Crow American represented, but also allowed white audiences to contrast themselves with the presentation onstage, further solidifying their sense of their superiority, not so dissimilar to the ethnic displays of the midway.

Similarly, African American patrons wishing to see Williams perform in Washington, D.C. were directed to seats far from the stage. R.W. Thompson, writer for the *Freeman*, an African American newspaper, noted that while in seasons past the liberal theater owner had allowed African American patrons to purchase seats as close as five

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[120] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 142.

[121] The theater may have excluded African Americans, but on the road Williams continued to attract black audiences, who "flocked" to see him. *New York Age*, January, 5, 1911.

[122] "Marry in Haste," *New York Times*, April 20, 1910.

[123] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 46.

rows back in the balcony, in 1911 they were restricted to the gallery. This meant that they were "allowed only the extreme rear corners of that elevated 'roost' [on the roof of the National Theater], while hundreds of vacant seats yawn between theem [*sic*] and the white people who occupy the front rows."[124] Thus, acceptable and unacceptable spectatorship was established: As black men were not admitted into close proximity, they were not in a position to gaze upon exposed white female flesh. This position was likewise withheld from the working class and men of color employed behind the curtain, including, presumably, Williams himself. At a moment when Americans felt threatened by the dislocations of modernity and white men felt their social, cultural, and political power wane, Williams' desexualized and physically demoralized character provided audiences assurance that—at least here—the white audience controlled the space of the theater and perhaps, by extension, the white female performers as well.

However, while Ziegfeld premised his show on black separation from the white performers and audiences, there were numerous cases of African Americans "passing" and thwarting segregated seating. Indeed, according to Karen Sotiropoulos, "[b]y attracting such large black audiences, African American performers actually created the grounds on which to challenge Jim Crow seating rules."[125] African American activist Mary Church Terrell described defying segregated seating in a theater in Washington, D.C. by arranging for the lightest and darkest women in her group to enter together and when they were questioned by the usher they pretended to be foreign.[126] By the 1920s,

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[124] R. W. Thompson, "Theatrical Chit-Chat of Washington," *Indianapolis Freeman*, January 14, 1911, 5.

[125] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 71.

passing had become common enough that one Washington theater manager employed a "black doorman to spot and bounce intruders whose racial origins were undetectable by whites."[127] The elimination of the black gaze upon white female performers that Ziegfeld sought was as much an illusion as the seemingly pristine whiteness of the chorus girls themselves. The color line of the audience proved to be a permeable one.[128]

Remembering Bert Williams

As a performer, Williams was unmatched, in this or any age. Even before his death, he was recognized as one of the greatest American performers, regardless of race. Tributes and accolades poured in after his death, and his passing marked the end of an age in black theater. Even before his death, Americans black and white celebrated Williams for his charm, his humor, and his humanity. "There is art in everything Mr. Williams accomplishes" the *Chicago Tribune* mused, and thus Williams was entitled "to the honorable designation of artist."[129] The *New York Dramatic Mirror* intimated that Williams was "one of the best and most intelligent comedians we have," regardless of race, "[t]he test is that one forgets his color, and in the world of fun, color is not an important distinction."[130]

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[126] Ibid.

[127] Constance M. Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 207.

[128] One could also argue that the very tradition of minstrelsy itself had demonstrated the permeability of the color line, as white performers had "tried on" blackness, both out of the desire to ridicule it but also in appreciation of its cultural forms. Lott, 6.

[129] *Chicago Tribune*, November, 11, 1907, 8.

While white audiences may have been able to briefly forget his color, Williams lived in a culture that required black artists to wear masks. In life, Williams recognized that his success and indeed his entire onstage persona relied upon the burnt cork mask, so he was reluctant to appear onstage without blackface, even when given the opportunity.[131] Though the mask may have been a limit to his performance, his humor and style defined an era. Yet Williams acknowledged the hardship of racism. When interviewed in 1909, Williams admitted that he "often found it inconvenient" to be a black man in America.[132]

This "inconvenience" was apparent during Williams' tenure with the *Follies,* which came to an end in 1919. Williams had struggled with the emotional weight of being the only black cast member in an all-white show, particularly as he fought against racial segregation when the *Follies* went on the road.[133] In 1919, the Actors Equity Association—the union of actors in New York City—went on strike over performers' contracts, and voted to go on strike in August. When *Follies* performers themselves walked out in support of the strike, the striking cast mates neglected to inform Williams, who "went to the theater as usual, made up and dressed. Then I came out of my dressing room and found the big auditorium empty and the strike on. I knew nothing of it: I had

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[130] "Majestic: Mr. Lode of Coal," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, November 13, 1909, 7. In Smith, *Bert Williams,* 120.

[131] When Williams and Walker performed in England, Williams was presented the opportunity to perform without blackface, as blackface was not a tradition in English theater. Williams, however, decided to continue performing in blackface. Smith, *Bert Williams,* 60.

[132] Bert A. Williams, "The Comic Side of Trouble," *American Magazine* 85 (January 1918), 34.

[133] See, for example, Williams' complaint about segregated travel accommodations in Lester A. Walton, "Bert Williams on Race Problem," *New York Age*, May 4, 1918, 6.

not been told. You see, I just didn't belong."[134] He viewed this neglect as the ultimate sign that he would never be accepted as a full cast member. After leaving the *Follies,* Williams went on as principle in an independent show, though by this time his health began to decline. Williams died of a heart condition on March 4, 1922. He was just forty-six years old.[135]

Williams' performance defined an era, and so too did his dedication to his community. Without a doubt, Williams created opportunities for African Americans. Eric Ledell Smith credits Williams and Walker in successfully combating Jim Crow laws in several cities.[136] They did so by leveraging their cross-racial fame to demand performance in the first-class theaters that had historically featured only white performers. In essence, Williams imagined possibilities for black performers that simply did not exist in the early twentieth century. In 1909, Williams dreamed of a day when black performers "will carry the words of Tuskegee Institute to every village and hamlet and into every home, white or black" and engender "a more perfect understanding among the races."[137]

To a degree, Williams accomplished his goal of fostering an understanding between the races. If nothing else, his popularity and that of the other black performers of his era ushered in a new generation of African American writers, musicians, and artists

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[134] Rowland, *Bert Williams,* 129–130.

[135] Smith, *Bert Williams,* 225.

[136] Ibid, 108.

[137] Veronica Adams, "The Dramatic Stage as an Upbuilder of the Races," *Chicago Inter Ocean*, February, 25, 1909, 6, as quoted in Smith, 110.

whose work came into vogue during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. The celebration of black expressive culture came to define not only 1920s America, but the notion of modernity itself. Indeed, the modern identity that came to fruition in the twenties was a hybrid of black and white expressive culture, a celebration of black culture that ironically rested on segregation.[138] Even in the city where Americans seemingly embraced modernity, Americans preferred that their cultural changes come within a space in which their security was prescribed. Just as the patrons of the amusement zones delighted in the thrilling experience of a mechanical ride while guaranteed their physical safety, so too did white audiences want the thrill of interracial performance stripped of the dangers of black physical and sexual prowess.

Thus, the particular circumstances in which Bert Williams came to integrate Broadway are complicated given the context of the show in which he performed. The *Follies* were ultimately a limited vehicle for the star. Williams lamented that the quick-change skit nature of the show precluded his ability to develop the kind of complex and sympathetic characters that he yearned to play. His performances had subtlety and nuance because of the way he would "take a character and build it up, giving both sides," but he bemoaned the shortness of his skits in the *Follies,* which "changes too quickly to lay out a definite aim, to build up. One can't build up a character in a hurry."[139] The *Ziegfeld Follies* was, at its heart, a girl show predicated on the performances of its legendary chorus line, to which its comedians would always play a secondary role.

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[138] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 240.

[139] J.B., "Bert Williams," The Soil: A Magazine of Art, 1, no. 1 (December 1916), 20–21. Mabel Rowland contended that while the article was signed J.B., in fact it was penned by R.J. Coady. Rowland, 93.

Conclusion

Given that the *Follies* featured women purported to be the most glamorous in America, the context of American race relations—and in particular American ideas about black male sexuality and the phenomenon of Jack Johnson—bears significance. While Williams' performance alongside the seminude Glorified Girls held the potential to be socially transgressive, the mask of minstrelsy tempered the shock of Williams' proximity to the white female performers. The burnt cork mask, proscribed Williams' distance from the girls, and his costuming and stylized mannerisms stood worlds apart from the opulent, lush staging of the chorus girls. Through these means, his distance from the chorus girls was preserved. When Williams did appear on stage in roles that forced the audience to consider his maleness or sexuality—which was rare—it was done in such a way as to assure the audience of his impotence, thus emasculating him on stage. This portrayal of Williams made the *Ziegfeld Follies* an acceptable vehicle for the onstage integration of a black male actor and white chorus girls. While boxer Jack Johnson represented the threat of black manliness, the actor Bert Williams was an acceptable addition to the *Follies* because he was systematically and symbolically proscribed an emasculating role. Thus, Williams found himself limited by racial prejudice, trapped in a character he could not escape, enduring ever "to make 'em laugh."[140]

[140] As quoted in Rowland, *Bert Williams,* 93.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

By the middle of the twentieth century, many of the vestiges of the turn of the century commercial amusement were in decline. A great number of amusement parks, once on the outskirts of urban areas, had by the 1950s become enveloped by the larger cities they supported. As Americans moved to far-flung suburbs, amusement parks, along with urban cores, began to decay with neglect. Americans no longer perceived the *heterosocial* interaction provided by amusement parks as a thrilling, outside-the-norm experience. Instead, in the family-friendly decade of 1950s, they coveted the sanitized oasis of order and efficiency that was Disneyland.[1] And Florenz Ziegfeld, the great impresario of glorified girl shows, died in 1932, living just long enough to witness the end of the *Follies* as a yearly extravaganza. Indeed, 1927 marked the end of the *Follies'* tenure at the New Amsterdam Theatre. The opulent show became a periodic spectacle occasionally produced throughout the 1930s and 1940s, until the show took its final gasp in 1957.[2] A handful of films followed, but none could recapture the sheer spectacle of the stage show. The spirit of the *Follies,* however, lives on in Las Vegas showgirls performances, a postmodern homage to the original revues, where audiences celebrate in the over-the-top glittering pastiche. The very things that had made these amusements so exhilarating at the turn of the century had, in part, led to their demise. The problem with the modern thrill was that a greater excitement always needed to be devised. Some five

[1] Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 164.

[2] Linda Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

decades into the twentieth century, the icons of modern turn of the century amusement had largely lost their thrill of the daring.

Not all disappeared, however. Slumming continues, alive and well, into the twenty-first century. Slum tourism has largely—though not entirely—moved out of the United States, to places like Rio de Janiero, Mumbai, and Johannesburg. Like their predecessors of a century ago, contemporary slum tourists seek thrills and to satisfy their curiosity about the experience of slum life.[3] The historic connection between sex and tourism continues, as far-flung locales have become tourist destinations for engaging in illicit sex. Like sentinels ever on guard, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (the Japanese branch) protest sexual tourism, continuing their mission of defending women and children against illicit sex.[4] Like slumming, world's fairs also live on into the twenty-first century, though the last to be held in the United States was in 1984. Like Coney Island and the *Ziegfeld Follies*, world's fairs, at a time of increased global travel and intense social media, have lost much of their glimmer and thrill for American audiences.

Historian T.J. Jackson Lears wrote that "[a]ll scholarship is—or ought to be—a kind of intellectual autobiography."[5] Certainly this research reflects my personal interests, but this dissertation is also stamped with my interpretation of both the past and

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[3] Bob Ma, "A Trip into the Controversy: A Study of Slum Tourism Travel Motivations," 2009–2010 Penn Humanities Forum on Connections, 2010.

[4] David Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local: Sex Violence, and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 90.

[5] T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), xviii.

the present historical moment. I did not set out to write a history in order to draw parallels to the present day, but over the course of writing this dissertation, I cannot help but see similarities. Just as Americans both embraced and resisted the changes heralded by modernity at the turn of the twentieth century, so too do Americans grapple with the dislocations of globalization in these early decades of the twenty-first. Shades of the same anxieties regarding race, gender, class, the economy, and the nature of modern amusements have resurfaced, and the dilemmas of the past seem to mirror our own. Today black performers occupy a very different space than Bert Williams but we still debate the place for diversity in American entertainment, particularly in the light of movements like "Oscars So White," which highlights the lack of diversity in yearly Oscars nominees and in Hollywood broadly.[6] Movements like Black Lives Matter and Me Too extend this critique to larger American society, critiquing racism with police forces and excessive use of force against the black public, and the pervasive existence of sexual harassment and rape within Hollywood. While these movements focus on specific issues, they have led to a broader climate of critique of racial and gender hierarchies within the United States.

Amidst tectonic changes in the American social landscape, some Americans grope for a return to the familiar. With the rise of these social movements, backlash has likewise emerged, with the number of racial supremacist organizations increasing.[7] A

[6] See a collection of Los Angeles Times articles on the subject here: http://www.latimes.com/la-et-oscars-so-white-reaction-htmlstory.html.

[7] Sara Sidner and Mallory Simon, "Number of Neo Nazi and Black Nationalist Groups Grew in 2017, SPLC Says," CNN, https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/21/us/splc-hate-group-report-2017/index.html

return to traditional masculine physicality seems to also be increasingly popular. For example, the cult of "vigorous manhood" that American men at the turn of the twentieth century envisioned as delivering them from the menace of "overcivilization" and gave purpose and power to Eugen Sandow and Teddy Roosevelt appears renewed. A new cult of extreme obstacle courses allows Americans (majority men, though women do also participate) to escape "however briefly, their bourgeois existences" and "comfort zones" though conditioning their bodies to almost ludicrous endurance, including running through an obstacle of dangling wires connected to 10,000 volts.[8] To the participants, it is the suffering that makes the experience authentic and real, which they contrast with their tedious everyday existence.

Core to the experience of modernity was the spectacle, and the opportunity to transform the self through participation in spectacle; the chance to be something new and different, if only for a night Americans still crave the thrill of the spectacle, albeit in different forms than those of a century ago. Just as Americans at the turn of the twentieth century delighted in the spectacle of amusement zones and rushed to become a part of the crowd, Americans of the twenty-first century likewise fantasize new roles and realities for themselves. The rise of reality television in the early years of the twenty-first century gave people worldwide the opportunity for short bursts of something like fame, in which they make themselves a spectacle to the public, not so dissimilar from the watching

[8] Austin Murphy, "Mud, Sweat, and Tears: My Day as a Tough Mudder Crash Test Dummy," Sports Illustrated, https://www.si.com/edge/2014/12/02/tough-mudder-beta-test (accessed 1 March 2018). See also Katherine Bindley, "Tough Mudder, Spartan Races See Increase in Women," Huffingtonpost.com, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/10/tough-mudder-women-spartan-race_n_2257878.html (accessed 1 March 2018).

crowds at the Blowhole Theater of Coney Island. Americans' desire to be in the thick of the spectacle, it seems, has not abated, though the medium has changed significantly.

Perhaps even now, at this very moment of profound social transition, I wonder if we also live amidst an era chafing against the changing racial, class, and gender dynamics of the twenty-first century. Amidst the powerful forces of change in the Black Lives Matter, Time's Up, and Me Too movements and countless others demanding radical transformation of America, America seems on the verge of transformation. But now, unlike the modern age dawning with the turn of the twentieth century, we get to be part of that process of transformation; the future is up to us.

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