

**Welcome to
Part 2 of 5**

Postcard: **Dearborn and Randolph**, 1890s. It only took 60 years to go from swampy trading town to the most modern city.

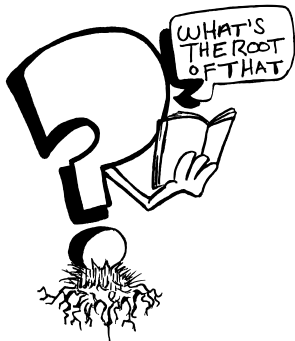


With most First Nation people displaced - but not fully removed - White settlement boomed in the Chicago area. Land was carved out, dug up, cut into, blasted, moved, bought and sold at a fierce pace. Like no other place on earth in the mid 1800s, wild visions of canals, ports, railroads, factories, grain elevators, and urban metropolis lifestyles quickly became reality in just 30 years. At this point in time Chicago was not only fueling Western expansion, it also boosted the system of **capitalism** and sharpened the **real estate industry** all at once. As Carl Smith states in *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief*, Chicago's location would make it *more accessible than any place on earth to resources and markets at the very moment when America was taking over leadership in industrial enterprise.*

Due to an endless supply of farmland and forests as well as a new waterway connection from the Atlantic Ocean (New York City), through Chicago, all the way to the Gulf of Mexico (New Orleans), Chicago became the natural resource hub of the entire Midwest and major supplier of the world. Chicago became the biggest global supplier of **lumber, grain, and cattle**. With painstaking labor, it was the world's largest U.S. railroad hub, the tallest

skyscraper builder, and longest canal digger. Chicago also had the grandest shopping and many conniving political and financial operators, to boot. No other economy has grown faster in such a short period of time. As we'll see in *Part II*, this economic boom attracted over **2 million people** by 1915—many of whom were already bearing the brunt of social, economic and political inequality at home; many were displaced or ethnically targeted and came here to make the best of things.

The affluent's drive for profit and lust for economic power produced a disorganized city, where entrepreneurs built in different directions with little rhyme or reason - other than having people as **laborers** living close by. These men established extremely organized and effective corporations with a tremendous need for human labor. Men were needed by the hundreds of thousands to fill brutally taxing jobs digging canals, laying railroads, transporting lumber, building structures, butchering livestock, and producing steel. The wellbeing of workers was of little concern to Chicago's industrialists. When workers lost their limbs, fell on hard times, or reached their death, help was hard to come by. New workers were simply recruited



What created Chicago's super growth?

as replacements. When laborers organized strikes, other immigrant groups - then Blacks and Latinos desperate for decent jobs - were all exploited as strike-breakers. Where did people live? Most resided in “slum” communities.

The racial anxieties that resulted in the removal of American Indians from the region set a precedent of **exploitation and displacement** once Chicago evolved into a large metropolis. The development of **monopoly capitalism** and a militant **labor movement** in the city resulted in racial housing segregation as another way to divide and control the mostly **immigrant working-class resistance**, while isolating the “dangerous classes,” as they were often called. Consequently, since the early twentieth century, urban plans that aimed to modernize Chicago have reinforced the powerful demands of **white supremacy** and economic development. These plans were hatched by men such as Daniel Burnham to bring order out of chaos.

To understand current struggles against urban removal, it is critical to review this period—a time of rampant industrial growth, extreme wealth inequities, and the rise of Chicago’s first poverty-ridden communities (read: slums and ghettos). It was an urban jungle of *extreme poverty* for most and *extreme wealth* for few. Today’s inequality, however, is superfluous and even more out of control.

All Rise: Monopoly Capitalism, Labor Exploitation, and Land Values

Located on the shores of Lake Michigan, Chicago was an ideal place for shipping raw materials and eventually manufactured goods. Given its geographic position and access to newly taken land and resources, “Yankee” businessmen quickly bought property, invested large sums of capital, built industries, and recruited workers. The leading figures of Chicago’s economic expansion were **Gurdon Hubbard** and **William Butler Oden**. Both men came from

small-town, East Coast origins and established a clear five-step process: *purchase Chicago land at low prices, boost its worth through great ventures* (e.g., Lake Michigan/Chicago harbor building, the Illinois and Michigan Canal, and the railroads), *establish trade with the East Coast and Gulf of Mexico; sell land plots for enormous profits, and reinvest these profits into greater economic development projects*. For this vision of private capital growth to occur, two things were needed, possibly more than anything else: **federal funds** for building those major projects (Chicago’s elite pushed repeatedly for public funds) and **cheap labor**—the immigrant.

An intense Chicago industrial demand for labor in the grain, lumber, railroad, and eventually meat packing and steel industries, brought tens of thousands of workers to Chicago in the pre-Civil War period. Most of these unskilled and skilled laborers were from Europe—themselves often displaced by famine, war or conflict. The first permanent Black community also formed in Chicago during these years, as the city was a “safe-haven” for those who escaped slavery. As a result of labor migrations, the population of Chicago grew faster than any other city in the United States from 1830 to 1880. These migrants built the city, filled the poorly built **tenement housing units**, and fueled the early and constant growth of Chicago. They also brought with them ideas of cultural expression and political activism (e.g., socialism, communism) that would soon threaten Chicago’s power structure. Yet, as rebellions fermented, the business community focused on market dominance, land development, and the “bottom line” instead of labor relations and issues.

Maps of the city during this period reveal the rapid growth and **privatization** of property. In 1830, the first year Chicago land lots were sold, prices started at **\$34 a lot** (about 80 x 100 ft.). They quickly rose to **\$100** each as President Andrew Jackson ushered in the age of “Indian Removal,” marked by land speculation, slavery’s expansion, and upward mobility for some

