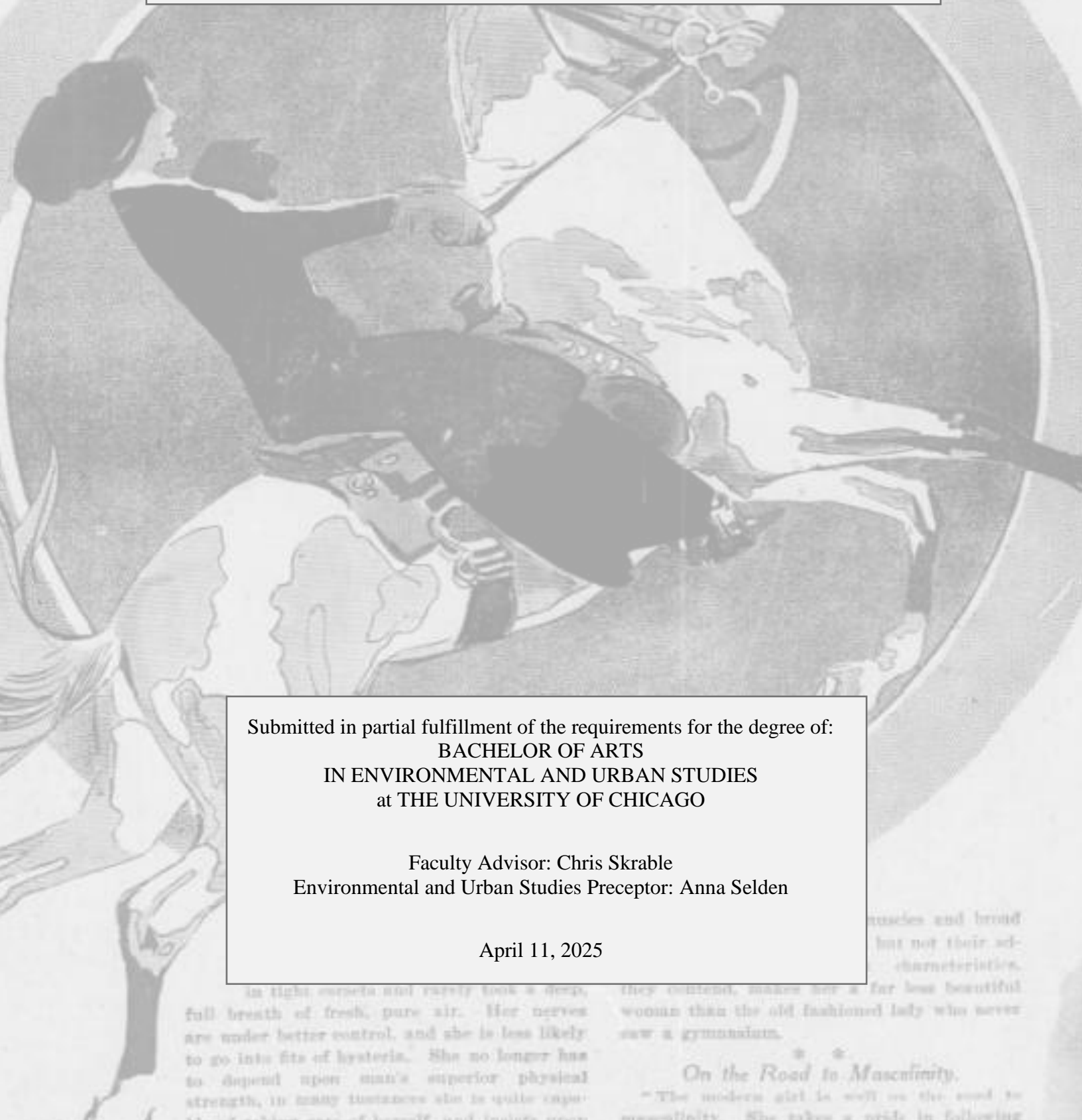


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...d their figures

NECK THICKER  
WAIST LARGER, AND  
NOSE MUSCULAR  
FEET AND HANDS LARGER

A NEW AND MASCULINE  
TYPE OF FEMALE FIGURE  
WHICH DR. SARGENT  
THINKS EVENTUALLY WILL  
BE PRODUCED BY THE  
MODERN WOMAN'S  
ATHLETICS

**“Many Girls Just Like Her”: Vice Districts, Gender Transgression, and the Fear of Female Modernity in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago**  
By Sam Shelffo-McGrath



Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:  
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Faculty Advisor: Chris Skrable  
Environmental and Urban Studies Preceptor: Anna Selden

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...in tight corsets and rarely took a deep,  
full breath of fresh, pure air. Her nerves  
are under better control, and she is less likely  
to go into fits of hysteria. She no longer has  
to depend upon man's superior physical  
strength, in many instances she is quite capa-  
ble of looking out for herself, and insists upon

...muscles and broad  
...but not their ad-  
...characteristics.  
...they contend, make her a far less beautiful  
woman than the old-fashioned lady who never  
saw a gymnasium.

*On the Road to Masculinity.*

\* \* \*  
“The modern girl is well on the road to  
masculinity. She takes a pride in following

**ABSTRACT**

A profoundly unsettled public perception of social order characterized America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which the White middle class believed traditional American domesticity to be under attack due to tensions around race, class, and women's suffrage. Within this, the category of gender transgressions—any behavior threatening the sanctity and bounds of the traditional relationship between men and women—emerged as an outsized concern for legal and moral authorities. Chicago's red-light districts, collectively known as "Levees," functioned as permissive spaces for all forms of vice. Examination of narratives of atypical gender performances and relationships (spatialized within the vice *district*, especially as Chicago's First Ward Levee gained greater attention from the press) and the subsequent responses of media and governmental authority allows for analysis of the role cultural anxieties about changing gender roles played in attempts to create moral and spatial order within the city. Using documentation around arrests, trials, and reform missions, this project argues that the reciprocal relationship between vice behavior and vice districts that reformers established transformed "antisocial" behaviors into a culturally transmissible spatial disease that necessitated punitive intervention. Gender transgressions, inasmuch as they threatened masculine hegemony, were treated under this framework as representative of a total breakdown of social order brought by unchecked modernity. The Levee(s), as more of a cultural idea of vice than a strictly geographically bounded district, served as an incubator for authorities' strategies of treatment for gender transgression and as a test case for cultural anxieties about urban disorganization.

*Acknowledgements.*

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**DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

In order of appearance.

William Murphy	A wash-girl.
William T. Stead	An investigative journalist.
Jack Johnson	A boxer.
Dwight L. Moody	An evangelist.
Lyman Gage	A financial magnate.
Maggie Darling	A prostitute.
Carter H. Harrison IV	Chicago's 37 <sup>th</sup> and 40 <sup>th</sup> mayor.
"Hinky Dink" Kenna	Alderman and saloonist.
"Bathhouse" John Coughlin	Alderman and poet.
Johnny De Pow	A boodler.
Bill Winters	A St. Louis regular.
Chief Smith	A St. Louis detective.
Bob Hannon	A barkeep.
Sidney Hammond	A teenage contractor.
Belle Schafer	A free spirit.
Alice Mitchell	A scorned lover.
Freda Ward	A lover.
Matt Rollinger	A jealous husband.
Michael Burns	Another.
Joseph Piatciewicz	A hobbyist crossdresser.
Bronislawa Piatciewicz	A dissatisfied wife.
Kate Kane	A lawyer.
George Quinn	A professional crossdresser.
Quincy De Lang	Another one.
Arthur Burrage Farwell	A busybody.
Herman Schuettler	A Chicago cop.
Walter T. Sumner	A priest.
Fred Busse	Mayor from 1907-1911.
John E. Wayman	State's Attorney.

## INTRODUCTION

William Murphy was born a man and lived his life as one. That he happened to possess what others deemed a slender figure, a girlish, delicate face, and a high-pitched voice was nothing more than a quirk of nature. Nevertheless, these were always the first things beat cops noticed about him. Under an 1851 Chicago municipal ordinance, it was a crime for anyone to “appear in a public place in a dress not belonging to his or her sex, with intent to conceal his or her sex.”<sup>1</sup> Murphy was clearly a woman—or so they thought—illegally masquerading as a man. He was a regular around the “dens and dives”<sup>2</sup> of Chicago’s vice districts, where the officers on patrol were keen to stop passersby on any suspicion of disorderliness. As a result, he was brought in for ‘*masquerading as a man*’ so many times that the police captain at Harrison St. Station had to issue him an official certificate verifying his sex. In order to escape harassment, Murphy resolved that “his sphere was petticoats,” and began to wear female clothing in public. Despite adopting the gender his local precinct appeared to believe best suited him, he didn’t manage to escape legal trouble. He next made headlines for the alleged theft of a silk dress at a residence where he worked as a wash-girl—a crime somewhat overshadowed by the revelation that he was a wash-boy after all—for which he was sentenced to one day in county jail.<sup>3</sup> Murphy was far from the only unwitting victim who would be caught outside the culturally-determined mold of his assigned gender role.

Chicago, much like the rest of America, found itself embroiled in a struggle to find its civic footing amidst fears over myriad changes wrought by the approaching modernity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This oncoming American modernity—a “social and cultural ferment”<sup>4</sup> caused by political,

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<sup>1</sup> William Eskridge Jr, *Gaylaw: Challenging the Apartheid of the Closet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 338. Similar laws persecuting cross-gender dress were in place nationwide at the state and local municipal levels.

<sup>2</sup> “The Worst Spot On Earth,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 3, 1886.

<sup>3</sup> “A Short Sentence for Stealing a Silk Dress,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 1886.

<sup>4</sup> Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 33.

economic, and population shifts mediated by a newly invigorated mass media apparatus—created contradictory possibilities and aspirations towards the fantasy of a national future for the new era. As women increasingly claimed their place in the public sphere, the boundaries of traditional gender roles—and the gendered split of public/private spaces—experienced a social breakdown. Increased immigration and in-migration found a new influx of Black, Chinese, and Eastern European populations whose presences were perceived as a threat to the White American family unit.<sup>5</sup> The urban metropolis, with its many and varied potential modes of life, was seen as the flashpoint around which fears of social disorganization manifested, as immoral or antisocial behavior became spatialized and associated with the physical space of the city.<sup>6</sup>

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, newspapers claimed Chicago as “the wickedest city in the world.”<sup>7</sup> It was notorious for crime, impiety, and fast living: preachers struggled to find the words to properly express its sinful nature, as even the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah were “nice, sleepy old towns compared to [Chicago].”<sup>8</sup> Critics often described the city as “wide-open” – meaning the rule of law was at best polite fiction, as police and government were much more likely to be in on the scheme than to take any kind of suppressive action. Although “wide-open” Chicago always had its fair share of vice, the Levee district (which was semi-mobile in response to political pressures but mostly stayed within the bounds of the First Ward and today’s South Loop area) was perhaps its most famous center of sin. The Levee gained much greater notoriety after the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, where it became the center of much publicity for tourists flocking to Chicago’s after-hours attractions of brothels, saloons, and opium dens.<sup>9</sup> At that time, it centered on a single block reasonably accessible from the fair (on Printer’s Row between Harrison and

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<sup>5</sup> Duggan, 14–15.

<sup>6</sup> Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*, 2009, 20–25.

<sup>7</sup> “Chicago Wickedest City,” *The Morning Call*, November 12, 1906.

<sup>8</sup> “Turns His Face,” *The Marshall Messenger*, June 30, 1896.

<sup>9</sup> Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*, 39.

Polk) which made it an attractive destination. Its newfound popularity combined with the First Ward's permissive aldermen and their democratic machine allowed it to grow into an undisputed red-light district throughout the 1890s and 1900s. It was a popular and profitable racket: the aldermen themselves made up to \$70,000 in one night through an annual ball that pimps, gamblers and saloonkeepers of the Levee understood was mandatory to attend to maintain the First Ward's protection.<sup>10</sup> The broader apparatus of the city got a cut from the vice business as well. Justice of the Peace court offices—derogatorily known as “justice shops”—charged a fee for use of their services, whether that was a marriage license or a guilty verdict.<sup>11</sup> The establishment of the Municipal Court system in 1905 did little for this pay-to-play system: municipal police court judges, in addition to their public salaries, made hefty nightly fees processing bail bonds, disorderly conduct charges, and various vagrants and prostitutes the Chicago Police Department (CPD) hauled in on a rotating basis.<sup>12</sup> Periodic enforcements of law and order dented the Levee's business, but not by much: even when the “Old Levee” was largely cleaned up by popular demand in 1903 the vice business simply moved down to approximately 12 square blocks around 22<sup>nd</sup> Street from Clark to Michigan (still well within the same municipal districts).<sup>13</sup> However, although the Levee held powerful financial incentives for local government and the CPD, increasing pressure from the Confederation of Churches caused the formation of the 1911 Vice Commission, whose report *The Social Evil in Chicago* ultimately spelled the end of the Levee – though certainly not of corruption.<sup>14</sup>

Between 1893 and 1911, the heyday of the Levee district, moral and legal authorities simultaneously tolerated, exploited, and persecuted the various forms of ‘vice’ and ‘deviant behavior’

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<sup>10</sup> St Sukie De La Croix, *Chicago Whispers: A History of LGBT Chicago before Stonewall* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 22.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Willrich, *City of Courts* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Willrich, *City of Courts*; William Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, 1893.

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan, *Lords of the Levee*, 1943, 235.

<sup>14</sup> De La Croix, *Chicago Whispers: A History of LGBT Chicago before Stonewall*, 24; Carter Harrison IV, “Manuscript Regarding Chicago Political and Social History, and Harrison Family History,” n.d., Box 15, Folder 715, Newberry Library.

(which, as the Levee evolved into an increasingly de-spatialized imaginary, became more and more a subset of the former as the idea of deviance itself became linked with the staples of vice). Among these, *gender transgressions*, as a category including but not necessarily limited to queerness, may have initially seemed among the least dangerous. These behaviors merely overstepped what were seen as the appropriate boundaries of masculinity or femininity, and cast a broad net including anything from crossdressing to living as the opposite sex to wearing pants while riding a bike. But as Chicago became a focus of the national conversation around urban vice and reform in the 1890s,<sup>15</sup> reformers' tactics inadvertently created a mutually constitutive relationship between vice behavior and vice district. Vice, in this framing, became conceived as a social and spatial disease with a nearly unlimited ability to spread. Given its spatialized nature, controlling vice—and vice spaces—became a moral imperative to direct the future of urban life.

The years around the turn of the century represented a period of possibilities at once creative and repressive, as perceptions of unlimited social change transformed gender roles into sites of negotiation within the public sphere. Gender *transgressions*—coded as vice behavior—were both uniquely expansive for traditional lifeways and threatening to the entrenchment of perceived male dominance over women, as behaviors that unsettled the very categories of “men” and “women.” They came to be perceived as edge cases of modernity: potential futures representing total social disorganization. Gender behaviors that were perceived as threats to the nuclear family and male hegemony, particularly in relation to any complication of the perception of the female image as inherently domestic and unthreatening, motivated an increased need to interrogate gender characteristics in an attempt to separate “real” women from gender rebels. Gender transgressors represented what traditionalists feared was the future of urban life: total social disorganization, where even something as fundamental as sex was subject to change. Gender transgressions (and

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 126.

their treatment) served as a microcosm of how anxieties around gender roles and the sanctity of the American family were processed, which were essential underlying threads in the broader fear around modernity and social change. Ultimately Chicago authorities would attempt to repress visible gender nonconformity through police persecution and cracking down on vice districts where such behavior was most visible, as if to attempt to avert modernity by repressing its manifestations.<sup>16</sup> Theater and entertainment acts, understood as *gender performances*, became a normalized display of gender nonconformity in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that ran on a parallel track to more personal expressions of nonconformity.<sup>17</sup> As repressive anxieties around the new century settled, what was left were the newly strengthened links between vice behavior and vice districts which created new exploratory environments for slumming that would lead to the Pansy Craze of the 1920s.

Studying queer communities in this time period comes with the problem of terminology: the word “homosexual” first appeared in print in the United States in 1892, but didn’t become popularized until the 1920s.<sup>18</sup> As the identity of the homosexual was still being created and understood, queerness existed as a set of shadowy and ill-understood fragments to heterosexual Americans, including sodomites, degenerates, perverts, inverts, and female impersonators, among other allegedly deviant groups. However, early conceptions of queer deviance were best defined as a persecution based on perceived gender transgression – stepping outside the bounds of their acceptable gender behaviors through their queerness. For men, they were perceived as betraying the perceived natural role of masculinity by having sex with other men; women, meanwhile, found that their sexual independence from men threatened traditional family dynamics. This contrasted persecution based on heterosexual sex-based deviance, which mainly applied to “fallen women”

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<sup>16</sup> Vice Commission, “The Social Evil in Chicago,” 1911, 296.

<sup>17</sup> De La Croix, *Chicago Whispers: A History of LGBT Chicago before Stonewall*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> Jim Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town: Sodomites, Female Impersonators, Third-Sexers, Pansies, Queers, and Sex Morons in Chicago’s First Century*, 2018, xiv.

(e.g. prostitutes). Sexual transgressions were actions from which fallen women could be rescued; the idea of a gender-based transgression, however, was based on the denouncement of the individual's own identity – an expression of the inner self from which the public found it difficult to conceptualize salvation. The narrative of women forced into “White slavery” in brothels,<sup>19</sup> which was the predominant image around discourses of vice reform, contrasted the image of the queer deviant who was deemed a degenerate of independent origin as “inverts” became an increasingly medicalized category.

Since sodomy, sexual inverts, female impersonators, urnings, tribads, third-sexes, and any of the other words used to describe same-sex desire were considered taboo, any news reporting on the subject was somewhat sensationalist. What the average American heard on the subject of sodomy was Alice Mitchell's 1892 murder of Freda Ward, or Guy T. Olmstead's fatal shooting of his lover W. L. Clifford in 1894.<sup>20</sup> Sexual inversion, in these narratives, was one of many forces of chaos that lurid newspaper narratives characterized as threatening the white American family. Parallel to this was the rise of “new women” of which lesbians were a type, alongside prostitutes, “fast” girls, and “morally loose” Black women. The first American women's suffrage organizations, founded in 1869, fueled cultural anxieties that female economic independence and sexual autonomy would endanger white men's access to white women's bodies.<sup>21</sup> This created an environment in which heterosocial male/female dynamics were already perceived as under attack, where gender transgression was not simply a personal choice but also a destabilizing force to society.

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<sup>19</sup> Amy Lippert, “The Visual Pedagogy of Reform: Picturing White Slavery in America,” *Journal of Urban History* 46, no. 4 (2019), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0096144219834258>.

<sup>20</sup> William Eskridge Jr, *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America 1861-2003* (New York: Viking, 2008), 40; Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town: Sodomites, Female Impersonators, Third-Sexers, Pansies, Queers, and Sex Morons in Chicago's First Century*, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, 43.

This project seeks to understand how gender nonconformity and urban vice were understood in Chicago at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as moral panic around a newly spatialized conception of wickedness created an incentive for repression of taboo behaviors. Public fears of social disorganization motivated in part by increasing female independence, and fears of spatial disorganization motivated by the need to reckon with the spatial forms of the modern American metropolis created conditions where urban vice and the issue of public morality could be sensationalized. Gender transgressions emerged as an outsized concern, as many believed they represented a possible dystopian future – women could be men, men could be women, and the entire gendered hierarchy on which American society was founded would crumble into dust. Vice districts fulfilled nearly a parallel role: as permissive spaces in which “immoral” behaviors were commonplace, and visitors found themselves mingling across sex, race, and class barriers that might not be possible in “polite” society. These permissive spaces allowed for the creation of possible futures, of which gender transgression constituted one part, that the American public feared would lead to the breakdown of the traditional heterosexual White family unit. Analyzing the responses of legal and moral authorities to gender transgressions in the context of highly visible urban vice allows for those spaces to serve as the laboratory in which American responses to modernity were concocted. Gender nonconformity as a category of its own (including but not limited to what we would today understand as queerness) is something that has not been widely written about in this period. While the intersections between *queerness* and urban vice districts, and modernity and vice districts<sup>22</sup> have been studied, there remains a gap in the literature relating to public anxieties around gender nonconformity and what that meant for urban spatial order. This topic is especially relevant in Chicago, which experienced a highly publicized search for moral structure in the years following the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition.

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<sup>22</sup> See particularly George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 1994, and Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*.

Historical narrative analysis of relevant case studies forms the foundation for this project. Because of the relatively taboo nature of the subject material, many gender nonconforming persons in this period would have preferred as little documentation as possible: what does remain skews toward the more lurid and scandalous anecdotes that made headlines. A notable limitation of this project is the inability to reconstruct missing information from this period. However, as much of this project is concerned with responses to and conceptions of a gendered imaginary, it is possible to read against the grain with the extant documentation to analyze the motivations behind punitive responses to gender transgression. The selected case studies display the varieties of both how personal gender nonconformities were constructed and the ways the specificities of each case provoked unique reactions stemming from broad cultural anxieties. The primary archives of evidence are historical newspapers, publications about Chicago from moral reformers and the tourism industry, and personal papers from individuals involved in discourses around Chicago's civic and moral life. These are, of course, necessarily slanted: even first-person testimony from gender transgressors remains filtered through the particular lens of mass media. However, at its core this project is much more concerned with perception than reality. These sources may have questionable veracity when it comes to the incidents and realities being reported on, although they have been scraped for meaning as much as possible within these confines, but they ring true as portraits of the gender-perception *imaginary*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

An exploration of historiographic literature on the relationship between vice, cities, policing, and reform facilitates a better understanding of the cultural anxieties surrounding the perceived breakdown of traditional gender roles at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These anxieties manifested in the resulting reactions towards gender-nonconforming behavior, which became associated with the vice and moral decay that Chicago's Levee symbolized. While governmental

authorities tended towards more regulationist viewpoints (e.g. managing vice in condoned red-light districts, often for both societal and profitable personal gain), the major motivators of action on vice reform were clubs and missions of moral reform activists. Although these reformers occupied a spectrum of opinions on both the nature of vice itself and the proper methods to combat it, as their varying responses to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition showed, their work gave voice to tensions around the blurring of boundary between male and female roles in the domestic and public spheres with an often myopic focus on White female prostitution (hyperbolically termed "White slavery"). One consequence of this focus was the elevation of the White female victim and her narratives as a cultural icon to the exclusion of the narratives of more marginalized persons like Black women and queer men involved in prostitution. This unequal treatment was due to a perceived inability to be 'reformed' into the White domestic ideal along both racial and sexual boundaries. Policing, in turn, further cemented queerness as a characteristic that could be identified in citizens in order to prosecute and persecute queer communities.<sup>23</sup> Attempting to frame queerness (among other marginalities) as a vice behavior—and thereby frame the associated persons as residents of the simultaneously spatial and symbolic Levee—was one way Chicago authorities were able to manage social anxieties. An analysis of these intersectional tensions, especially as expressed in reaction to red-light districts, enables a more nuanced understanding of how gender transgressions were situated in the narratives of domestic breakdown and social disorganization that prevailed in Chicago around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **MORAL REFORM AND "SOCIAL EVIL"**

The moral reformers of the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century were predominantly middle-class White social activists who aimed to bring a law-and-order mindset to the working poor.<sup>24</sup> In

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<sup>23</sup> Hugh Ryan, "Inventing, and Policing, the Homosexual in Early 20th C. NYC," *The Gotham Center for New York City History*, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Willrich, *City of Courts*, xxxi.

*Urban Masses and Moral Order in America*, historian Paul Boyer argues that moral reform movements of the late-nineteenth century typically fell into one of two categories: coercive and environmentalist. Coercive reformers relied largely on the trope of the wicked city, treating both the urban environment and the people they saw as in need of reform with a hostile tone. The urban menace had to be feared, and ultimately entirely stamped out in order to remove the influences deteriorating the city's moral character. Environmentalists, however, saw the physical conditions of city slums as one of the root causes of vice and immorality, and focused less on stamping out vice establishments and more on attempting to use urban planning to create more attractive cities and thereby a more moral populace.<sup>25</sup>

The motivations behind these reformers and social activists have been the subject of some debate. Historian Don Kirschner argues that while many scholars paint reformers in a unanimously positive and altruistic light, a contrasting interpretation advanced by Robert Wiebe's 1967 *The Search for Order* (among other scholars of the 1960s) characterized the reform vision less as an altruistic desire to alleviate human suffering and more as a search for order and efficiency.<sup>26</sup> Boyer seconds the Progressive fixation on "urban moral decay and incipient disorder," noting that environmentalist reform often sprang from the most creative and indirect strategies used to promote moral order.<sup>27</sup>

Progressive-era moral reform as a movement emerged largely from the tradition of Protestant evangelism. Although reformers offered subtle variations on their own theme, the fundamental thesis was that America was facing a moral crisis that could be solved with the spread of

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 180.

<sup>26</sup> Don Kirschner, "The Ambiguous Legacy: Social Justice and Social Control in the Progressive Era," *Historical Reflections* 2, no. 1 (1975): 70.

<sup>27</sup> Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 353.

good Christian values.<sup>28</sup> The social changes of increased immigration and in-migration, and the greater independence of women—perceived by the middle class as a threat of social disorganization—were confronted through a spiritual framework of sin and wickedness imposed on the city itself, at times with a geographic literality through the designation of parts of the city as vice districts.<sup>29</sup> Undergirding Protestant evangelism and Victorian liberalism was a shared focus on individual character-building and conversion, as an evangelical middle class that had defined itself in opposition to the (often foreign-born) working poor attributed poverty to personal qualities like intemperance and laziness.<sup>30</sup>

However, progressive perspectives on the social causes of crime (born of the “new fissures in liberal ideology”<sup>31</sup> appearing in the wake of the cultural shifts of the late nineteenth century) increasingly influenced reformers during this period.<sup>32</sup> Understanding the cause of crime as an environmental issue stemming from unjust aspects of life, which quickly became the guiding principle of Chicago’s criminal justice reform,<sup>33</sup> also produced new possibilities for state intervention. If the condition of the city affected the morality of its masses, intervention became not just a possibility but a duty.<sup>34</sup> The 1893 World’s Fair became a testing ground for this social responsibility hypothesis, as reformers imagined its possibilities as an architectural establishment of new forms

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 139. To say that the reform movement was entirely Protestant or entirely White would be an oversimplification, but the mainstream values most high-profile reform organizations were rooted in relied heavily on the White Protestant middle-class experience. For readings on non-Christian moral reformers, start with Edward Bristow’s *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery, 1870-1939* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983); Cynthia Blair’s *I’ve Got to Make My Livin’’: Black Women’s Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010) and Martha Patterson’s *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005) also discuss Black reform activists and racial tensions in social activism in this period.

<sup>29</sup> Thekla Ellen Joiner, *Sin in the City: Chicago and Revivalism 1880-1920* (Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 28.

<sup>30</sup> Joiner, 30.

<sup>31</sup> Willrich, *City of Courts*, xxv.

<sup>32</sup> Willrich, 65.

<sup>33</sup> Willrich, 86.

<sup>34</sup> Willrich, 68.

of modernity and social order. For environmentalist reformers, the White City of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition was one of the ultimate promises of the future of orderly cities: reformers wrote about their hopes and dreams for the White City, which would finally prove how much the city's environment could uplift its populations.<sup>35</sup>

## **WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION**

Although the White City served as a symbol of hope for a new Chicago, its ultimate effects may have done more to bolster the strength of the old Chicago. Anticipating a new influx of both economic development and thirsty fair-goers, the three years preceding the World's Fair saw the opening of dozens of new brewing companies and seven hundred new saloons.<sup>36</sup> Faced with the Fair's utopian visions on the one hand and the evidence of vice, boodling (political graft), and a "wide-open" political future on the other, historian Thekla Ellen Joiner argues that reformers occupied a spectrum in regards to their position on the potential outcomes of the World's Columbian Exposition. More liberal Protestant reformers believed that the World's Fair would prove to be a vector of broad social uplift through the city's exposure to "Western intellectual enlightenment," while the more conservative evangelicals held a dimmer outlook due to their focus on individual conversion experiences.<sup>37</sup>

Ultimately, historian Chad Heap finds that Chicago's vice districts (especially those of the conveniently-located First Ward Levee(s), contrary to reformers' hopes) were catapulted into the public eye alongside the World's Fair as tourists flocking to the Fair found themselves sampling Chicago's more illicit offerings by night.<sup>38</sup> The "social evil" was on full display, with Chicago's night-time economy almost as compelling to visitors as the fair itself. Reformers were certainly

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<sup>35</sup> Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 184.

<sup>36</sup> Joiner, *Sin in the City: Chicago and Revivalism 1880-1920*, 67.

<sup>37</sup> Joiner, 69.

<sup>38</sup> Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*, 39.

aware of the Levee's popularity, with the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) even leading a highly publicized slumming tour during the fair.<sup>39</sup> The journalist William T. Stead published *If Christ Came to Chicago* shortly after the end of the World's Fair, based on his research and interviews in the bleak winter that followed. In his fervent denunciation of urban vice, he devotes particular attention to the Levee district as a center of sin and iniquity within an already-degenerated town.<sup>40</sup> Paul Boyer finds elements of both coercive and environmentalist reform attitudes within his writing, simultaneously espousing the need for a religious enlightened minority's moral control and oversight over the broader populace and ending with a utopian environmentalist vision of a future twentieth-century Chicago based on every Chicagoan's own sense of moral unity through its architectural transformation.<sup>41</sup>

Due both to his writings and his part in the 1893 formation of the Chicago Civic Federation,<sup>42</sup> Stead's positions on vice would become extremely influential in subsequent Chicago reform traditions.<sup>43</sup> His blend of coercive and environmental doctrine allowed for the approach of reform organizations as self-appointed rescuers, destroying and exerting punitive control over vice establishments in order to rescue the innocents who had been tainted by their presence and thereby establishing a new moral city. But who exactly constituted 'the innocents' in need of rescuing from their sinful lives became an increasingly loaded question in the face of Chicagoans' increasing fears of social disorganization.

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<sup>39</sup> Joiner, *Sin in the City: Chicago and Revivalism 1880-1920*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 184.

<sup>41</sup> Boyer, 186.

<sup>42</sup> The Chicago Civic Federation, perhaps even more than Stead himself, would end up as an important interest in Chicago reform politics: the organization, as well as some individual members, motivated much of the impetus that led to the 1911 Vice Commission and their subsequent publication *The Social Evil in Chicago* that changed the landscape of vice in the city.

<sup>43</sup> Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 184.

## PROSTITUTION AND THE “WHITE SLAVERY” PANIC

“White slavery” was the idea that young White women were being trafficked and forced into prostitution *en masse* in large cities and was an important concern of many missions and reform leagues in Chicago during the Progressive era. The anti-vice activists who dedicated themselves to this issue found themselves at a flashpoint of racial and gendered tension that gave rise to a nationwide preoccupation with the anti-White slavery crusade. Immigration increased exponentially after 1900 both from foreign Caucasian populations (such as Italians, Irish, and Eastern Europeans that were selectively regarded as ethnic, “non-White”<sup>44</sup> minorities), and from Black populations migrating north, which left native-born Whites grappling with increasingly complicated racial categories and a changing definition of their own Whiteness.<sup>45</sup> In tandem with this was the rise of the ‘New Woman,’ who was independent, sexually liberated, and fundamentally at odds with the domestic, asexual, passive wife that hegemonic masculinity demanded.<sup>46</sup> With the White, heterosexual family unit threatened on two fronts, these cultural anxieties served to amplify the issue of White slavery – the ultimate trial of *who* could be granted access to White women’s bodies.

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<sup>44</sup> As “Whiteness” itself became an increasingly complex category, so too did the language required by scholars to navigate the bundle of rights and privileges associated with “White” as a hegemonic racial attribute distinct from any real ethnic community. Ethnic white populations that would now easily fall under that umbrella were, at the time, racialized minorities who were not afforded many of the benefits of White privilege that other populations enjoyed. Brian Donovan uses the term “native-born whites” to distinguish this in-group and out-group dynamic in *White Slave Crusades*, which I have replicated at times in this paper, but I am further exploring the orthographic distinctions inherent in “white” versus “White.” Black (with a capital B) has in more recent years become an accepted orthography to acknowledge the shared community and cultural identity that Blackness encapsulates, but the question of white/White is less settled. Scholar Eve Ewing, in her article *I’m a Black Scholar Who Studies Race. Here’s Why I Capitalize ‘White,’* argues that capitalizing White grants an important “specificity and significance” to Whiteness that pushes back against the invisible assumption that “whiteness” is a neutral, a-racial attribute instead of a racial identity: capitalizing White forces readers to confront Whiteness as an identity and phenomenon associated with its bundle of privileges gained through imperialism, exploitation, and the creation of racial hierarchy, while leaving it uncapitalized allows Whiteness to be implicitly considered the standard. I am using White in this paper to refer to the in-group privilege associated with a group of racial characteristics that were selectively expanded or bounded to include or exclude various ethnic populations.

<sup>45</sup> Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 10; Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, 43. Also see Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited and Beyond the Gibson Girl*, for the cultural development of New Women.

Amy Lippert frames the plea for the moral soul of the city, in addition to anti-vice crusades against drinking, gambling, and other ‘degenerate’ activities, as depending on the narrative that foreigners and older men were seducing innocent young White women into a life of sin.<sup>47</sup> Framing immigrant populations as a danger to White women was a narrative with potential punitive consequences to the most vulnerable populations, as similar characterizations of Black men had already proved (such as the case of African-American boxer Jack Johnson, who was sentenced to a year in prison under the Mann act for having consensual sexual relations with a White girlfriend).<sup>48</sup> Additionally, this central narrative around urban sex work characterized White woman as the ultimate protagonists of the drama of the slums: they needed—and deserved—rescuing, while other more marginalized identities (among them Black sex workers and queer men) were largely ignored as reform targets, as they could not fit into the idealized White heterosexual family dynamic that reformers were trying to restore.<sup>49</sup> Even the official language around White slavery made the boundaries of victimhood explicit: as Pamela Haag shows in *Consent: Sexual Rights and the Transformation of American Liberalism*, government reports defined White slavery’s victims as “those women who, if given a fair chance, would ... have been good wives, mothers and useful citizens.”<sup>50</sup> The women who could be rescued from White slavery were those that could be restored to the middle-class White domestic sphere – and only those.

Black women’s participation in the urban sex economy provoked a remarkably different response from anti-vice social activists. In *I’ve Got to Make My Livin’: Black Women’s Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, Cynthia Blair argues that prostitution constituted a “racial

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<sup>47</sup> Lippert, “The Visual Pedagogy of Reform: Picturing White Slavery in America.” See Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*, for the effect these narratives had on attempts to legislate the agency of young adult sexuality.

<sup>48</sup> Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (Columbia University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>49</sup> Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920*, 12.

<sup>50</sup> Pamela Haag, *Consent: Sexual Rights and the Transformation of American Liberalism* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 63.

battleground” in which city leaders attempted to re-assert social and racial hierarchy in the face of Chicago’s rapidly changing demographics even as the increasing Black population sought equal ground in the metropolis.<sup>51</sup> White reformers did note the presence of Black prostitutes in Chicago’s red-light districts, but despite their outsized representation in the city’s sexual economy<sup>52</sup> they were never afforded the narrative importance that reformers afforded the White “fallen woman.” Rather, while White prostitutes were considered a class of women degraded by circumstance, Black prostitutes represented a fear of the breakdown of racial boundaries and potential miscegenation that increasingly occupied the minds of native-born Whites.<sup>53</sup>

## NEW WOMANHOOD

Even as moral reform and evangelical revivalism grew in response to social pressures around race and sex, many women within the reform movement found themselves navigating the murky waters of ‘New Woman’-hood. Shifting dynamics within the domestic household at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were threatening to unsettle the traditional family, as an increasing proportion of women gained new nonfamilial attachments and identities through school, work, and leisure settings.<sup>54</sup> As more women began to enter the workforce, and join – or even spearhead – social movements, female economic independence threatened the (White) home as White women found themselves with options beyond a singular reliance on White men. Black women, prostitutes, lesbians, and Black men appeared in mass cultural imaginations as embodied threats to the White domestic hierarchy,<sup>55</sup> motivating much of the response to prostitution and “White slavery.” The

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<sup>51</sup> Blair, *I’ve Got to Make My Livin’*: *Black Women’s Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> Blair, 14.

<sup>53</sup> Blair, 86.

<sup>54</sup> Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, 43.

<sup>55</sup> Duggan, 43.

participation of middle- and upper-class White women in the public social sphere, however, was able to exist in a paradoxical space for female agency.<sup>56</sup>

Martha Patterson (*The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930*) defines the New Woman as a contradictory cultural figure who was simultaneously “suffragist, prohibitionist, clubwoman, college girl, American girl, socialist, capitalist, anarchist, pickpocket, bicyclist, barren spinster, mannish woman, outdoor girl, birth-control advocate, modern girl, eugenicist, flapper, blues woman, lesbian, and vamp”<sup>57</sup> – and any of the other thousand ways women found to assert their independence at the turn of the century, often in disagreement with each other. The New Woman was not a united push towards female liberation, but rather a series of perceptions of social unrest around the domestic sphere, which provoked varying reactions depending on both their membership group and actions.

While the role of women was contentious in reform thought—male reformers such as Chicago’s own shoe-salesman-turned-evangelist Dwight Lyman Moody preached the importance of “virile masculinity” and domestic motherhood while denouncing the “public” woman—the evangelical revivalism that characterized social activism offered female reformers a space to assert their own social power and independence.<sup>58</sup> However, while female-led reform organizations such as the WCTU, Jane Addams’ Hull House, and the World’s Fair’s Board of Lady Managers were highly influential in Chicago’s moral landscape, they were often only able to exercise their influence by using the privilege of their class and race to shield themselves from social consequences.<sup>59</sup> White female actively excluded Black women from membership in their organizations due to

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<sup>56</sup> Edward Blum, “‘Paul Has Been Forgotten’: Women, Gender, and Revivalism during the Gilded Age,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 3, no. 3 (2004): 250.

<sup>57</sup> Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>58</sup> Blum, “‘Paul Has Been Forgotten’: Women, Gender, and Revivalism during the Gilded Age,” 248–50.

<sup>59</sup> Joiner, *Sin in the City: Chicago and Revivalism 1880-1920*, 72; Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 155; Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, 44.

“political expediency,” leaving Black activists to form their own suffrage associations and women’s clubs.<sup>60</sup> The 1893 World’s Fair was similarly segregated: only after outside pressure during the Fair did the Board of Lady Managers allow a few Black reformers to speak at Exposition events, and even then not at the White City itself.<sup>61</sup>

## DEVIANT BODIES

While reform organizations sent undercover investigators into vice areas primarily to look into saloons and female prostitution, they often stumbled upon queer subcultures in the course of their work. One investigator for the 1911 Vice Commission reported being propositioned twenty times walking down State Street while wearing a red necktie, which was a popular way for queer men to identify one another.<sup>62</sup> The publications resulting from these investigations all mention evidence of queer life in Chicago’s vice districts, but the men participating in these subcultures are treated with a noticeably different tone than the women participating in Chicago’s intimate economy. Reformers were generally sympathetic to the causes of individual female prostitutes while being against prostitution as an industry, but the “pervert of the male persuasion”<sup>63</sup> was depicted as irredeemably lecherous, with a deviance stemming not from his environment but rather from his internal characteristics. Part of this was driven by the evolving conversations towards developing homosexuality as a medicalized identity occurring throughout the 1890s. Historian Jeffrey Weeks suggests that the end of the nineteenth century represented a shift from a religious model of homosexuality to a medical one, as “the homosexual” became an identifiable individual with an

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<sup>60</sup> Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915*, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Joiner, *Sin in the City: Chicago and Revivalism 1880-1920*, 75.

<sup>62</sup> De La Croix, *Chicago Whispers: A History of LGBT Chicago before Stonewall*, 24.

<sup>63</sup> L. O. Curon, *Chicago, Satan’s Sanctum*, 1899.

inherent condition instead of simply a set of behaviors that – theoretically – anyone could be engaging in.<sup>64</sup>

The behaviors regulated by “crime against nature,” “buggery,” and “sodomy” were sinful activities, and it was the fact that a man committed them that made *him* sinful: a man who did not commit these sins was not tainted by them. However, as physicians turned their attention towards homosexuality, the practice of sodomy was increasingly understood as stemming from a root cause. Foucault describes the homosexual identity as “consubstantial with [the queer man]; less a habitual sin than a singular nature.”<sup>65</sup> This nature affected not only his behavior but his affect, mannerisms, physical body, and mind: he had an “interior androgyny”<sup>66</sup> that expressed itself through the practice of sodomy (among other things). Here, gender became an issue indistinguishable from sexuality. The taboo “committed” was straying from the masculine gender archetype (even in the case of crime against nature laws, the issue was ultimately in compromising the sanctity of the male-female domestic relationship with nonprocreative sex, especially nonprocreative sex in which one took the role of the woman<sup>67</sup>) and the androgynous internal character of the homosexual thus became a taboo *being*. Although it was less legislated, the taboo around female homosexuality similarly came from the fact that the woman threatened heterosocial gender hierarchies by taking on an aggressive, masculine sexual role.<sup>68</sup> The homosexual was not an individual who committed sodomy, but rather a “third sex”<sup>69</sup> who, by the inversion of traditional gender roles,

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<sup>64</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, London: Quartet Books, 1977. Cited in George Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance,” *Salmagundi*, 1982.

<sup>65</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 45.

<sup>66</sup> Foucault, 45.

<sup>67</sup> Eskridge Jr, *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America 1861-2003*, 18.

<sup>68</sup> Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance,” 117. Notably, when it came to transgressing the feminine gender archetype, lesbianism was hardly the only expression of female sexuality that threatened the heterosocial dynamics enforcing women’s subordination to men. Nearly any open expression of female sexuality was considered a pathological behavior in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – women’s suffrage, sex work, and wearing pants similarly fell into this bucket.

<sup>69</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 48.

was actually somewhere in between man and woman. The term “sexual inversion,” which was most popular throughout the nineteenth century, denoted a biologically deterministic conflation of sexual and gender deviance: gender expression was thought to have been ‘inverted,’ causing men and women alike to display opposing gender traits (including desire for persons of the same sex).<sup>70</sup>

This medicalized understanding of sex/gender deviance established the deviant *body* as a culturally readable subject. The bodies of gender transgressors were understood to be evidence of their interior androgyny, transformed physically into deviant, uncategorized forms.<sup>71</sup> The paradigm of “passing,” as an antithesis to the totally *uncategorizable* body, serves as an attempt to create culturally legible transgender bodies. But while passing constitutes a “success” for trans individuals (though Sandy Stone argues this is ultimately repressive and non-transformative in terms of reframing the boundaries of gender as sites of complication and possibility), the cisgender outsider—especially in periods of particular anxiety around cultural gender roles—perceives this act as a threat.<sup>72</sup> I am using the framework of “deception” and “perception” as alternate framings of “passing” (being perceived in public as cisgender) and “clocking” (being perceived in public—despite one’s best effort to *pass*—as transgender), reconfiguring both in terms of a one-sided

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<sup>70</sup> Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance,” 116.

<sup>71</sup> Deviant bodies under the cisnormative visual gaze operated—and operate—under a paradigm of perception and deception. “Perception” entails a success for the outsider eye, as the deviant body is pushed out of normative gender practice. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen posits this exclusion from normative categories as a process of “monsterization,” as the deviant “embodied [through physical grotesquerie] the punishment earned by those who violate sexual taboos.” (Bruno Roy, “En Marge Du Monde Connue: Les Races de Monstres,” in *Aspects de La Marginalité Au Moyen Age*, ed. Guy-H Allard (Quebec: Les Editions de l’Aurore, 1975), 77, quoted in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *The Monster Theory Reader* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020) The body becomes an aberration: to cis- and heteronormative outside eyes, this is a warning. Sandy Stone’s foundational essay “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” explores the reverse side of this relationship with that same body as a site of creation, considering whether complete assimilation into the cisnormative gaze—“passing” or being “stealth”—is the end goal for transgender populations. Stone suggests this ultimately serves to efface transgender chronologies through the erasure of their lived experiences as the opposite sex (and divorcing a transgender past from a cisgender-passing future).

<sup>72</sup> Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 10, no. 2 (1992): 150–76.

relationship with the outsider eye. Deception-perception, in this context, becomes not a matter of personal safety or cultural legibility, but an impurity to be rooted out within the public sphere.

### **SEMI-OPEN EXPRESSION IN VICE DISTRICTS**

Vice districts functioned as important social centers for early queer communities because of the cover of plausible deniability, but the public nature of gender performance sometimes complicated this. The First Ward Levee was as close to a center of openly queer subculture as was possible in its time: because of its leniency and even endorsement of prostitution, sexual deviance was expected. Male prostitution was an early locus of semi-open queer activity, but even outside of visiting prostitutes queer networks sprang up in the Levee through public spaces like certain baths, restaurants, and saloons.<sup>73</sup> Male prostitutes themselves, who were generally assumed to only serve other men, were a class (much like Black prostitutes) that escaped the sympathy afforded to White female prostitutes – they were considered “physiological or psychological misfits” who fell under the jurisdiction of medicine more than anything else.<sup>74</sup> But while male prostitutes may have been exclusively gay, the Levee itself was not an exclusively gay district and provided a ready-made cover in the form of its other vices such as drinking, gambling, and female prostitution.<sup>75</sup> The dimly-lit streets of the Levee at night also provided a further smoke-screen for gender deviance, as female impersonators were able to pass as cisgender women without suspicion.<sup>76</sup>

This was a ‘public’ that was both spatially and temporally bounded, restricted to nighttime in Chicago’s most notorious neighborhood, during which gender transgression could pass unremarked. Practicing this deviance outside those bounds, however, constituted a different kind of

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<sup>73</sup> Gregory Sprague, “On the Gay Side of Town: Chicago’s Homosexual Subculture Before World War II,” in *Out In Chicago: LGBT History at the Crossroads* (Chicago: Chicago History Museum, 2011), 81.

<sup>74</sup> Willrich, *City of Courts*, 196.

<sup>75</sup> Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town: Sodomites, Female Impersonators, Third-Sexers, Pansies, Queers, and Sex Morons in Chicago’s First Century*, 47.

<sup>76</sup> Elledge, 48.

transgression: exposing a broader population of young, impressionable heterosexuals to gender deviance might “leave them defenseless”<sup>77</sup> against the advances of sexual inverts, and threatening a broader moral corruption. Even the knowledge of their presence in the district became a threat to Progressive-era moral reformers, ultimately motivating enough political pressure from the Federation of Churches to empower the 1911 Vice Commission to put an end to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Street Levee.<sup>78</sup>

## HISTORIOGRAPHIC CONTRIBUTIONS

The tides of change at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—urban vice, women’s suffrage, increased immigration and in-migration—created an environment of profound anxiety around what American urban life would (and could) look like. Heterosocial dynamics experienced major revisions as women engaged with the public sphere through both work and leisure, blurring not only the boundaries between public and private but also between men and women. A cultural struggle over the proper place of women created charged categories of urban vice as prostitution, homosexuality, and any other behaviors that compromised the White domestic unit became potentially threatening to traditional ways of life. Deviance, in its many guises, became not just an individual moral failing but an issue of *public* morals, and the moral health of the city itself. Vice districts, as uniquely permissive spaces, offered a microcosm of these dynamics. Through this lens, fears of total gendered social disorganization could be leveraged on select undesirable groups in a variety of ways – but for those who betrayed traditional sexual roles, the advent of modernity meant they were increasingly conceived of as (infectious) disease carriers. Although queer Chicago has been extensively written about from the 1920s and onwards, especially after the pansy craze and the records of Ernest Burgess’ University of Chicago sociology students, the 1890s-1900s represents a crucial period in the formation of queerness itself as an identity and how that identity related to

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<sup>77</sup> Elledge, 33.

<sup>78</sup> De La Croix, *Chicago Whispers: A History of LGBT Chicago before Stonewall*, 24.

the traditional family. Gender transgression<sup>79</sup> represented a space in the landscape of urban morality at the center of issues of race, sex, and public expression. Tracking public responses to gender nonconformity demonstrates both the historical role of gender transgression in fears of social disorganization and the role the state played in our understanding of gender possibilities today.

### IMAGINARY GEOGRAPHIES OF CHICAGO VICE

The 1890s saw a profound change in the conceptualization of “the city” and the place of urban vice. As social activists, government officials, and moral reformers struggled to pinpoint the causes of increasingly publicized social disorder, two schools of thought emerged: a “coercive” perspective aligning broadly with the Victorian moral system and a newer “environmental” understanding of antisocial behavior. As Paul Boyer defined these in *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America*, the former believed that vice stemmed from an internal flaw and the proper course of action was to punish and remove it from sight, while the latter argued that vice stemmed from environmental conditions, and the proper course of action was to uplift the physical conditions of those who were degraded by their circumstances to remove the desire for vice. William T. Stead was arguably the most prominent environmental reform advocate in Chicago at this time, with his publications kickstarting the formation of the influential Chicago Civic Federation (whose members would later find themselves embedded in the 1911 Vice Commission). However, both he and his disciples failed to completely reconcile their ideals with their own moral beliefs. Ultimately environmental reform tactics in Chicago recombined with coercive ideology, transforming “social evil” into a social contagion that was environmentally transmissible, exposing anyone—not just the morally impure—to the threat of infection.

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<sup>79</sup> “Gender transgression” as a category includes but is not exclusive to what we would now understand as “queerness.”

This increasing spatialization of vice created an imaginary geography of Chicago's Levee even as the district itself became increasingly abstracted: first as mobile, then as multiple districts, and finally as a spatialized association with vice behavior that justified interventionism across the city. "The Levee," through the ideological confusion of environmental reform, became a process of place-making that inherently degraded both the succession of neighborhoods that were labeled as "Levees" and the character of their residents and visitors. This framework recontextualized vice (and vice spaces) as a threat to public health and safety, carrying the disease of social disorganization across class, race, and gender boundaries. While this recontextualization transformed long-tolerated vices like prostitution into domestic breakdowns-in-progress that had the potential to threaten the sanctity of women everywhere, the response to these processes can most clearly be seen with cases representing a complete breakdown of gender roles such as gender nonconformity, which will be discussed in subsequent sections of this project.

## THE WICKED CITY

William T. Stead came to Chicago in the autumn of 1893, and made something of an immediate splash. On November 12, he gathered up anyone and everyone who would listen— "[p]reachers and saloonkeepers, gamblers and theological professors, women of the levee and members of the W. C. T. U., anarchists and professional people"<sup>80</sup>—at Central Music Hall to pose a question. What if Christ came to Chicago? Would he "find anything in Chicago that he would wish to have altered?"<sup>81</sup> His speech was controversial, to say the least. Stead was a native Englishman who had first come to notoriety as an investigative journalist after his 1885 series of articles "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (of which he was the editor), an exposé of vice and prostitution in London similar to the still-nascent White slavery panic.

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<sup>80</sup> "Strong Words Used," *Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 1893.

<sup>81</sup> "Strong Words Used."

During his research for the exposé he went so far as to attempt to purchase a 13-year-old girl in order to prove the existence of a trade in young girls, a stunt for which he did three months in prison.<sup>82</sup> In his own words, Stead had come to the New World under the illusion that the modern city of Chicago had solved the old world's problems – and had found instead that it “had improved upon [those problems], and more than that had originated new scandals which not even a third-rate town in Europe would endure.”<sup>83</sup>

Despite a mixed reception from both his audience and the wider Chicago populace, Stead's account of social and political corruption in the Second City resulted in the resolution to form a twenty-one-person “Civic Confederation” committee (largely composed of social activists and religious officials) to address those issues.<sup>84</sup> This committee organized into the hundred-person Civic Federation of Chicago in the span of just a few months, with Lyman Gage (formerly president of the World's Columbian Exposition's board of directors, and soon to be 42<sup>nd</sup> United States Secretary of the Treasury) elected as its president on January 20, 1894. The Civic Federation's incipient mission aimed to address the unemployment and economic downturn experienced by Chicago in the aftermath of the World's Fair – and thereby the social evil that had been aggravated by recent conditions – just as Stead had recommended, although he was not involved in any level of the Civic Federation's forming aside from its germination. Stead, who had returned to the city for a further investigation on the conditions of Chicago, would end up collating his preaching and his journalism in a book called *If Christ Came to Chicago! A Plea for the Union of All Who Love in the Service of All Who Suffer* published about a month later.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> “Sensational Abduction Case,” *Cambridge Weekly News*, September 12, 1885.

<sup>83</sup> “Strong Words Used.”

<sup>84</sup> Graham Taylor, “Dates of Chicago's Civic Reform Movements” (n.d.), Box 27, Folder 1566, Newberry Library.

<sup>85</sup> Graham Taylor, “Civic Federation Proposed” (n.d.), Box 37, Folder 1960, Newberry Library.

In Stead's characteristic fashion, much of the book was spent denouncing vice and wickedness in all its many and very specific forms; however, *If Christ Came to Chicago* posited that the majority of vice behaviors and classes of social outcasts stemmed from social conditions. In the case of homelessness, for example, Stead argued against the prevailing doctrine "that the American tramp is a pariah and that he ought to be kept as such."<sup>86</sup> Rather, he characterized Chicago's homeless population as a broad set of honest and willing workers, some with prestigious educational credentials, all with some set of unfortunate circumstances (unemployment, disability, family trouble, etcetera) that had first startled them out of the structure of regular society and "downward, ever downward into the depths of the malebolgic pool of our social hell."<sup>87</sup> He extended a similar vision to the prostitute, telling the story of a woman named Maggie Darling whom he met at Madame Mary Hastings' Custom House Place brothel. Maggie had grown up in San Francisco, where she met an older man who, in the course of their betrothal, pressured her into premarital sex. She became pregnant, and her betrothed—who she would find soon out had been a married man the whole time—skipped town. Maggie couldn't return to her family and support network pregnant and unmarried, and in her search for work ended up at a brothel. Although she managed to work her way out of the brothel and into gainful employment as a servant in Oakland, eventually her former profession was discovered and she was driven back into her life of sin, where Stead would eventually find her in Chicago.<sup>88</sup>

Stead saw Maggie Darling's story as emblematic of the societal problems he was arguing were at the root of vice. For him, it was evidence of the environmental dysfunction of social organization, a "microcosm of the history of the human race."<sup>89</sup> The fault lay not with Maggie, but with those in her orbit: the older man who had seduced and betrayed her; the Irish Catholics who

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<sup>86</sup> Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, 24.

<sup>87</sup> Stead, 31.

<sup>88</sup> Stead, 43–48.

<sup>89</sup> Stead, 42.

turned her out of their house after she was discovered to have been a prostitute; the police officers who exploited and blackmailed her and the other inmates of Madam Hastings' house; and the church communities who protested against their daughters coming into contact with "harlots" (even the "penitent Magdalens").<sup>90</sup> Maggie, backed into a corner, had simply done what was necessary to survive.<sup>91</sup> However, her story also illuminates many of the fears of domestic breakdown that both coercive and environmental reformers saw in the perceived downwards spiral of the Levee's unfortunates. The dominant paradigm of vice among both schools of thought was essentially that of a slippery slope: it could start with losing employment and end (inexorably) with sleeping in vermin-infested rags on the floor of the Harrison St Police Station; it could start with premarital sex and end in an early death from syphilis after a life of prostitution; it could start with the occasional drink and end in wasting away the family's savings at the saloon day in and day out. The difference came principally in what happened after that: whether those unfortunates could be redeemed by changing their circumstance, or whether they were forever pariahs who could only be isolated from decent folk. For Maggie Darling, Stead's depiction of her personal downward spiral mirrors much of the White slavery rhetoric that would become much more popular a few years following.<sup>92</sup> However, more than the later White slavery panic, Maggie's story symbolized the path that the White middle and upper classes feared for women as a category. Although prostitution as a profession was nothing new, the emergence of women in the public domain certainly

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<sup>90</sup> Stead, 34.

<sup>91</sup> Crucially, despite Maggie's survival sex work, she would jump at the chance to be redeemed or the offer of a helping hand. Stead is careful to emphasize that while she might not believe it was possible, she would want nothing more than to escape her life of sin and live like everyone else. This archetype of the penitent Magdalen, cited several times by Stead, appears to reproduce the Madonna-whore complex within the site of the brothel. The discussion of selective sympathy from outsider perspectives on the intimate economy from the previous literature review are relevant to this reading of *If Christ Came To Chicago*: notably, although Stead professes a belief in the Christ within every person no matter their circumstance (allegedly directly countering this phenomenon of selective sympathy), upon reading it's clear there are some persons he just doesn't quite get around to extending the gift of empathy towards.

<sup>92</sup> We can see in this story alone a clear prototype of the ways White slavery was conceptualized at the height of its panic, around 1900-1910. Amy Lippert's "The Visual Pedagogy of Reform: Picturing White Slavery in America" goes through many of the talking points nascent here. The young (White) woman from a good family, lured into sexual downfall by an older and ill-intentioned man, would quickly become a dominant cultural icon in the discourse around prostitution.

was, re-contextualizing prostitution as a newly threatening potential contagion. It might start with increasing the rights and public presence of women – but where might it end?

Though they shared the same fearful vision of a disorganized future, many Chicagoans reacted negatively to Stead's ideology. He reprinted an article that had been published about his original appearances in *If Christ Came to Chicago* from a "leading evening paper" whose review was as follows:

"In this self-respecting city of the West, the 'cause of humanity' stands in no need of advice from British fanatics who base an argument upon the analogy of the London pauper system. The American tramp is *sui generis*. He would not work if work were offered him. He deserves not the tear but the lash. We know how to deal with him. Mr. Stead does not. The toe of a boot by day and a cold stone floor by night—these be the leading courses in the curriculum by which we would educate into self-respect such tramps as are capable of it. The tramp is a pariah and we ought to keep him as such."<sup>93</sup>

The objection to Stead came on two fronts: firstly, his fundamental assumption that environmental change could transform the nature and behavior of social outcasts, and secondly the perceived attack on the city itself by an outsider. Although this example certainly falls towards the coercive end of the scale on reform attitudes, the contradictions inherent in coercive/environmental reconciliation still appear. The author insists that the boot and the lash will suffice to educate "such tramps as are capable of it"—implying there are tramps who are capable of moral education, and tramps who are not. Even here, there is a condition of selective sympathy waiting to be applied to a select few who really are just degraded by circumstance, instead of being wholly and inherently indecent like the rest.

But despite its controversial reception in Chicago, Stead's argument to the city was not really geographically specific in any way. He opens *If Christ Came to Chicago* with a map of the brothel- and saloon-studded rows of the Levee, and calls out specific people, names, and addresses

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<sup>93</sup> Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, 23.

throughout, but his characterization of the city is nothing unique to Chicago. The narrative itself maps nearly 1:1 onto his earlier “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” set a continent away and some years earlier. Stead starts that report with a comparison to Athens and the tale of the Minotaur instead of a plea towards Christ, but from there it’s a tried-and-true format. There are women who wander inexorably downwards into the maze-like “maw of the London Minotaur,”<sup>94</sup> entrapped and ruined by the sinful conditions they find themselves in, with nowhere to turn but houses of ill-fame and assignation. Stead’s process was much the same, spending a month interviewing religious officials, saloonkeepers, prostitutes, doctors, in his own words “the noblest and meanest of mankind, the saviours and destroyers of their race.”<sup>95</sup> His English Maggie Darlings were girls forced or sold into sexual slavery by trusted adults and family members, naïve Irish girls off the boat and country damsels falling prey to the tricks of the London underbelly. Although Stead professed a sincere belief in the power of his work—as well as his initial lack of intention to publish anything coming out of his trip—, five-time mayor Carter H Harrison IV would remember him as “first of the muckrakers,” who had come to Chicago “to get by hook or by crook the sensational material for a best-seller that would line his pockets with American dollars.”<sup>96</sup> Harrison, like his father before him, held that the “wide-open” policy of regulated vice ultimately benefited cities and Stead’s characterization of the Levee district (and Chicago as a whole) was a bad-faith attempt to transpose a pre-existing framework onto the Second City. There was nothing unique in Chicago’s vice – not even its ability to be exploited.

### **(DE)SPATIALIZING VICE**

The inseparability of personal responsibility and environmental pressure was due to the fact that the two worldviews were often mutually constitutive. The Victorian moral system

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<sup>94</sup> William Stead, “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, July 6, 1885, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Stead, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Harrison IV, “Manuscript Regarding Chicago Political and Social History, and Harrison Family History,” n.d., 5.

dominant before the turn of the century laid the foundations for coercive reform, holding that antisocial behavior stemmed from the fault of the individual or their own desire to engage in sin. Assigning wickedness to people who produce their own permissive spaces within the city then allowed for the creation of a wicked city: the idea that the urban form itself could be the cause of “deviant” behavior. The environmental reform ideology that accompanied this spatialized idea of vice held, similarly to the City Beautiful movement, that personal behaviors could be uplifted and corrected by improving the urban environment. In practice, however, environmental reformers struggled to extricate their moral beliefs from the religiously coded (and in many cases straightforwardly religious) institutions they situated themselves in. This often took the form of selective sympathy as some categories of deviants were considered victims while others were considered perpetrators: even the Chicago Civic Federation, which had been formed from Stead’s directive of empathy for the conditions of vice, struggled to form a moral center around environmental ideology (admittedly, not dissimilar to Stead himself). An 1895 pamphlet listing the duties of each of the Federation’s six departments (Political, Municipal, Philanthropic, Educational, Industrial and Moral) explicitly named the Federation’s goal as to “rid the down-town district of street walkers and drive the demi-monde out of sight as much as possible.”<sup>97</sup> Their goal was not to improve living conditions and thereby “[energize] and [give] effect to the public conscience in Chicago”<sup>98</sup> as they would claim to strive for in other publications, but simply to erase as much as possible evidence of undesirables. In the face of broadening social evil, environmental reform ideology often manifested not as a belief in the transformative power of urban space, but as a fear of social contagion. When it came to the *wicked city*, environmental reform had unleashed social evil from the bounds of internal defect and into the realm of infectious disease.

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<sup>97</sup> Graham Taylor, “The Civic Federation of Chicago and Its Work,” December 12, 1895, 2, Box 37, Folder 1960, Newberry Library.

<sup>98</sup> Taylor, “Civic Federation Proposed,” ii.

Chicago's "Levee" was, in its most abstracted form, simply the idea of concentrated urban vice. Swap out names and addresses and it was virtually indistinguishable from New York's Tenderloin, London's Whitechapel, or the nighttime economies of Paris that Stead described as "a naphtha-lighted city of Dis."<sup>99</sup> The original provenance of its name is unclear—possibly referring to some actual levee by the water owing to the original Levee's location near the Chicago River—but there were other names for these red-light districts: Customs House Place, Hair-trigger Block, Hell's Half-Acre, 'The Black Hole,'<sup>100</sup> Little Cheyenne.<sup>101</sup> What made "the Levee" distinct from these other names was its increasing geographic abstraction from the actual grounded sites of vice. "The Levee" seemed to appear wherever there was vice, instead of the reverse. It was, by nature, a roving concept. It went wherever vice was the greatest.

Even the most strictly geographical definition of "the Levee" was understood to be mobile. It shifted as needed, with the growth of the city and changing favorable conditions. It could be found, most likely, between the river and 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, east to Michigan or State. This was not an accident of geography but rather a result of the political patronage of the First Ward's aldermen, "Bathhouse John" Coughlin and "Hinky Dink" Kenna. These two were entrenched in the Democratic machine as the leaders of the "Gray Wolves" of Chicago Politics alongside Johnny De Pow, an unabashedly corrupt faction of boodlers that nevertheless did profitable business for both themselves and the party. Bathhouse and Hinky Dink's main business was the protection of the Levee, a shakedown that was immensely lucrative and earned them appellations such as "the patron saints

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<sup>99</sup> Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," 2.

<sup>100</sup> Although this name has been reproduced in secondary literature, it is somewhat unclear whether this was a district name in as common use as the rest on this list, or if it was one particular Inter Ocean reporter's turn of phrase. Nearly every article referencing the "Black Hole" as a red-light district in Chicago are from a run of 1882 Inter Ocean articles that are either part of the body of their exposé on west-side vice, or in reference to that exposé. It's possible that many articles referencing this area have not been preserved, but due to their salacious nature these vice districts tended to make a wide variety of headlines.

<sup>101</sup> "Hinky Dink and Bathhouse John's 'Carnival of Evil,'" *Chicago Tribune*, January 25, 1987.

of the levee.”<sup>102</sup> When the brothels and saloons of the central district were forced to pack up for any reason – such as when Wells street was reclaimed for the central business district after the Fire, or during any of the periodic attempts to enforce law-and-order on the district(s)<sup>103</sup> – relocating within the First Ward guaranteed a level of continued protection from and engagement with the machine. It seemed like every time the incoming mayor or chief of police made some half-hearted effort to be seen as a reformer, the newest iteration of the Levee was already about to spring up that would make the old one “a sepulcher by comparison.”<sup>104</sup>

As public consciousness increased around its embodiment of vice, “the Levee” gained the ability to be in multiple places at once. There was the “old levee” of Customs House Place, the “Wabash avenue levee,” the “new” or “south-side levee” (the most notorious of the lot), a “north-side levee,” and a “west-side levee.”<sup>105</sup> As “the Levee” became Chicagoans’ preferred terminology for the abstraction of a vice district, the Levee found its way out of Chicago: there was a Levee in Paris, New York, and London.<sup>106</sup> Any vice district could be the Levee, if it was wicked enough. The mobility of the Levee as an imaginary—and its potential to be imposed on other areas—created a two-way association between vice behavior and geography. Where there was a vice district vice behavior could be expected, but the reverse was also true. Where there was vice behavior (drinking, gambling, sexual immorality, or anything else considered taboo), that place—no matter

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<sup>102</sup> “Cleansing of Chicago’s Notorious Plague Spot,” *The Inter Ocean*, June 9, 1901. Note that “levee” in this quote is uncapitalized: without exception primary sources refer to the levee as per orthographic conventions of the time, similar to how Black and White would have been consistently lowercased. Secondary literature on the Levee refers to it with capitalization owing to its specificity as place, framework, and ideological symbol; this is something I have reproduced within this paper, although primary source quotes will retain their original orthography.

<sup>103</sup> “Cleansing of Chicago’s Notorious Plague Spot”; “Levee Begins to Obey Order,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 7, 1901.

<sup>104</sup> “‘New Levee’ Gay; ‘The Maxim’ Open,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 14, 1903.

<sup>105</sup> “‘New Levee’ Gay; ‘The Maxim’ Open”; “Lid Is Off at Freiberg’s,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 13, 1905; “Dives Blossom in the Levees,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 23, 1905; “Accuse Wheeler In Affidavits,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 15, 1904.

<sup>106</sup> “Our Strong-Arm Women,” *The Chicago Chronicle*, December 15, 1895.

how buttoned-up and respectable—might be the Levee. The “Levee,” most rightly named, was not a place but a process: the process of turning neighborhoods into wicked neighborhoods.

The intangible nature of the Levee contributed to the discourse about the place of red-light districts in Chicago (and the further distinctions between the wicked person and the wicked city) as environmental ideology moralized the spatial dimensions of Chicago itself. The mutually constitutive link between behavior and district meant that the Levee was a symbol applied to vice even outside of the red-light districts most commonly referred to under that name, while the presence of the Levee—wherever it may be—enabled punitive action across Chicago under that banner. This spatialized framework allows for analysis of vice behaviors as symbolizing a simultaneous fear of individual and broader social disorganization: as the harbingers of a new and awful modernity.

## **GENDER TRANSGRESSIONS**

Having established the (de)spatialized vice conditions of Chicago, which went hand-in-hand with social fears of a specifically female and uncontrollable modernity, it becomes important to analyze the futurities that Chicagoans worried lay at the end of that path. Prostitution represented one breakdown-in-progress of the domestic sphere, as did wage-earning women and interracial relationships. Anything that threatened the essential unit of White female subordination to White men or otherwise influenced the pattern of formation for female heterosocial relationships fell into this bucket – and crucially, these breakdowns *increasingly* threatened that unit as the spatialized nature of environmental vice reconfigured atypical behavior as a potentially transmissible disease. However, the final evolution of this hypothetical modernity was the complete breakdown of not just gender *roles*, but gender itself: not only would men and women experience a breakdown in the ways they related to each other, but men and women as categories might cease to exist – squashing any future possibilities of a return to traditional domesticity. Gender nonconformity, in

the 1890s just as today, represented the edge case of modernity: what a completely disorganized society might act and look like. If men could be women and women could be men, there was no biological enforcement of the patriarchal domination of men over women, and their superiority (specifically the hegemony centering White men at the top of the hierarchy) became essentially a polite fiction that could at any time be overturned.

The social evil's simultaneous transformation into a social contagion meant that gender transgressions existed not just as proof of modern anxieties, but as potential individual catalysts towards the advent of that social breakdown. This motivated much of the punitive and repressive responses towards gender transgression: by controlling nonconformity (and the permissive spaces where it was most often openly practiced) modernity itself might yet be averted. Instances of breakdown of the female gender role,<sup>107</sup> despite forming a very small subset of what were considered vice behaviors, occupied a vastly outsized place in discussions of vice. Similarly, punishing, averting, or otherwise controlling these breakdowns gained outsized importance as a case study that would determine whether traditional tactics of authority had the tools to deal with the rise of modernity – and whether a cultural message could be sent through their repression.

These gendered anxieties were inextricable from the racialized dynamics inherent to both the urban system and the fears of social disorganization surrounding modernity. Attempts to understand environmental vice often attributed it to a racial “Other” (usually Black, Chinese, or foreign-born White) whose presence negatively affected the moral character of the city, and whose cultural differences indicated a disorganized domestic sphere. Disease itself (both physical and mental) was spatialized—held “at a distance from those who exhibited proper moral rectitude”—and formalized into a normal/deviant dichotomy that often fell along racial lines.<sup>108</sup> Deviant

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<sup>107</sup> Gender nonconformity in both directions, whether assuming the masculine or feminine role, was conceived of as most threatening in its specific relationship to femininity.

<sup>108</sup> Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 47.

*bodies*, by virtue of their “abnormal” cultural conduct, became spatialized carriers of environmental disease, degradation, and immorality.<sup>109</sup> Newspapers speculated that the strength of urban vice (especially the hold of drinking and gambling on the city) came from the fact that “more than half of our people here [in Chicago] are not Anglo-Saxon.”<sup>110</sup>

Gender perceptions often also depended on race: *Chicago By Day And Night*, an 1893 travel guide to the “Paris of America,” discussed Black female prostitutes in the racially integrated Little Cheyenne vice district. These women were characterized as threateningly masculine, a distinction that was broadly applied to Black but not White prostitutes throughout the era’s literature. The chapter describes them as “Amazonian in physique,” who filled police with such a “wholesome dread” that most would choose to “engage in a grapple with half a dozen male desperados”<sup>111</sup> rather than with one of Little Cheyenne’s Black prostitutes. The womanhood that traditionalists were interested in preserving was implicitly understood to be White womanhood. Black women, then—especially those whose professions easily mapped on to the framework of social contagion—were a threat to that womanhood simply by virtue of being Black and female. They embodied the futurity of racial disorganization in the White domestic unit just as gender transgressors embodied its total sexual breakdown. In this paradigm, individual nonconformity to the White domestic ideal became diffused into the spatial environment, enabling punitive interventions in the guise of public safety. With that justification established, authorities turned to methods of control.

## DECEPTIONS, PERCEPTIONS

Once the urban spatial disease of modernity had been conceived of, legal and moral authorities began to wrestle with the question of how best to deal with it. Punitive strategies evolved

<sup>109</sup> Shah, 53–54.

<sup>110</sup> “Explains Saloon Plan in Reply to A Critic,” November 24, 1907, Clippings on Vice in Chicago, vol. 1, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>111</sup> Vynne, *Chicago by Day and Night: The Pleasure Seeker’s Guide to the Paris of America*, 202–3.

throughout the 1890s and into the 1900s, an unsettled period characterized by the contestation of the nature of gender transgression itself: whether it was an oddity or a specific, and therefore broadly prosecutable, degeneracy. Earlier instances of personal gender nonconformity (outside of the frameworks of theater in which burlesque and vaudeville shows operated, which carried their own evolving dynamics and power structures) provoked an often-humorous reaction of bemusement from the public and authorities alike, or—in cases of discovery—the notion that although an individual may have strayed from a standard mode of life, they were now freed from their charade and could thankfully assume the responsibilities of their proper gender role.

However, as social *contagion* transformed the role of modern women into a highly visible and contested site of transformation, gender transgressions became perceived as threats not just to an individual's moral sanctity (as had been their predominant framing throughout American history) but rather as actions that undermined the category and perception of womanhood. This can be seen in the evolving response to gender transgressions in both directions, as both women assuming male roles and men assuming female roles served to unsettle the image of a woman: she could be a “man” in disguise, using the perceived harmlessness and domesticity of the predominant female cultural image as a shield, or—perhaps worse—a lesbian, appropriating male power and domestic roles to her own ends. Either option created a set of potential actions that ran counter to patriarchal domination. The cultural anxieties around the image of womanhood can be seen in these parallel currents through case studies of lesbians who committed stereotypically masculine expressions of domestic dominance, such as battering or killing their partners, and cisgender men who appropriated the image of womanhood not as a means of personal expression but as a tactic to disguise criminality (as seen in the rash of cross-dressing bandits appearing in the news in this period).

The renegotiation of gender roles was a broad national issue encountered in the attempt to define “American-ness” and modernity. Chicago was deeply influenced by the zeitgeist around gender transgression, as national mass media created a sweeping narrative around gender and modernity that Chicagoans then applied closer to home. Gender transgressions of national concern, filtered through the Chicago press, in large part formulated the ways in which Chicago feared and dealt with its own gendered breakdowns. Although these case studies were populated across the country—some of the most notorious discussed here originated in St. Louis and Memphis—they speak to gender transgression as a national discussion. To attempt to confine Chicagoans’ perceptions of gender transgressions to local cases would do a disservice to Chicago’s place within that national zeitgeist: in fact, Chicagoans’ responses to their own gendered breakdowns were inextricably informed by the contextual narratives they were fed through mass media.

### **“WILL YOU PROMISE ME TO LIVE AS A GIRL?”**

Bill Winters<sup>112</sup> looked up at St. Louis’ Chief of Detectives Smith through what reporters would record as happy tears. He promised to get rid of his rough masculine clothes and chewing tobacco at once, and in fact confessed he had been “awfully anxious for this time to come.” The event that had brought him to this moment was the public admission that he was, in fact—and had been his whole life—a woman. It was such a relief to have been discovered and to finally throw off the charade, to take up again the frocks and frills that were natural to him by virtue of his sex.

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<sup>112</sup> Many of the people who appear in this project existed on the margins of gender and sexuality in a time where those lines were still being drawn and redrawn. Especially when looking at arrests, gossip columns, and other reporting – media in which, for the most part, the subjects were unable to speak for themselves – their own identity could not be made clear. In considering what pronouns to use for these individuals, I am following the example of Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*. Hartman chooses to use masculine pronouns to use for Gladys Bentley, arguing that Bentley’s autobiographical essay “I Am A Woman Again,” which describes the hormone therapy he underwent to make himself into ‘a woman again,’ clearly shows his identification with a male gender identity. I am choosing to extend this framework and referring to historical individuals with pronouns corresponding to the gender they lived as in the absence of punitive authority (i.e., an individual who lived as a man, but claimed to be a woman with a wish to re-assume a feminine role *only once arrested by police*—as in this case—would be referred to with masculine pronouns). Similarly, I will refer to individuals using their chosen name when that information is available.

Although he had been living for nine years as a man, he told the detective “I don’t want anything other than to be just a girl.” In fact, the reason for the charade had been nothing internal to him or his desires: just a fact of circumstance, as “no man knows how hard it is for a girl to earn an honest living.”<sup>113</sup> It had simply made sense to live as a man, although he was certainly relieved that he would not have to do it anymore.

Winters had first assumed his masquerade in 1900, as a 13-year-old girl escaping his home in Galveston allegedly under the influence of a 28-year-old man who claimed to be madly in love with him. After leaving that man in Dallas, Bill found his way to Quincy, Illinois, where he continued to work and live as a man, claiming it as a natural matter of safety. From there, he came to St. Louis in 1902, where he lived until the chance discovery of his sex in 1909. The people that knew him were shocked: barkeep Bob Hannon was quoted as saying “If Bill’s a girl, then I must be a woman. Say, I’d part with a hundred dollars to see Bill in girl’s clothes. He certainly must be a sight.”<sup>114</sup> He drank, swore, courted girls, worked as hard as any of his fellows, fished, camped, chewed tobacco. By any measure, he was as masculine as could be.<sup>115</sup> As a man, he had utterly eluded any suspicions from those around him, throwing himself into all aspects of masculine life. That he was discovered at all was more or less a complete accident, having been caught up in a police raid in St. Louis’ downtown vice district and admitting in his holding cell (under pressure either real or imagined, as subject of what newspapers would consider either “rapid cross-fire questions” or a simple joking remark with “no intention of being serious”<sup>116</sup>) to being a woman.

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<sup>113</sup> “Girl Poses for Nine Years as a Pretty Boy,” *The Ledger-Dispatch*, February 18, 1909.

<sup>114</sup> “Posed as Man for Nine Years,” *The Inter Ocean*, February 28, 1909.

<sup>115</sup> He even wrestled with all the other guys down at the club: a bartender at a different one of his haunts echoed Hannon’s sentiment, saying “Go on; you can’t tell me Bill Winters is a girl . . . I used to wrestle with Bill down at the club, and he could throw me every time. He’s as strong as a bull, and knows all the holds, too.” See “Posed as Man for Nine Years.”

<sup>116</sup> “Girl Poses for Nine Years as a Pretty Boy”; “Posed as Man for Nine Years.”

The way that Winters situated himself and his narrative within the paradigm of gender nonconformity allowed him to escape much of the punitive morality applied to others in his situation, as the recipient of the selective sympathy afforded only to specific groups of degenerate individuals.<sup>117</sup> While he was considered an “admirable actress”<sup>118</sup> for his ability to elude detection as a gender transgressor, the popular narrative of his discovery failed to apply that understanding to his actions afterwards. He was seen as a simple victim of circumstance, who had turned to cross-dressing to find and keep work in ways he could not have done as a lone woman out in the world with no family to support him.<sup>119</sup> Situating himself as a through-and-through woman may have made the lengths he went to and activities he engaged in while living as a man baffling to the outside eye, but it allowed him to escape the punitive arm of police tactics. In fact, filled with sympathy for what he saw as a woman who simply wanted to live an honest life, Chief Smith intervened with the judge to remit Winters’ punishment and secured a position for him where he could “do woman’s work and be taught womanly ways.”<sup>120</sup>

“Masquerading as a man” for the stated purpose of gainful employment was a gender transgression that did not *successfully* appropriate what was seen as proprietary male power, especially considering that many of these transgressors would choose to remain celibate to pass as male. Sidney Hammond ran away from his home in Springfield, Ohio at age thirteen, seeking independence and choosing to present himself as male to work as a contractor. After stints working in the gravel-pit with the Chicago and Atlantic Railroad near Marion, Ohio and some time at a dairy farm in Canton, he eventually found himself at the West Division Street Railway Company on the west side of Chicago. He was discovered, like Winters, by mistake. The daughter of the dairyman he

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<sup>117</sup> It certainly didn’t hurt Winters’ cause that he was perceived and written about as a young, pretty, White woman. Given his sex, race, and professed desire to tread a more righteous path, he was an easy target for reform.

<sup>118</sup> “Girl Poses for Nine Years as a Pretty Boy.”

<sup>119</sup> Ironically, Winters once wrote in a letter to a friend, “I often wish I were a girl. A fellow has to work so much harder to earn a living than a girl does.”

<sup>120</sup> “Posed as Man for Nine Years.”

had worked for had become romantically interested in him during his time there, and in order to dodge her affections (and the associated risk of discovery) Hammond told her he was already married. But although he had moved on to Chicago, she managed to find his address and sent a letter to his boardinghouse addressed to the fictional Mrs. Hammond.<sup>121</sup> When asked if the letter to “Mrs. Hammond” belonged to him, Hammond gave away the ruse, responding with a “confusion so apparent”<sup>122</sup> that his foreman began to suspect the deception and would discover the secret of his sex not much later. Upon discovery, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) took charge of him and returned him to his parents in Ohio.<sup>123</sup>

There are several through-lines connecting Winters and Hammond in relation to their transformation (or lack thereof) of the masculine image. Reporting on both emphasized their moral uprightness throughout their time living as men, each having “passed through her strange adventures without a shadow falling upon her virtue or a single stain upon her chastity.”<sup>124</sup> Although in both cases women had been romantically interested in them, neither were believed to have reciprocated: as Winters related to Chief Smith, “I never made love to anybody. But lots of girls have told me I was a pretty boy.”<sup>125</sup> Chastity remained the ordinal principle through which personal expressions of gender nonconformity were received. Had Winters or Hammond taken lovers, it would have been a moral stain on multiple fronts to both them and their partners as women engaged in unacceptable romantic entanglements—and a deception that then extended beyond the individual—while also committing the unforgivable sin of severing the potential for their partner to be available for cisgender men. Although they assumed the mantle and power of masculinity, Winters

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<sup>121</sup> “Puss in Boots,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1885.

<sup>122</sup> “Puss in Boots.”

<sup>123</sup> “In Male Attire,” *The Inter Ocean*, March 25, 1885.

<sup>124</sup> “In Male Attire.”

<sup>125</sup> “Girl Poses for Nine Years as a Pretty Boy.” Although it would be a fair assumption that Hammond, due to both his sex and age (he was only 16 in 1885), avoided entanglements of a romantic or sexual nature, it is somewhat doubtful to what extent the same was true for Winters. In any case, however, his claims to that end were taken at face value by authorities.

and Hammond in no way threatened male access to female bodies: they were not sexual competition. Their emphasized moral uprightness cemented their status as deviants through mere chance and circumstance, and despite the growing fear around social and moral contagion their personal choices—while in need of correction—implied little about gender roles in a broader context.

This was supported by their positionality in the contestation between *deception* and *perception* as ascribed to gender nonconformity. Since Winters' and Hammond's goal was simply to *pass* and live undetected as celibate men, the outsider eye's success-case of detection—i.e., getting *clocked*—removed any power they may have had over the social structures of gender in which they existed. By virtue of their stories appearing in national headlines, any immorality their gender transgression may have encouraged was presupposed to have been neutralized. In fact, their discovery ultimately reinforced bioessentialist rhetoric around the differences between men and women: despite physical abnormalities that may have aided in their deception (both are reported to have possessed unusual physical strength that allowed them to keep pace with cisgender male friends and coworkers), a lack of suspicion from the people around them (especially in the case of Winters, whose associates were nearly unable to believe the revelation of his sex), and the happenstance nature of their discovery, the truth *would* out in the end. Regular citizens could rest easy in the knowledge that women could not become men, and should they go so far as to try, would not be able to do so forever.

Throughout this period, this is an attitude that extended even towards persons who might have been perceived today as transgender men who positioned themselves more through a lens of internal desire. The *Chicago Chronicle* reported on an unnamed “woman” in New York who was detected at Ellis Island attempting to immigrate to the U.S. after living as a man in England for twelve years, who declared upon discovery of his sex, “I’ll kill myself before I’ll wear women’s clothes. It is my life’s desire to be a man. That the Almighty made me a woman is no fault of

mine.”<sup>126</sup> By virtue of his wealth, independence, and foreign status, instead of going forward with his immigration to America he simply reassumed men’s garb and left on a steamship for Germany. The physical distance plays a factor in the lack of moral concern with which editors treated his story: gender transgressors *en route* back to Europe had less than nothing to do with the sanctity of the American family. But there was the added security of knowing that he could be perceived in some essential way as different from a cisgender man, as evidenced from the very fact of the article: he could not escape the gendered gaze. Belle Schafer of Indiana was similarly unafraid to claim desire as a primary motivation (although focusing more, like Winters and Hammond, on what the privileges of masculinity could afford), telling a *Chronicle* reporter “I want to be outdoors. I want to travel and see the country. A woman can’t do that like a man and I’m going to be a man.” Schafer, despite having been caught in male garb several times before, baldly stated an intention to continue doing so: “In the spring I expect to go away again, but I won’t be caught next time.”<sup>127</sup> But despite a clear lack of ability or will to reform and return to womanly ways (contrasting with Winters and Hammond), Schafer’s story is treated with bemusement more than any fear of moral contagion and collapse. Having already been detected multiple times, Schafer’s gender transgression was essentially powerless. It was not considered to have any bearing on masculinity – or, for that matter, femininity. Here was simply the case of a woman trying, and most importantly failing, to be a man.

These cases, and the responses to them, stand in stark contrast to the instances of gender nonconformity that were perceived as threats to gender roles and family dynamics. The former cases generally pertained to “female” aspirations to a masculine role in the absence of any sexual dynamic, which unsettled neither masculinity as a dominant gendered paradigm nor women as a

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<sup>126</sup> “She Wears the Garb of Man,” *The Chicago Chronicle*, July 16, 1897.

<sup>127</sup> “She Dresses Like a Real Man,” *The Chicago Chronicle*, October 10, 1897.

class in their domestic and sexual roles. Instances of gender nonconformity that involved sexual relationships, however, did threaten masculine hegemony and unsettle the female image. Similarly, cross-dressing criminals both unsettled and expanded femininity, casting doubt on *any* woman as a potential physical threat in disguise.

## UNDERMINING FEMALE IMAGES

The relationship between a man and his wife carried certain social dynamics considered proprietary to the family unit. She took care of him by cooking and cleaning and managing the family home; he took care of her by earning enough money to support her and their life together.<sup>128</sup> The family, the essential unit demarcating a functional society, traditionally designated the patriarch at the head of the household and the wife/mother as his not-quite-equal. It was the responsibility of a husband to treat his wife well: if he battered or abused her, it was a shame, but it was undeniably masculine. A woman battering a man, or a woman battering a woman, would be an expression of dominion that could not fit within the clear-cut lines of traditional gender dynamics. It was a gender transgression in and of itself, stripping traditional sex and sexuality down to its base relations of power and control.<sup>129</sup>

Alice Mitchell and Freda Ward were in love. They were even, apparently, engaged to be married. They were both scions of wealthy Memphis families, who had met at the “fashionable and exclusive”<sup>130</sup> Higbee School for Girls. But Ward’s family, upon discovering the nature of their relationship, felt they had to intervene. The Wards wrote to Mitchell’s mother and cut all contact between the two girls, causing Mitchell to become moody and begin to say that Ward had been faithless to her and broken their engagement. In January of 1892, she learned that Freda Ward and

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<sup>128</sup> Dolores Hayden, “What Would a Non-Sexist City Be like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design and Human Work,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, no. 3 (1980): S172.

<sup>129</sup> Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, 23.

<sup>130</sup> “Abnormal Love,” *The Boston Globe*, January 31, 1892.

her sister were set to embark on a steamer from Memphis to Golddust, Tennessee. She followed them to the customhouse near the levee where the steamer was anchored, took a razor blade from her pocket, and cut Ward's throat. The explanation Mitchell would give to authorities following her arrest would be, "I loved her so much I had to kill her."<sup>131</sup> Her story captured the national imagination of the American public in a way the "strange adventures" of Winters, Hammond, and others like them simply could not. Chicago's news outlets were no exception, with every newspaper from the *Tribune* to the German-language *Illinois Staats-Zeitung* publishing new installments and "details of the terrible tragedy"<sup>132</sup> as fast as dispatches could arrive from Memphis. It was salacious—murder always was, and murder *for love* doubly so—but more than that it was the implications of what it meant for Mitchell, a woman, to have committed the act of intimate partner violence. Women who committed violent crimes were already considered to have "crossed the line of gender to engage in 'masculine' activity,"<sup>133</sup> but partner violence was a step further into the masculine sexual role.

Ward, despite her lesbian entanglement, was unambiguously cast in the role of the straight woman upon whom Mitchell preyed; Mitchell's own gender within the context of her sexuality was subject to some further debate. She was not just a woman who desired the privileges of living as a man – she did not, in fact, want to live as a man. Mitchell, by virtue of her relationship with and eventual murder of Ward, claimed the power and privilege of masculinity (i.e., access to and dominion over women) as part and parcel to her own femininity. As a lesbian murderer she was in sexual competition with men, denying their access to "normal" women like Ward, with her own

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<sup>131</sup> "Love Runs Mad and Deadly," *The San Francisco Examiner*, January 31, 1892. Mitchell's attorneys (contracted by her father) would put out a statement for the press, in which Mitchell's alleged first-person account elaborated that "I could not bear to think of her living in the company of others. Then, indeed, I resolved to kill Freda because I loved her so much I wanted her to die loving me, and when she did die I know she loved me better than any other human being on earth." – see Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, 48.)

<sup>132</sup> "Alice Mitchell and Freda Ward," *The Inter Ocean*, February 24, 1892.

<sup>133</sup> Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, 23.

deviance stemming likely from some sexual inversion. However, although some media outlets attempted to sensationalize the story by emphasizing Mitchell's masculine nature—a fondness for rifle-shooting, a “fierce and sometimes ungovernable” temper, the pseudonym ‘Alvin Ward’ under which she had written *Freda*, even false reports of Mitchell appearing in men's clothing<sup>134</sup>—there was little about her outward presentation that suggested any capability for violence. Mitchell was “a beautiful girl:”<sup>135</sup> a young, attractive, wealthy, White woman who appeared to have all the cards in her favor. If Mitchell was capable of violence, why not others? Was any woman truly harmless? Alice Mitchell and the lesbian love murder narrative formed a fundamental threat to a hegemonic masculine domination founded on the assumption that women were *not capable* of everything that men were, both positive and negative: she cast doubt on the constitutive parts of female identity, creating a lurking threat that anyone might embody.

While Mitchell may have unsettled the female image through her appropriation of a typically male capacity for harm, the inverse of that same trend could be found in cisgender criminals using the female image to mask their impending acts of violence. The turn of the century saw a bizarre rash of cross-dressing bandits across the country. For instance, a train robbery scheme on the Union Pacific headed to Lincoln, Nebraska saw one of the robbers disguised as an old woman accompanying a coffin containing “her” deceased son (also a live bandit).<sup>136</sup> In Indiana, a man reported being waylaid by a hijacker posing as a female hitchhiker.<sup>137</sup> And so too in Chicago, where a group of burglars in the fourth ward tried to allay suspicion from the neighbors by robbing in drag.<sup>138</sup> Appropriating the female image served two purposes: first, it was a disguise like any other

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<sup>134</sup> “Abnormal Love”; Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, 48; Duggan, 55. Mitchell's lawyers released in the course of the proceedings letters the lovers had written each other signed “Alvin Ward” and “Fritz Ward” as evidence supporting the defense's plea of insanity. According to *The Inter Ocean*, Mitchell had also planned to use the “Alvin” pseudonym in order to legally marry Freda – see “Alice Mitchell and Freda Ward.”

<sup>135</sup> “Love Runs Mad and Deadly”; “Abnormal Love.”

<sup>136</sup> “Caught Jack In The Box,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 1889.

<sup>137</sup> “Woman With Boots And Weapons,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 19, 1895.

<sup>138</sup> “Threat to Hang Thieves,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 12, 1900.

that could prevent identification and send the CPD chasing in the wrong directions. But secondly, the female image itself carried certain assumptions of behavior that bandits were able to subvert through their criminality.

Social conventions dictated that respectable women were non-violent and unthreatening, so the assumption of a female image served as a helpful contradiction: if anyone on the train would be a hijacker, if anyone on the street would be a killer, surely it would not be the woman over there with all the petticoats. Lurid cases made Chicago headlines to this effect: in 1896, for instance, Matt Rollinger shaved his mustache and dressed in female attire to attempt to shoot and kill a man who was “too friendly”<sup>139</sup> with his wife. (The cross-dressing, in addition to his numerous suicide attempts in jail after killing the wrong man, may have made an impact on the ultimate success of his insanity plea.)<sup>140</sup> In 1904, Michael Burns murdered his wife and, while the police were searching for him, dressed as a woman to attend her wake where he would also attempt to shoot his sister and father.<sup>141</sup> Both these instances saw the assumption of the female image in an attempt to evade suspicion: femininity could almost be said to have an inverse relationship with criminality, in which because the criminal in nearly every case was assumed to be male, suspicion would not easily fall upon whoever appeared to be a woman.<sup>142</sup>

While the female image may have originally carried certain connotations of harmlessness that could be exploited with criminal intent, ultimately these instances of banditry served to complicate that harmlessness they sought to use. Much like Alice Mitchell’s, their actions—cognitively dissonant with the idea of femininity—served to unsettle the nature of womanhood itself. Any

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<sup>139</sup> “Rollinger on Trial,” *The Chicago Chronicle*, July 21, 1896.

<sup>140</sup> *People v. Matt Rollinger*, No. 3519 (Criminal Court of Cook County December 12, 1897).

<sup>141</sup> “Slayer at the Wake,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 14, 1904.

<sup>142</sup> Cisgender men were not the only ones to attempt to manipulate the assumptions around traditional gender roles for their own purposes. Notable is the 1899 case of Ellis Glenn, a man who was arrested, tried, and convicted for forgery in Hillsboro, Illinois. Once convicted, he then pretended to be his own fictional twin sister who had nobly gone to prison in his place (as supposedly proven by the fact of his biological sex). See “Ellis Glenn’s Strange Story,” *The Inter Ocean*, December 10, 1899.

woman might be a lesbian murderer; so too, any woman might turn out to be a male bandit or hijacker or thief. What made these cases real threats to the rigidity of gender roles and the place of women in this period, in ways that Winters and the rest were not, was their particular relationship to the deception-perception paradigm. While Winters, Hammond, Schafer, and the rest became neutralized by the act of perception—having thus failed to pass—recognizing Mitchell for a lesbian or the burglars as men in disguise did nothing to neutralize their situations’ perceived dangers. Mitchell, outed, still had the power and prerogative to murder Ward; burglars could steal whether or not their disguises were intact. Perception in these cases only exposed the existence of a threat, be it to personal property or male hegemony. It was the first step towards neutralizing gender threats to the American public – the sooner the better, to head off as much of the damage as possible, since there could be no lackadaisical assurance as with Winters and Hammond that the truth would eventually out. Even after perception had been accomplished, however, further intervention was required to actually neutralize gender transgressions. This paradigm created new and essential doubts around the female image itself, producing a need to *verify* an individual’s identity as a “real” woman (a test there were infinitely many ways to fail).

## **CONTROLLING DYSTOPIA**

The narratives that national press outlets developed around gender transgression created a social hysteria that Chicagoans would apply onto incidents closer to home. The fear of new forms of criminality attached to femininity affected much of the response to more explicitly vice-coded gender transgression within the imaginary dimensions of Chicago’s Levee. Simultaneous to the conceptualization of homosexuality as an interior trait with outwardly perceptible manifestations (which often took the form of gender transgressions themselves), gender became a battleground that could be challenged as perceived atypical gender traits or assumption of roles became subject

to a paradigm of “clockability”<sup>143</sup> that reframed the perception and punishment of gender transgression as a duty of public morals. Perception became the dominant framework through which “real” women and men could be validated and “fake” gender rebels could be excluded from the categories of gender, thereby re-situating womanhood in its most rigid and idealized form.

Within this wholesale gender exclusion, theater performance—representing at its core, as long as you didn’t read too deeply into it, a production that was comfortingly *unreal* and explicitly for the purpose of entertainment—became situationally acceptable as a venue for gender transgression and experimentation. The situation was liable to change, as performance was nevertheless the subject of contestation at the borders of what was or was not too close to reality. Although the performance itself suggested nothing about the gendered realities of the performers, they had the capacity to influence the audience towards moral indignity. When the audience was thought to be less than discerning, or the notoriety of the act reached a pitch such that it reflected back on the character of the city itself, transgression became once again a social disease that could not be allowed to continue.

## **REASONABLE SUSPICION**

Joseph Piatkiewicz<sup>144</sup> was a carpenter by trade. He was a Polish contractor who lived on the Northwest side of Chicago in the heart of the area’s Polish ethnic enclave, having immigrated from Kozmin, in Prussian Poland, in 1868 at age 18. He had “great strength and an iron

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<sup>143</sup> There is a tension here worth noting within the insider-outsider dynamics of deception and perception. Broad cultural anxieties (specifically situated as stemming from the anxieties of an insecure White, Protestant middle class) interacted with deception-perception as a method of detecting wrongdoing and stemming undesirable behaviors. However, transgender and gender-nonconforming people had their own relationships to deception-perception that introduce a multiplicity to this framework. While out of the scope of this paper, it would be a disservice not to acknowledge the ways transgender communities have subverted and created new networks of meaning.

<sup>144</sup> Joseph Piatkiewicz appeared in Chicago newspapers throughout the 1880s and early 1890s, with his surname spelled a different way nearly every time. I have not been able to determine whether his surname in truth was Piatkiewicz, Pankiewicz, Piethiewicz, or Ponterveiski. In lieu of a definitive answer “Piatkiewicz” is the surname used in his lengthiest feature, a profile piece from the Tribune, so that is the orthography I have opted to reproduce.

constitution”<sup>145</sup> that served him well as a manual laborer and allowed him to play the hero’s part as a firefighter in Michigan before he and his wife (a match arranged by his mother back in Poland) eventually settled back in Chicago where his contractor business flourished. He could “outclimb, out-wrestle, out-drink, and out-run ninety-nine out of a hundred of his neighbors.”<sup>146</sup> At work, all agreed Piatkiewicz was as masculine as could be—a completely “normal” man. In his personal life, however, he was not so masculine as his first impression may have indicated. Back in the 1870s, according to Piatkiewicz, he and his wife had one day discovered they were exactly the same size and could share clothing, and had each experimented in going out on the street in female and male garb respectively. He “liked it so well that [he] bought some dresses for [himself] and [had] worn them ever since.”<sup>147</sup>

Life in Chicago with his wife and two children brought financial security, but not domestic happiness: he and his wife, Bronislawa, became estranged<sup>148</sup> and she left him and the children for a time. Although she eventually came back, the relationship never recovered: both spoke of a desire for divorce (Catholic beliefs notwithstanding) and remained together only for the children. Much of what the family fought over was Piatkiewicz’s manner of dress. Both Bronislawa and the children were “greatly distressed”<sup>149</sup> by his pastime—not only dressing as a woman for leisure in his own home but routinely going out on the streets and appearing in society (Piatkiewicz claimed to “have been in every theater in town dressed this way,”<sup>150</sup> among other ventures). It was far from a private hobby—the community, and even the city at large, were well aware of his preferences. He even starred in a lengthy profile on his life and crossdressing habits published in the Tribune in

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<sup>145</sup> “Wears Woman’s Togs,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 9, 1892.

<sup>146</sup> “Wears Woman’s Togs.”

<sup>147</sup> “Wears Woman’s Togs.”

<sup>148</sup> Piatkiewicz, as quoted in “Wears Woman’s Togs,” characterized this as the breakdown of their formerly loving relationship. Bronislawa herself, quoted in “A Shoplifter’s Disguise,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 29, 1885, may have had a different opinion, having told a reporter “I did not like my husband from the day I married him.”

<sup>149</sup> “Wears Woman’s Togs.”

<sup>150</sup> “Wears Woman’s Togs.”

1892. The article emphasized at length what the Tribune saw as a mismatch between Piatkiewicz's masculine persona in his work life versus the feminine persona of his private life. The real oddity was that he was not an effeminate man who wished to be a woman, but rather a real bear of a man who chose to wear woman's attire by simple preference. Piatkiewicz in his own words characterized his manner of dress as a simple hobby and a personal mode of expression, saying "You ask me why I do this and whether it does not hurt my business. Why do other men do things they know are hurting their business? Why do other men hang around saloons and get drunk when they know it is ruining them? They do it because they enjoy it. That is their weakness and this is mine."<sup>151</sup> He liked how he dressed, and that was the end of the matter. It had little bearing on anything else.

Authorities were less accepting of Piatkiewicz's quirks. He was an "old story with the Poles,"<sup>152</sup> navigating the semi-public sphere within his own ethnic enclave without molestation. However, when he breached those bounds of containment and appeared among the native-born Whites of greater Chicago, he quickly found himself in legal trouble. He had been arrested three times for impersonating the opposite sex, as well as once for shoplifting *while* impersonating the opposite sex.<sup>153</sup> When he appeared in court for the latter offense, he did so in his finest dress: a ruffled gown, fur-lined dolman, and feathered bonnet, with a ribbon necklace and pendant earrings to match.<sup>154</sup> His lawyer, Attorney Kate Kane, "who knows all about it" (the "it" in question being womanhood, as the first woman admitted to the Chicago bar)<sup>155</sup> based her defense on some truth of Piatkiewicz's inner nature. She asked for dismissal on the charge of impersonating the opposite sex due to the fact that "it is his natural nature to actuate an unreal femininity ... He thinks he is a woman, your Honor. Why, he stands in front of the mirror for hours at a time. To elucidate: It's

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<sup>151</sup> "Wears Woman's Togs."

<sup>152</sup> "Wears Woman's Togs."

<sup>153</sup> "Wears Woman's Togs"; "A Shoplifter's Disguise."

<sup>154</sup> "Settled by Justice Meech," *Chicago Tribune*, December 30, 1885.

<sup>155</sup> "Settled by Justice Meech"; "Kate Kane Is Wedded," *The Chicago Chronicle*, September 9, 1895.

his natural nature.”<sup>156</sup> Kane argued that Piatkiewicz wasn’t impersonating anything—simply expressing his internal self. The judge was less than sympathetic and fined him \$40 and costs.

Whether it was simply a hobby or a profound inner nature or (as alternately argued by Kane) the natural product of a disturbed mind, impersonating the opposite sex remained an unacceptable use of the public domain. Within his own domestic unit, Piatkiewicz’s gender nonconformity had fractured the household dynamic. But in the context of his neighborhood community, comprised entirely of foreign immigrants like himself, his transgression was not necessarily within the purview of American judgement. The potential for his vice behavior to, by the power of association, transform his neighborhood into a vice district—a new Levee—was less pressing: his neighborhood was not a native-born White neighborhood, and his neighbors not quite White American families. However, boundary-crossing was a transgression of both sex and ethnicity: the assumption of a “fake” womanhood that might cause an unsettling of the natural order went hand in hand with the potential unsettling of an ethnic and racial order. Gender transgressions were often characterized by Chicago media as stemming from foreign or un-American ways of life. According to headlines throughout this era, Viennese working-class women “appear more like men dressed in female attire”<sup>157</sup> and often began to bald before twenty-five; bicyclists in Melbourne exhibited a “mannish costume”<sup>158</sup> beyond any of the bicycle bloomer controversies discussed in Chicago; Belgrade’s men of society spent their time “disguised as women”<sup>159</sup>; Chinese immigrants were being smuggled *en masse* across the border hidden in coffins or dressed in drag.<sup>160</sup> In short, immigrants were bringing with them anti-American behaviors that threatened a traditional American way of life (gender nonconformity being one such example). With the necessity imbued into

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<sup>156</sup> “Settled by Justice Meech.”

<sup>157</sup> “Vienna,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 28, 1873.

<sup>158</sup> “Wheelwomen of the Antipodes,” *The Chicago Chronicle*, July 14, 1895.

<sup>159</sup> “Police Raid Takes High Men,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 1908.

<sup>160</sup> “As Jacks-In-A-Box,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 24, 1895.

*detecting* gender transgressions in the wake of moral panic around Alice Mitchell and other gender nonconforming criminals, separating the wheat from the chaff became a matter of the highest priority.

Although Piatkiewicz took great pride in the undetectability of his feminine persona, papers took delight in noting the ways in which his appearance didn't quite match—as skillful as his presentation was. His feet were “rather large for a Chicago girl,”<sup>161</sup> and his voice and walk and hands, according to the *Inter Ocean*, spoke to his masculine nature. These were all common tropes when it came to “clocking” gender transgressors, along with such hints as the presence of an Adam's Apple, affecting a “kangaroo walk” (fashionable among women at the time), swearing, and making too-efficient purchases in large stores instead of browsing around for a bit first.<sup>162</sup> Any piece of reasonable suspicion—any detection of a gender-atypical behavior or trait, no matter how inane—was grounds for interrogation and arrest. Suspected gender transgressors could be brought in by police on shoe size alone, and explanatory variables such as whether “a revolver was in ‘her’ pocket”<sup>163</sup> could be figured out later. Individuals who were arrested in this way were typically portrayed as having been stopped on their way to some nefarious purpose, whether that was crime, disorderliness, or the general spread of immorality. Preventing gender transgressions was a good and necessary intervention, for the moral health of that individual but more importantly for the security of the community around them.

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<sup>161</sup> “She Was A Male,” *The Inter Ocean*, December 29, 1885.

<sup>162</sup> “The Story of the Cravat,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 6, 1910; “Kangaroo Walk Betrays Him,” *The Inter Ocean*, October 14, 1907; “Current Notes,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 1889.

<sup>163</sup> “Feet Trap ‘Woman’ Burglar,” *The Inter Ocean*, November 29, 1907.

## PREVENTING MORAL INFECTION

Before the show began, a “barker” at the Riverview amusement park would step outside to say a few words to the anonymous streams of men and women passing by his attraction, hoping to lure them inside. Those words would be as follows:

“This is not a bible class. We don’t have them here. The management of the park does not pay for the privilege of holding bible classes and Sunday school. I have never heard of a bible class being held in Riverview. If you are looking for such things you are in the wrong place. You ought to be at a Salvation army hall or at a church. An amusement park is no place for you.”<sup>164</sup>

This was in August of 1909, under the skeptical eye of the Chicago Law and Order League and the CPD.<sup>165</sup> The park—resilient as ever—was back to its normal operations some weeks after a series of amusement park arrests across the city for performers’ “indecent” acts. A significant proportion of arrests were “female impersonators,” most notably George Quinn and Quincy De Lang for their striptease act at the Duncan-Clark Theatre on the charge of “conducting an objectionable performance” along with unlawfully impersonating the opposite sex.<sup>166</sup> The public at large (and the loudest minority of reform activists in particular) had turned their eye towards amusement parks as part of the ever-increasing creep of spatialized vice, which had at this point begun to escape the narrow bounds of the geographic Levee. Arthur Burrage Farwell, president of the Law and Order League, told the Chicago Tribune that “[t]hings are permitted in the amusement parks which are barred everywhere in Chicago except the ‘red-light’ district.”<sup>167</sup> For his part, Acting Chief of Police Herman Schuettler was quoted as saying “I had no idea such shows were

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<sup>164</sup> “Reform of Parks Is Only A Splash,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 5, 1909.

<sup>165</sup> “Twofold Assault on Park Shows,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 12, 1909. Incidentally, the institutions did this entirely separately and at odds with one another, as they had fallen out over the appropriate methods to deal with vice in amusement parks after a tentative and very short truce

<sup>166</sup> Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town: Sodomites, Female Impersonators, Third-Sexers, Pansies, Queers, and Sex Morons in Chicago’s First Century*, 53; “Attractions’ Go Into Court Today,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 14, 1909.

<sup>167</sup> “Twofold Assault on Park Shows.”

permitted,” and if city council were in session he would definitely “ask for a new ordinance regulating [them].”<sup>168</sup>

Acting Chief Schuettler had instructed his squad of detectives known as the “purity squad”<sup>169</sup> to crack down on “vulgar and immoral shows”<sup>170</sup> as part of a broader effort to reform the amusement park—a vice district pre-packaged for family entertainment. The issue with these shows—and with female impersonators in particular—was not necessarily the routine, but rather the audience. Quinn and De Lang were referred to as “female minstrels,” an appellation that was not uncommon in this era (the troupe to which the pair belonged was officially named “Duncan Clarke’s female minstrels”<sup>171</sup>) but which spoke to the roots of the practice as inherently intertwined with minstrelsy itself. Where they got into trouble was performing in front of an audience that Schuettler and Farwell feared might not be able to distinguish fact from fantasy—who might be seduced by the presence of gender transgressions before their eyes, notwithstanding the separating presence of the stage. A detective involved in their arrest cited one of the main factors contributing to the unacceptability of the show as the fact that “the place was filled with women and children,”<sup>172</sup> vulnerable minds that might be easily corrupted. The issue with the other great vice of gambling in amusement parks, similarly, came from the fact that “boys and girls were ... allowed to play them.”<sup>173</sup> The fantasy—of the park, of excess, of vice, of transgression—was permitted on the stage and in moderation *so long as* it could be assured that everyone in the audience was aware it was nothing more than a fantasy, that each of them would leave the park and return to their normal and moral lives; that the performers themselves would take off the wigs and the dresses and the makeup at the end of the work day and live as normal men. But when it breached containment (and the

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<sup>168</sup> “Twofold Assault on Park Shows.”

<sup>169</sup> “First Song Crusade Victim Is Publisher,” *The Inter Ocean*, November 17, 1910.

<sup>170</sup> “Twofold Assault on Park Shows.”

<sup>171</sup> “Nine Killed in Rail Wreck,” *The Inter Ocean*, September 13, 1900.

<sup>172</sup> “Twofold Assault on Park Shows.”

<sup>173</sup> “Park Gambling Must Cease,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 19, 1909.

more notoriety even the idea of female impersonation had, the more likely that was) the “purity squad”—both police and the public, trained on the Levee’s disorder—were reminded that gender transgression was, in fact, a real and pressing danger to the moral health of the urban form.

The Riverview shows had a less-than-family-friendly parallel down in the South Side Levee in the form of Aldermen Bathhouse and Hinky Dink’s annual First Ward Ball. Having started the affair in 1896 after the permanent shutdown of Lame Jimmy’s annual birthday party (under the auspice of his employer, the notorious madam Carrie Watson) left a gap in the Levee’s appetite for a good party,<sup>174</sup> over the course of the next decade the ball would “become a national issue” that newspapers outside of Chicago would claim as worthy of a “special message to congress” by President Roosevelt.<sup>175</sup> Though born out of a simplistic desire for a good bash (at least for Bathhouse, who took great joy in presiding over the event “[r]esplendent in his evening attire”<sup>176</sup>) the First Ward Ball was a powerful moneymaking scheme for the aldermanic pair. As the “annual ‘society’ event of the underworld of Chicago” (alternately called the city’s finest “obscene orgy and public scandal” and favorably compared to “pagan Rome in her most degenerate days”) it attracted a complete who’s-who of the First Ward, from politicians and cops to pimps and prostitutes.<sup>177</sup> Saloonkeepers, madams, gambling-ring leaders and anyone else with a vested interest in keeping the CPD out of their businesses understood buying tickets—usually in bulk to distribute to employees and clients—to be a necessary expense. Cops, meanwhile, had to buy a ticket themselves to avoid being fired.<sup>178</sup> All and sundry were encouraged to come and drink until the Grand March began, with Bathhouse John at the head of a procession of “the best the Levee had to

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<sup>174</sup> Wendt and Kogan, *Lords of the Levee*, 153–54.

<sup>175</sup> “That First Ward Ball,” *The Boise Citizen*, December 18, 1908.

<sup>176</sup> “Annual Orgy Bad As Ever,” *Grand Forks Herald*, December 16, 1908.

<sup>177</sup> “That First Ward Ball”; “Good Enough, but What Does It Amount To?,” *The Inter Ocean*, December 11, 1909; “Marie Chapel To Be Independent Church,” *The Inter Ocean*, October 6, 1908.

<sup>178</sup> Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town: Sodomites, Female Impersonators, Third-Sexers, Pansies, Queers, and Sex Morons in Chicago’s First Century*, 60.

offer.”<sup>179</sup> Female impersonators in particular constituted a notable section of the marchers, flocking to the event as a chance to go out on the town in full drag with no fear of arrest.<sup>180</sup> In the ball’s prime, “the revelry did not fairly begin until midnight and it lasted as long as anybody was sober enough to keep up the pretense of dancing.”<sup>181</sup> In Hinky Dink’s own words, “Why, it’s great! It’s a lallapalooza!”<sup>182</sup> But although Chicago’s powers-that-be had historically turned a blind eye in order to retain the loyalties of the powerful First Ward machine, the more notorious the ball grew, the more it came to be seen as a moral infraction against the nature and reputation of the city itself: a stain, and one that had the potential to spread.

### **EPILOGUE: “IF THE MAYOR SAYS WE MUST CLOSE...”**

In 1907, convinced of their own invincibility, Bathhouse and Hinky Dink went so far as to personally invite Walter T. Sumner—dean of Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral, and soon-to-be-appointed chairman of the Chicago Vice Commission—to the ball.<sup>183</sup> Sumner was appalled by what he saw, and the following year reformers joined with the Chicago Tribune and promised to photograph, publish, and shame anyone seen at the event. This failed to put a damper on the party, but did result in the fashionable employ of false beards and masks.<sup>184</sup> The year after that, as opposition to the ball grew even more powerful, “the city officials were compelled to take heed”<sup>185</sup> and take action to repress the spectacle—albeit reluctantly. Mayor Busse revoked the venue’s liquor license a month before the 1909 ball was set to take place, along with another stringent set of bans prohibiting dancing, masquerade costumes (with a particular eye towards the lavish costumes of

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<sup>179</sup> Wendt and Kogan, *Lords of the Levee*, 278.

<sup>180</sup> Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town: Sodomites, Female Impersonators, Third-Sexers, Pansies, Queers, and Sex Morons in Chicago’s First Century*, 60.

<sup>181</sup> “A Triumph For Deeney,” *The Courier-Journal*, December 12, 1909.

<sup>182</sup> Wendt and Kogan, *Lords of the Levee*, 280.

<sup>183</sup> Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town: Sodomites, Female Impersonators, Third-Sexers, Pansies, Queers, and Sex Morons in Chicago’s First Century*, 61.

<sup>184</sup> De La Croix, *Chicago Whispers: A History of LGBT Chicago before Stonewall*, 22.

<sup>185</sup> “A Triumph For Deeney.”

female impersonators), smoking, swearing, and “the presence of any known crooks,” along with a prompt closing time of midnight and an attendance capacity of 7,600.<sup>186</sup> Under pressure to make the First Ward Ball a respectable affair, the presence of female impersonators was one of the first things on the chopping block. Ahead of the event the Tribune reported that, alongside the CPD’s enforcement of “the absence of the hundreds of airily clad ‘jockeys,’ ‘harlequins,’ ‘Dianas, etc.,” it was expected that “the first male who appears in dresses will occupy a patrol wagon all to himself for a swift ride to Harrison street [station].”<sup>187</sup> Without both revelers and revelry, the ball was a sad affair. It was a sober, seated benefit concert that was out by midnight and reported a total attendance of only 3,000.<sup>188</sup>

The ball’s last gasps were a harbinger of things to come for the South Side Levee. A month after the 1909 affair, Mayor Fred Busse created the Chicago Vice Commission in response to continued pressure from the Federation of Churches, meant to investigate the social conditions of prostitution and other vices in Chicago.<sup>189</sup> The thirty-member commission, helmed by Dean Walter T. Sumner and including Chicago notables such as Julius Rosenwald and Judge Harry Olson, published their results the following year under the name “The Social Evil in Chicago: A Study of Existing Conditions.” Of particular note to investigators was the discovery of a thriving subculture of “sexual perverts” within the Levee, gay men that the Commission report described in the following terms:

“A large number of men who are thoroughly gregarious in habit; who mostly affect the carriage, mannerisms, and speech of women; who are fond of many articles ordinarily dear to the feminine heart ... Many of them speak of themselves or each other with the adoption of feminine terms, and go by girls’ names or fantastic application of women’s titles.”<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> “Protests Win; First Ward Ball Is Off,” *The Inter Ocean*, December 10, 1909. Notably, the capacity limit came after an estimated 20,000 tickets had already been sold.

<sup>187</sup> “Threaten Bomb For Orgy,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 4, 1909.

<sup>188</sup> Wendt and Kogan, *Lords of the Levee*, 289.

<sup>189</sup> Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 194.

<sup>190</sup> Vice Commission, “The Social Evil in Chicago,” 297.

The investigation further noted that some of these men were known to be female impersonators who performed in the South Side Levee's saloons. Their female disguises were "so perfect" they were "enabled to sit at tables with men between the acts, and solicit for drinks the same as prostitutes,"<sup>191</sup> and even go so far as to pick up men in the bars. Implicit here was the danger: that effeminate gender transgressors were seducing and ruining men who might otherwise be "normal."

Although the report stopped short of making a real recommendation for remedying (read: erasing) the current state of gay subculture in Chicago, the lack of a post-exposure measure speaks to the entrenchment of the social contagion. The remedy to "sexual perversion" was "first and foremost ... the thoroughly practical ideal of a straight and pure sexual life both before and after marriage."<sup>192</sup> Prevention was the cure. Immersing oneself in heterosexual life was the antidote to an uncertain world of gender and sexual abnormality. The Commission went on to recommend a more specific rewording of laws banning sex perversion, claiming it "should more definitely recognize the dangers of this latter day growth of degenerate traits"<sup>193</sup>—writing into the law itself strategies of perception for the modern transgressor. However, whether more awareness around the dangers of such degeneracy would be beneficial for the moral purity of the city was "very doubtful." The Commission concluded by saying that "Probably the purity and wholesomeness of the normal sexual relationship is all that is necessary to dwell on."<sup>194</sup> Knowledge, in the realm of the vice imaginary, functioned as a Pandora's box. Learning about that gendered modernity and the fact of its possibility unleashed it from all containment and allowed unlimited and contagious spread. The only way to repress gender transgression was to bury it.

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<sup>191</sup> Vice Commission, 297.

<sup>192</sup> Vice Commission, 298.

<sup>193</sup> Vice Commission, 298.

<sup>194</sup> Vice Commission, 298.

Gender transgression as a social contagion, and furthermore a contagious *future*, profoundly affected how authorities in and out of the South Side Levee were able to conceive of those behaviors. Defense required retreating into the structure of the White American family, relying on its “purity and wholesomeness” to guard against what had become a transmissible thought disease through the construction of the spatial vice imaginary. The 1911 Vice Commission report would ultimately deal a fatal blow to the South Side Levee: as the Chicago machine turned against Bathhouse and Hinky Dink, increased police persecution under the authority of State’s Attorney Wayman and Mayor Harrison over the next few years drove the business out of the neighborhood until “every resort had darkened windows and closed doors.”<sup>195</sup> The Levee, that wretched pit of vice, had finally been destroyed. Moral Chicagoans could sleep well knowing there would be no more perverted carousing going on under their noses, no more of that permissive space where all the edicts of American civilization and society could be overturned. The Levee was dead. But in a much more real sense, the Levee as an idea—the Levee as imaginary geography—lived on, tough as ever.

Some years later, Mayor Harrison would take a dim retrospective look at the actions his government had taken in closing the South Side Levee. It had not, as reformers had hoped, ended the social evil once and for all. Harrison, a regulationist by beliefs and a reformer by political pressure, reflected that his actions “did not end the evil ... merely scattered it broadcast, brought it close to the homes.”<sup>196</sup> The imaginary and abstracted Levee, the idea of permissive space, had scattered but not disappeared. Bohemia—free love, sexual thrill, radical politics; a new Levee for the socially conscious—bubbled up in Towertown to the north, where slummers flocked to places like the Dil Pickle Club for their fill of pleasure and titillation.<sup>197</sup> Black nightlife in Bronzeville to

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<sup>195</sup> “Wayman Clamps Lid on the Levee; All Resorts Dark,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 6, 1912.

<sup>196</sup> Harrison IV, “Manuscript Regarding Chicago Political and Social History, and Harrison Family History,” n.d., 8.

<sup>197</sup> Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*, 62–65.

the south (the bustling “Black Metropolis”) became a fascination to pleasure-seekers of all races into the era of Prohibition. Vice had moved out of the slums proper and fashioned permissive spaces out of mixed-income districts.<sup>198</sup> Modernity, as it turned out, could not be averted. Gender transgression offered novel possibilities that were bigger than any specific geography—and because there would always be experimentation *somewhere*, there would always be spaces of experimentation to be found.

## CONCLUSION

In December of 1930, just a few years before the World’s Fair would return to Chicago with the 1933 Century of Progress International Exposition, *Variety* announced that the “[w]orld’s toughest town, Chicago, is going pansy. And liking it.”<sup>199</sup> The article claimed 35 new tea rooms staffed by “lads in gal’s clothing” had opened on the near north side (Towertown) in the past six months alone: an unprecedented amount of both visibility and acceptance for gender transgressions. This followed a nationwide trend, as the “pansy and lesbian craze” of the early 1930s brought female impersonators and other gender transgressors back to the mainstage. Outward manifestations of homosexuality and gender nonconformity were not just tolerated, but objects of magnetism for the affluent Whites who predominantly took part in exploratory slumming and thrill-seeking. Historian Chad Heap considers this final slumming vogue to be the most spatially abstracted: an extremity of what he calls “the general progression of slumming from a place-oriented activity to an amusement that determined the character of the spaces upon which it converged.”<sup>200</sup> The co-creative link between vice behavior and vice district persisted: the search for a new Levee created one wherever it was looked for, whether in Near North, along Madison Street, or at the

<sup>198</sup> Heap, 70–75.

<sup>199</sup> “Pansy Parlors: Tough Chicago Has Epidemic of Male Butterflies,” *Variety*, December 9, 1930, Jim Elledge Papers, Box 46, Folder 15, Georgia State University Special Collections.

<sup>200</sup> Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*, 83.

corner of State and 35<sup>th</sup>... even Paris and London yielded new Levees for the discerning eye.<sup>201</sup> Gender transgression and the crossing of sexual lines were among the many fruits of modernity and permissive space, overstepping traditional boundaries as enabled by the ability to negotiate individual positionality within these spaces. But even as conditions changed, gender transgression—and the sanctity of the domestic unit—would remain a pressing concern to the American public in their attempts to conceptualize and spatialize vice.

The gendered unrest at the turn of the century was made possible by a very specific set of conditions, manifesting from rapid social change and broad cultural anxieties about the future and where the path ahead might lead. Of course, even as an analysis of gender breakdown as one possible future of modernity, there are several variables only glancingly discussed in this project that would be essential to a complete understanding of the role these cultural anxieties played in the response to gender nonconformity in this era. The topic of race and White Americans' changing understandings of their own racial constructs, for instance, is only partially explored as an intersectional lens that carries its own analytical complexities—as is the issue of labor as a creator of cultural capital. However, the value of this project lies in situating responses to gender transgressions not simply as attempts to repress unconventional modes of expression but rather as stemming from broader fears around the consequences of sexual liberation and gender equality (especially as considered in permissive and “immoral” spaces).

This paradigm allows for a broader analysis of responses *to* and perceptions *of* gender transgressions outside of the specific context of turn-of-the-century Chicago. We can understand gender nonconformity as the creation of possibilities on the periphery of traditional gendered boundaries, which are perceived as threatening to traditional patriarchal order. While not necessarily a new paradigm for gender, its application to the period of rapid social change and associated

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<sup>201</sup> “Our Strong-Arm Women.”

pushback of the transition from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century can recontextualize the cultural struggles relating to gender as an arm of broader contestations over futurity. This dynamic is hardly confined to history: gender nonconformity repeats itself as a visible and easily condemned manifestation of modernity in contrast with traditional American family values. On the one hand, where there is the potential for boundary-crossing there will always be those with a vested interest in upholding the norm. However, on the other, gender transgression creates itself as a site of infinite possibility, the molding of infinite transformative futures. Permissive spaces that create these opportunities resist erasure, just as transgressors did themselves. The tide cannot be stopped, only redirected; time only runs one way. The Levee(s) are everywhere—and more are born every day.

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