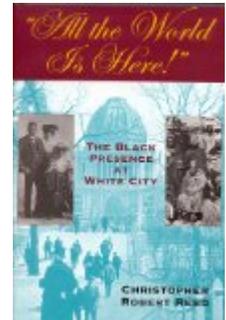


**Christopher Robert Reed.** *"All the World Is Here": The Black Presence at White City.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000. xvii + 230 pp. \$22.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-253-21535-2.



**Reviewed by** Shirley J. Portwood

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*"All the World Is Here"* is a very well researched and brilliantly argued book in which Christopher Reed uses the Chicago World's Fair of 1893--also called the World's Columbian Exposition or the White City--as a prism through which to "discover 'some' of the meanings of the many and disparate expectations ... of New and Old World Africans in the last decade of the nineteenth century" (p. ix). Reed persuasively argues that blacks--African, African American, Caribbean and South American--were included in the fair in numerous capacities, including as attendees, employees, exhibitors, and speakers. African American men were involved in preparing the grounds, located in the Loop area near Lake Michigan, by transforming the marshes and woodlands into the canals and lagoons of the White City. A few American blacks found employment during the fair, mainly in menial capacities that reflected their placement in the American workforce at large. Thus, black men at the World's Columbian Exhibit served primarily as laborers, janitors, and lavatory attendants. Poet Paul Laurence Dunbar was among the latter group. A black man guarded the first Ferris Wheel, a major attraction at the fair.

About fifty black chair boys, including James Weldon Johnson, like nearly one thousand of their white counterparts, ferried fair goers around the White City in rolling chairs. Jobs for African American women at the fair, as in the larger society, were even more limited than those for African American men. Nancy Green, representing the Aunt Jemima Company as the first personification of "Aunt Jemima," was one of the few black women employed at the World's Columbian Exhibit.

Reed contends that the widespread perception that blacks were excluded from the White City is based largely on a booklet produced in 1893 by noted black activists Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, Irvine Garland Penn, and Ferdinand Barnett and entitled *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition: The Afro-American Contribution to Columbian Literature*. This pamphlet was conceived prior to the fair and produced during its early months, before the authors knew the extent of black participation in this international event. The four authors and many other blacks were

alarmed because African Americans were excluded from the two official planning bodies for the fair, the all-male United States National Commission and the all-female Board of Lady Managers, both appointed by President Benjamin Harrison. Although blacks protested their blatant absence from these groups, Harrison did not change the composition of either. Yet blacks did have some official in-put into the planning, due to the roles of two blacks: Hale Parker, from Missouri, who was an alternate to the aforementioned national board of commissioners, and Joan Imogene Howard, who served on the New York State Board of Women Managers, a state planning body. In addition, Mrs. A. M. Curtis was employed rather briefly by the Board of Lady Managers in a clerical position, serving under their president, Bertha Honore Palmer. After Williams's resignation, Fannie Barrier Williams, a prominent Chicago black club woman, filled this position for a short time.

Hampton Institute, Wilberforce University, and Atlanta University, three black colleges, mounted impressive exhibits at the White City. The Hampton exhibit featured arts and crafts produced by its African American and Native American students, as well as photographs of the school. Black speakers at fair festivities included educator Booker T. Washington, noted elocutionist Hallie Q. Brown, Fannie Barrier Williams, and Frederick Douglass, among others. The Haitian exhibit, presided over by American Frederick Douglass, was an elaborate and impressive black exhibit and one that received a steady stream of visitors, both black and white, foreign and domestic.

The simulated village of the Fon people from Dahomey was among the most widely publicized and frequently visited fair sites. Newspapers and magazines extensively covered the exhibit, photographers included it in souvenir booklets, and many observers flocked there each day. The interest in this exhibit, perhaps more than any other, revealed the disparity in perceptions of Africans by an international audience. Some people saw at

the exhibit the rich culture of the Fon people, as well as a reminder of a distant African past that had shaped all humanity--as did Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal church, commenting at the concurrent Conference on Africa held in Chicago, publicly expounded his belief that all humanity started black" (p. 184). Other fair goers saw in the Fon village a non-industrial, rural lifestyle that was anathema to their Victorian tastes. The scantily clad, bare breasted women, and the robed men with their traditional musical instruments and other accouterments both fascinated and repelled many fair goers.

Colored American Day, which offered African Americans an opportunity to present their history and culture in a segregated setting, prompted a conflict among African Americans that revealed their diverse opinions about the most appropriate means to inform the world about the progress made by blacks in post-emancipation America and the best way to address issues of Jim Crow--segregation and discrimination--at the fair and in the larger society. Many blacks, including Ida B. Wells and Ferdinand Barnett, found this segregated event highly objectionable and refused to take part in it; other African Americans, like Dr. M. A. Majors of Chicago and Hallie Q. Brown of Wilberforce University, participated in the event, despite their opposition to its segregated nature. Significantly, Frederick Douglass, after first objecting to it, later championed the festivities, and Wells, upon hearing the acclaim for Colored American Day after the fact, later expressed regret that she had not attended the day's events.

Reed delves into the substantial primary and secondary literature on the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, and he investigates the sources on social theory, African American history, and other subjects, enabling him to provide a broad social and historical context for the work. The reader sees the larger settings of both Chicago and the United States as Reed analyzes the myriad views of black

life and culture and the varying expectations among blacks and whites about the appropriate role of diasporan blacks at the fair and internationally. Reed effectively shows that the position of blacks at the fair was a reflection of their position in the American society at large. The weaknesses of the work are so few and so minor that they hardly merit mention. A map of the fair site would enhance readers' appreciation of the geography of the Chicago setting. Curiously, Reed erroneously indicates, as an explanation for the inclusion of the literary works of white abolitionist Lydia Maria Child in an exhibit sponsored by African American women from the state of New York, that she was "black." Rather, the inclusion of Child's work might be used to illustrate that the black women who sponsored the exhibit regarded Child as an important figure in the abolitionist movement and that their assessment of the value of her work was irrespective of her race. (Or perhaps the sponsors of the exhibit mistakenly believed that Child was white.)

Both professional historians and history buffs will find that *"All the World Is Here"* is yet another example of Christopher Reed's excellent work on African American, American, and Chicago history.

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