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## "The World in Miniature": Nationality Performed in the Columbian Exposition and Chicago Immigrant Theatre

Megan E. Geigner

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*This article considers performances in two constructed communities in 1890s Chicago and how each presented ethnicity and nationality. I argue that the World's Columbian Exposition presented ethnicity and nationality as fixed characteristics of identity for people associated with sovereign nations. In contrast, I argue that neighborhood immigrant theatre, specifically Italian, Polish, and Czech groups, presented them as part of a fluid process of creating a hyphenated ethnic-American identity.*



In anticipation of the opening of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, a May 1893 feature in *The Standard* stated that "the Fair will present three great subjects of study—architecture, products, and people. Here is a world in miniature—a world of art, a world of nature and civilization exhibits, a world of mixed people. Which will be the more interesting study?" Certainly the architecture, the inventions, and the physical feats of the Exposition drew substantial attention, but it was the "mixed people" with their differing ethnicity and nationality that captured Fair-goers' imagination and made the experience that of a "world in miniature." In many ways, 1890s Chicago itself was a "world in miniature," with or without the Exposition. The Exposition provided a structured environment for patrons to access foreign nationals and exotics from across the globe but Chicago locals knew that the city had been home to myriad peoples before Fair planners erected the magnificent White City in Jackson Park. In the twenty years prior to the Fair, Chicago more than tripled in population, gaining an average of 1000 people a week, two thirds of whom were foreign immigrants (Flinn 1892, 82). Many people came to the Exposition

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*Megan E. Geigner is a student in the Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre and Drama Program at Northwestern University, where she is studying the intersection of theatre, nationalism, and issues of identity, immigration, and citizenship in the United States around the turn of the last century.*



to see foreign nationality and ethnicity<sup>1</sup> as demonstrated through architecture, food, music and theatre, but away from the hubbub of Jackson Park, Chicago's permanent residents also produced and consumed "foreign" architecture, foods, music and theatre.

Both the city's immigrants and the Fair planners framed these acts of ethnicity and nationality through the city of Chicago, reimagining the city and what it meant. For Fair planners, the Exposition was a way to perform Chicago's transformation from a swampy hinterland filled with scheming entrepreneurs to a place of cultural refinement. It was an opportunity to "display just how wonderful America had become" by way of its newest metropolis (Trachtenburg 209). For the city's immigrants, their neighborhoods and the cultural activities they created within them presented an opportunity to reframe Chicago both as part of their ethnic tradition and as their new nation. One of the most significant cultural activities in which Chicago immigrants participated was neighborhood immigrant theatre. Both the Exposition and immigrant theatre interpreted what ethnicity and nationality meant through performance. Although these performances occurred around the same time and in the same city, scholars have explored the treatment of ethnicity and nationality at the Exposition but not in Chicago immigrant theatre. This article is an investigation into the differing performances of ethnicity and nationality in each venue. I argue that the Exposition presented ethnicity and nationality as a static components of identity for those who lived in nation-states or colonized lands whereas neighborhood immigrant theatre presented ethnicity and nationality as fluid, diasporic, on-going processes contributing to a hyphenated identity.<sup>2</sup>

### **Foreignness, Ethnicity, and Nationality at the Columbian Exposition**

One of the largest draws of world's fairs in general was their promise to showcase the entirety of the world in the convenience of a single, contained location. Beginning with the Crystal Palace in London in 1851, nineteenth-century international expositions presented imperial powers' industrial processes and commodities. Over the years, they increasingly presented the people responsible for generating these products and those peoples' cultures. The fourth World's Fair held in Paris in 1867 introduced "établissements" at which Fair-goers could witness workers—many of whom were colonial subjects—producing goods like Indian shawls (Freibe 42–43). In the following years, an emphasis on culture replaced the emphasis on labor, which made the display of people equal to the display of products. For example, the World's Fair in Vienna in 1873 featured an ethnographic section in which "it was possible to admire Indian wigwams alongside Chinese fisherman's houses and the dwellings of the primitive inhabitants" (65). The Paris World's Fair of 1889, the international exposi-



tion that directly preceded and most influenced the Columbian Exposition, presented "The History of Housing of all Time and People" populated by French colonial subjects performing and presenting such attractions as "Arab horseback fights, snake charmers and swallows, Fakirs, and Javanese theatre and processions" (89). By 1893, people expected a certain quantity of foreign and exotic participants to populate World's Fairs.

The Columbian Exposition followed suit. Fair planners in Chicago made much of the growing foreign participation in the months leading up to the event. In a *World's Fair Notes* article published two months before the Exposition opened, an author exclaimed that "foreign participation so far ascertained up to the present, embraces 72 nations and provinces." Trade goods, arts, technology, food, and people from these seventy-two "nations and provinces" were displayed in two distinct places at the Exposition: inside the fairgrounds proper, called the White City (five hundred plus acres of groomed landscape and impressive architecture) and on the Midway Plaisance (an eighty-acre strip of carnival rides and ethnic villages) just to the west of the Exposition's admission gate. Countries and empires with displays inside the fairgrounds had items in the White City's grand, neoclassical buildings such as the Palace of Fine Arts or the Manufactures Building and also had a government building "where its people may assemble and find themselves in their own abode on foreign soil" (Snider 220). Countries with this type of presentation included the United States, Canada, Haiti, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Columbia, Venezuela, Brazil, Great Britain, France, Ceylon, Spain, Sweden, Germany, the Ottoman Empire, Siam, and Japan among others. The foreign government buildings were stately structures of various sizes that were officially designed, sanctioned, and populated by artists, government representatives, and other peoples from the country or empire presented.

In contrast, a *Harper's Weekly* article described the Midway as the place "granted for exhibitions not appropriate to the main divisions of the fair" ("Algeria and Tunis") and, as such, ethnicities and nationalities represented on the Midway Plaisance were not housed in grand, neoclassical buildings nor were they organized by people of the ethnicity or nationality presented. Ethnic villages on the Midway included those of the Algerians, Tunisians, Egyptians, the Irish, the Javanese, the Chinese, Turks, Moors, Native Americans, and Sub-Saharan Africans, among others (Bolotin and Liang 128-39).<sup>3</sup> The Midway was overseen by Frederick Ward Putnam, the head of the Exposition's Anthropology Department. Putnam employed consultants such as Sol Bloom and Cyrus Adler, who arranged for the Turkish Village, Frenchman Xavier Pene, who arranged for the Dahomey Village, and G. Brown Goode, secretary of the Smithsonian at the time, who was responsible for the overall arrangement of the Midway (Kirschenblatt-



Gimblett 97–99; Rydell 43–46). Goode claimed that the ideal layout for the Fair would illustrate “the steps of progress of civilization and its arts in successive centuries” (qtd. in Rydell 45). Goode’s idea resulted in the organization of the Midway: the far west end was meant to represent the beginning of civilization with exhibitions of animals followed directly by Native Americans and Africans in the Dahomey Village, the middle section featured largely Muslim populations, and the far east end, which abutted the entrance to the fairgrounds, featured the Irish and Germans. In his report for the Library of Congress, Denton Snider claimed that “in the Plaisance, [we] have fallen back to the beginning of human culture, which finds its culmination in the Exposition proper” (256–57).

In many ways, America was the culmination of the Fair. Albeit a year tardy, the Fair was held to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus’s “discovery” of the Americas, and therefore Fair planners allotted large physical spaces to North, Central, and South American countries within the fairgrounds. Of all the countries, though, the United States had the most real estate. Each US state had its own building or pavilion that rivaled and, in the cases of some, such as Pennsylvania and New York, exceeded the size of some foreign buildings. Maps show that the northernmost section of the fairgrounds, which was where the state’s buildings were located, was much larger than the area dedicated to the foreign buildings. Additionally, the United States Government building was one of the largest; it was larger than the Canadian, Spanish, Columbian, and Swedish foreign buildings put together. It was also at the easternmost end of the fairgrounds, on the lake-front, which, following the rationale of the layout of the Midway and the Exposition proper, suggested that the United States was the pinnacle of civilization.

To complete the message that America was not only the site but the culmination of civilization, Fair planners organized a stage play titled *America*, which debuted at the Auditorium Theatre on the eve of the opening of the Exposition. According to surviving programs the performance began with a scenes of Christopher Columbus’s “Voyage of Discovery” and “Triumphant Return to Spain,” followed by scenes about the Plymouth Plantation of 1621, of Washington crossing the Delaware, and an act dedicated to American inventions such as the lightning rod, the cotton gin, the telegraph, and the lightbulb. Each act finished with a grand ballet, choreographed by a Mademoiselle Sozo, a famous Italian dance master, and featured actors characterizing Peace, Liberty, Independence, Civilization, Education, Wealth, Reason, Sculpture, Chemistry, Invention, and Mechanism. *America* did chronologically what the layout of the Midway did spatially; it situated the Exposition as the culmination of Western history and achievement with the United States as the promise of the future. The



United States as represented by the stage play and the Exposition proper was a homogenous progression of success that overlooked Native Americans, people of color, and foreign immigrants.

The stage play *America* was symptomatic of the way that the Columbian Exposition at large presented concepts of nationality, ethnicity, and citizenship, and raises questions about how American immigrants who attended the Fair identified, refuted, or participated in the displays of their home cultures. While no records of Chicago immigrant Fair attendance exist, given the enormous Chicagoan attendance and the fact that at least a third of Chicagoans were immigrants in 1893, most likely Chicago immigrants did attend. *The Standard Guide to Chicago for the Year 1892*, a year before the Fair opened, stated "Chicago is a thoroughly cosmopolitan city. Less than one quarter of her people are of American birth—fully one third of the 292,463 native-born citizens are of immediate foreign extraction" (82). The *Standard Guide* lists the numbers of each population inside the city, including 54,209 Bohemians, 45,977 Swedes, and 11,927 Scottish, and 9,921 Italians (82). The *Standard Guide* compiled the next year states that "Germans lead among the foreign born peoples of Chicago; Irish come next and are followed by the Scandinavians, Bohemians and Poles" (26). Passages like this from the *Standard Guides* are similar to the way that the Exposition presented nationality, citizenship, and ethnicity. The Exposition's allowed little room for nuance in ethnic expression in that it presented people as from one ethnicity exclusively (immigrants were either Polish or German but not both), and in nationality since it identified patrons as either American or foreign (rather than Polish-American).

Fair planners envisioned foreign-affiliated patrons as discreetly identifying with a single nationality that was officially sanctioned within the fairgrounds, but many Chicago immigrant Fair-goers did not experience their ethnicity or nationality in that way. The Exposition featured special days to welcome patrons of foreign extraction who identified with a nation, empire, or ethnicity such as German Day, Austrian Day, and Ottoman Empire Day. These officially-sanctioned celebrations staged with the beautiful and stately foreign buildings as a backdrop presented nationality as exclusively the domain of recognized nations and empires. Many immigrant groups, however, did not have sovereign nations and therefore had no government building. While some groups without sovereign governments, like the Irish and the Polish, did have special days at the Fair, without a home on the fairgrounds, their feelings of nationalism were instead performed as ethnicity. Furthermore, because of intermarriage in the hostland and changing borders in the homeland, many Chicago immigrants did not identify with one ethnicity exclusively but conceived of themselves as multi-ethnic. For example, the oral history of Mary Fritz, a Polish Chica-



goan born in 1885, explains that her mother was from Prussian-ruled Poland (and spoke German) and her father was from Russian-ruled Poland (and spoke Russian), and she married a German Chicagoan. Fritz's aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings married Irish, Lithuanian, and German immigrants. Although Fritz primarily identified as Polish, she spoke many languages and was an American citizen.

The Fair did not leave much room for those, like Mary Fritz, who identified as culturally ethnic but also as American citizens, but instead presumed that patrons identified as either American or foreign. In fact, like Mary Fritz (and her parents), many Chicago immigrants were American citizens in 1892. Chicago had a Polish Alderman, August J. Kowalski, as early as 1888 indicating that Polish Chicagoans were voting, a right reserved for citizens. That being said, though, there was no place on the grounds of the Fair to identify as Polish-American. Those who identified as American could enjoy their state's building, such as the Illinois Building, the United States Government Building, or the Fair as a whole since the layout of the Exposition demonstrated America as the future of civilization. In contrast, the labeled foreign buildings set apart on discrete plots and the less-than-civilized villages on the Midway deemed those who did not claim an exclusively American identity as foreign. Patrons could easily circulate between the foreign government buildings on the fairgrounds so Chicago immigrants from Germany could visit both the United States Government Building and the German Government Building, but they could not be in one physical space that represented German-Americanness. The same was true of the ethnicities presented on the Midway. Patrons could circulate between them, but they experienced just that, a between-ness, rather than a place for multiple identification. Also, patrons could not circulate easily between the Midway and the fairgrounds because they had to stop and wait in line at an admissions gate between the two. According to Fair historians, patrons rarely went to the exhibits on the Midway and within the fairgrounds on the same day, so if a patron identified as both American and Irish, his or her feelings of ethnic and national identification were separated by space and time (Bolotin and Liang 143). The presentation of the foreign building as foreign, the difficulty of circulation between different foreign representations, and the idea that the whole of the Fair was exclusively a triumph of American progress made it difficult for recent Chicago immigrants who identified themselves diasporically as foreign ethnically but American nationally.

This is not to say that Fair planners were unaware of American immigrants or the possibility of what they could contribute to the Fair (in fact a great deal of immigrant labor built the Fair), but that they saw them as supporting players instead of central to or representative of the American



experience. For instance, the Music Hall featured concerts of American immigrant groups, although none were local and they were not invited to showcase their ethnic culture but to be compared to one another and American music. Although many immigrant groups in Chicago did have publicly performing musical clubs and societies, Theodore Thomas, the director of the music program at the Fair, invited ensembles from outside Chicago such as the German-American Women's Chorus (a group from Texas), the Bohemian Singers (from New York), the United Scandinavian Chorus, and the United Polish Singers Chorus (both national organizations) in order to—much like the layout of the Midway—exhibit “the world's musical progress” (Burg 171; Upton 295). Despite not being considered for their musical offerings, Chicago immigrants did attempt to be included and represented at the Fair. According to an article in a Czech language newspaper *Svornost* from April of 1890, Czech-Americans lobbied for one of their own to be included in the Fair's Board of Directors but were denied. Instead, two years later, the Fair's Women's Board designated a small section within the Women's Building to a Bohemian display after a group of Czech-American women approached Women's Board Chair, Bertha Palmer (“Bohemian Women at the Exposition”). These examples along with some of the special days at the Fair such as Irish Day or Polish show that the Fair did not fail to represent certain groups altogether but that it represented them in a limited way that rendered them foreign rather than embracing them as US residents and citizens. Furthermore these attempts demonstrate that Fair planners failed to conceive of the American immigrants as vital to the Fair and its showcase of the world in miniature.

All of this being said, certainly non-ethnic Americans, ethnic immigrants, and tourists from many places encountered one another at the Exposition and in Chicago at large during the time of the Exposition and in ways that did not adhere to the Exposition planners' maps, scheduled events, and sentiments. According to historian David F. Burg, tourists who descended upon Chicago for the Fair likely visited sights and neighborhoods beyond the Columbian Exposition, particularly at night since most of the exhibits were closed (227). The *Standard Guides* of both 1892 and 1893 boasted to tourists that Chicago was a thoroughly cosmopolitan city, using the number of foreign-born peoples as evidence, which encouraged people to seek out encounters with ethnic others whether at the Fair or on the streets of Chicago. The Fair, with its special ethnic performances or days, and the tourist materials developed in tandem with the Fair generated a flow of both ethnic Americans into the fairgrounds and non-ethnic Americans into the city at large. Although the Fair planners had an agenda in the way that they presented ethnicity and that agenda may have made it difficult to claim multi-



ple nationalities and selves, Fair patrons, like all audiences, had the ability to make their Fair experiences their own.

The Columbian Exposition followed the World's Fair trend of putting people's ethnicity and nationality on display but, in the case of Chicago, with its hundreds of thousands of immigrants and tourists circulating between the neighborhoods, the city at large, and the Fair, it is worth considering how the Fair's presentation of foreign cultures was congruous or discordant with other of types of ethnic presentation in the city. In some ways Chicagoans were primed for these performances by having had performances of nationality and ethnicity available to them in the immigrant neighborhoods for decades. The difference was that presentations of nationality and ethnicity performed in the neighborhoods were not executed for the non-ethnic Chicagoan's/tourist's benefit but were part of the ethnic community's negotiation of home and hostland culture. Understanding how neighborhood immigrants presented themselves in performance allows for an alternate, more individualized reading of ethnicity and nationality. Whereas ethnicity and nationality at the Fair constituted the world, ethnicity and nationality in immigrant theatre constituted individuals' experiences. Considering ethnic Chicagoans' experiences of their own ethnicity and nationality makes evident the dissonance between self-conceptions and exposition-created displays.

### Neighborhood Immigrant Theatre

In 1892, as anticipation about the upcoming Columbian Exposition filled the newspapers, several immigrant groups in Chicago increased their neighborhood theatrical activity. Although immigrant theatre in Chicago predates the 1890s, the city's Italian, Polish, and Czech neighborhoods all witnessed historically significant theatrical events during the inundation of Fair culture between August of 1892 and April of 1893: the Italians started a new amateur group, the Poles hosted an internationally-renowned actress, and the Czech's opened their first professional theatre. In each case, the theatre that each group created was not just an attempt to bolster the strength of their ethnic community but was also an exercise in reframing Chicago as their ethnicity's home.

The geographical space of the neighborhoods provided a unique place for ethnic communities to create performances that interpreted ethnicity and nationality. To be clear, neighborhoods and ethnic communities are not synonymous terms. Chicago historian Dominic Pacyga explains that "*Neighborhood* is a geographical term. *Community* implies a social relationship, a sharing of common goals, cultural or otherwise" and that "many different [ethnic] groups shared the same kind of geographical space . . . but they often did not interact with one another" (258–59, Pacyga's italics).



Anthropologist Lee Baker states that ethnic communities were frequently segregated "by language, occupation, leisure activities, and religion, and . . . [the] group worked, worshipped, and lived together, rarely reaching across ethnic lines" (139). In other words, people of different ethnicities lived interspersed within the same city blocks and buildings but they formed separate communities. Within the integrated space of the neighborhood, people of the same ethnicity opened and attended shops, schools, churches, and cultural institutions, creating space to imagine and enact city ownership and collectively negotiate their continuing relationship with their heterogeneous neighborhoods, the city, their hostland, and their homeland. Because of the unique qualities of the neighborhoods, immigrant theatre produced therein reframed Chicago in a way that allowed for fluid and hyphenated identities. Within these new theatrical enterprises, Chicago immigrants made Chicago (a frequent setting for the plays) a place in which they could celebrate ethnic tradition and American citizenship simultaneously.

The Italian, Polish, and Czech theatre groups developed around the time of the Fair are important case studies both because of the timing of their development and because each ethnic group held an ambiguous place within civilization discourse. Civilization discourse, a governing principle in the layout of the Exposition, borrowed from nineteenth-century evolution theory and posited that through time humans developed from savages, to barbarians, and finally into civilized beings (Bederman 25). Within the discourse, people participating in self-government (from Western European nations) had evolved into the most civilized humans on the planet, while other people, colonial subjects and people of color such as Arabs and Africans, were stuck in an earlier evolutionary phase. Industrial laborers and farmers from central European countries, such as the Slavs and Italians, occupied a position past savage but not yet at the height of civilization. Many central Europeans nationals without nation-states, such as the Czechs and Poles, did not fit neatly into established categories and were racialized differently from Anglo-Saxons, the "race" non-ethnic Americans claimed (Painter 214–19). Although Slavs, Alpines, and Mediterraneans (as the Poles, Czech, and Italians were called at this time) were eligible for American citizenship, and, as mentioned earlier, many were citizens, their immigrant and laborer status and their devotion to Catholicism made them even less capable of assimilation in American eyes.<sup>4</sup> Their ambiguous evolutionary and assimilation status in the United States and their lack of sovereignty abroad accounted for their limited representation at the Fair, but in neighborhood theatre, they could perform themselves as civilized, ethnic American citizens.



In the summer of 1892, nine months before the opening of the World's Fair but in the midst of Fair anticipation, the Italian newspaper *L'Italia* advertised a newly formed theatrical troupe saying, "A group of young Italians have formed an amateur drama club which will be known as Circolo Filodrammatico Italiano, and the money earned will be for the benefit of the members." After 1892 the Circolo Filodrammatico Italiano changed its name and evolved into other dramatic clubs but lasted for many years (and ultimately performed in Chicago's Hull-House, a beacon of Chicago immigrant culture from the turn of the century and beyond). In a later article, an iteration of this group claimed that its aim was to "work for better diffusion of the Italian language and the Italian culture in the Italian colony of Chicago" ("Italian Theatre"). This newspaper article shows that Italians were concerned about displaying their own culture as themselves in a way that promoted Italian culture as opposed to Mdm. Sozo, the choreographer of the stage play *America*, whose work glorified the Fair planners' idea of America instead of the Italian-American experience. Italian immigrants at this time identified more with the specific province or town of their birth in Italy than by general nationality (Candeloro 185). Therefore, it is significant that the Italian theatre-makers considered their community an "Italian colony in Chicago." This phrase demonstrates that the Italian-Americans were reimagining Chicago as a place where Italians could be unified despite region of origin or, that Chicago was a surrogate for their region of origin back in Italy. Rather than being Venetian Italians or Sicilian Italians, these were Chicagooan Italians. That they were concerned with maintaining their homeland language but were collapsing homeland regional identifiers demonstrates that Italian Chicago immigrant theatre allowed space to retain homeland culture but also to accept and negotiate Chicago as their new home. This immigrant theatre allowed the Chicago Italian community to embrace their Italian-ness and Chicagoo-ness as equal parts of their identities.

The year before the Exposition also marked a significant moment in Polish Chicago theatre history. Although the city's Poles had had their own theatres since 1873, in September of 1892, Helen Modjeska, a famous professional actress, performed at Polish Hall in a northwest Polish neighborhood alongside amateur Polish-American players. Although Modjeska had toured extensively in the United States since the 1870s and had played large, downtown theatres in Chicago (such as McVicker's), she had never performed in a Polish neighborhood theatre in Chicago prior to this time (Coleman i). Modjeska's appearance in the Chicago immigrant theatre in 1892 reconciled aspects of US culture and Polish culture. By the end of the nineteenth century, Modjeska was a major cultural icon. Helen Potter, a famous American lyceum performer and personality, included Modjeska



in her *Impersonations* book alongside other famous actors Edwin Booth, Charlotte Cushman, and Sarah Bernhardt. In addition to Modjeska's status as a famous actress in the United States, audiences of the national theatre in Poland were also familiar with Modjeska's fame from her work there between 1861 and 1876 (Coleman 2–3). Poles, Polish-Americans, and non-ethnic American audiences alike considered Modjeska one of the best tragic and Shakespearean actors of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century stage.

For such a famous, internationally-renowned professional actress to appear at a civic hall with amateur actors was an event that attracted the attention of thousands of Polish Chicagoans. *Dziennik Chicagoski* reported that "in spite of the rain . . . Miss Helen Modzejewska's performance at the Polish Hall attracted so many people that the Hall was filled to capacity [over 5,000] for the first time since it was built." The writer goes on to exclaim that "had the Hall been twice as large as it actually is, it is doubtful whether all who came to see the great Polish actress would have been seated." The play that drew the huge crowd was *Jadwiga, Queen of Poland* written by a Polish-American playwright Szczesny Zahajkiewicz who had immigrated to Chicago from Poland in 1889 (Brodhead 3). According to the Polish American Center, Queen Jadwiga was a child Polish monarch crowned in 1384 who sacrificed a union with her true love to do what was best for Poland and her people and therefore holds a special place in Polish national mythology. In his/her article in the *Dziennik Chicagoski* the reporter compared the fourteenth-century Poles in Warsaw to the nineteenth-century Poles in Chicago saying that "just as the Poles of old were happy to welcome the Polish Queen Hedwiga during her reign, so were the Poles of today happy to welcome Miss Modzejewska . . . Hundreds of people felt for the first time a genuine national feeling such as they had never felt before in their lives" ("Miss Modzejewska").

The audience's experience of "a genuine national feeling" never experienced before avails itself to multiple readings. First, the author could mean that Poles in Chicago did not have sufficient opportunity to celebrate their Polish identity while trying to adapt to American life but, that while in their theatre that night, Modjeska inspired Poles in the United States to embrace their Polish ethnicity in a foreign city for the first time since settling abroad. Polish community member Mary Fritz explains that during this time many Poles in Chicago hid their Polishness because it was a liability for finding jobs. According to Fritz when a potential employer asked her older brother, an educated young man, his nationality and he responded that he was Polish, the employer said "we don't hire Pollacks" (tape 3–4, 9). But in a theatre filled with people from their own culture and featuring a



highly-regarded celebrity and artist, Chicago Poles did not need to hide their Polish pride.

Second, the author's statement could mean that the Polish Chicagoans experienced a national sentiment that they had never had the chance to experience even in the homeland. In 1892 Poland had not had a ruling monarchy for centuries, but was divided among Austro-Hungarian, Prussian, and Russian Empire rule. Plays about ethnic nationalism (such as plays about the Polish monarchy) were not permitted by Austro-Hungarian theatre censors for most of the nineteenth century for fear of uprisings (Bachleitner 251). Czarist authority in the Russian partition also did not permit national drama. Prior to her career in the United States, several Polish students who presented Modjeska with a bouquet of flowers with a red and white ribbon (Polish national colors) were expelled from school by Russian czarist forces because the gesture was interpreted as an ethnic national demonstration (Holmgren 175). In contrast, when Modjeska finished her performance in Chicago's Polish Hall, Zahajkiewicz, the playwright, came onto the stage, declared her performance that night was the best possible, and tore up the script (Brodhead 4). The excited Polish Chicagoans in the audience scrambled to collect the pieces of the script as souvenirs from the evening (4). Keeping a souvenir of the performance gave the Polish immigrants a physical reminder of an event that allowed them to identify themselves with Polish ethnic nationalism in a public place free from surveillance or violence.

Finally, the author of the article's conception of nationality could refer to both American and Polish nationality together. Modjeska was an American citizen so while enjoying her virtuosity, Polish Chicagoans were also watching a model of Polish-Americanness. In her role onstage that evening Modjeska performed homeland ethnic nationalism in her native portrayal of a Polish queen but in her overall career she also performed successful immigration to the United States. Modjeska's success was in part due to her ability to transition and adapt to US culture but her performance that night also demonstrated that she maintained her cultural heritage. Modjeska's career, frequently mentioned in the Polish dailies in Chicago, described a woman who moved effortlessly between the ethnic neighborhood and the American commercial stage, between the English and Polish languages, and between Anglo-Saxon cultural playing icons such as Rosalind and Eastern European heroines such as Queen Jadwiga. Modjeska as a Polish immigrant and an American citizen presented a hyphenated identity. "Nationalism" in this conception does not refer to just Polishness nor Americanness, nor does it stratify ethnic Americans by geographical or even cultural space like the Fair. Instead, Modjeska's model of Polish-Americanness allowed Polish



Chicagoans to see themselves not just as Poles or as Americans but as a community of Polish-Americans.

Like the Poles and Italians, Chicago's Czech's also created neighborhood immigrant theatre that presented a type of ethnicity and nationality not represented at the Columbian Exposition during the time of the Fair. A month before the Exposition opened, the first professional Czech theatre in Chicago, the Ludvik Players, presented its first play ("The Fiftieth Anniversary of Bohemian Amateur Theatricals"). The Ludvik Players presented their work at Thalia Hall on the corner of 18th and Allport Streets in the heart of Pilsen, then the largest community of Czechs in the United States (Sternstein 26). The Ludvik Players was the first professional Czech theatre in the United States, although amateur Czech theatre existed in Chicago since 1863 (Borkovec 5). Like their Italian counterparts, this company existed well beyond the time of the Fair. In 1918, the Players celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary and in an article in the Czech newspaper *Denni Hlasatel*, a reporter referred to Frantisek Ludvik, the founder of the theatre, as a "patriotic pioneer." Like the Polish newspaper reporter's use of the word "nationalism," this reporter's use of the word "patriotic" to describe the theatre's founder could have multiple meanings. First, Ludvik's patriotism could refer to Czech nationalism. In the homeland, Czech theatre was an important part of the 1848 rebellions; the national theatre in Prague was organized and built as a result of a meeting of nationalistically-minded Czechs who advocated for the use of the Czech language in public institutions (Agnew 135). Like their counterparts at the National Theatre in Prague, the Ludvik Players used the Czech language exclusively. Frantisek Ludvik's decision to do so could reveal his desire for Czech sovereignty. Like the Poles, Czech peoples in the homeland were under foreign rule and had to fight for the right to use their language and were not allowed to present theatre critical of the ruling Viennese Hapsburgs, Catholicism, or that would incite nationalist conflicts (Bachleitner 252–53). By presenting Czech language theatre in a prominent building in Pilsen, Ludvik was enacting Czech national pride that mirrored that of the National Theatre in Prague but was free to present work not permitted by Austro-Hungarian censorship.

Secondly, "patriotic" could refer to feelings of pride for the Czech Chicagoans new homeland in the United States. Anniversary celebrations of the Players, which claimed to be in the spirit of the organization's founding, included intermission speeches in which Czech Chicagoan citizens wished the American troupes fighting in World War I well and "urged all Czechs to stand firmly behind the President and his administration and to prove their loyalty by buying bonds and war-saving stamps" ("Ludvik Players' Jubilee"). Though a generation later, this article claims that early



twentieth-century Czech-Americans were continuing a tradition of treating Czech immigrants as Americans. In this reading, the Ludvik Players' presentations encouraged an ethnic pride that embraced Czech-ness and American-ness simultaneously. As further example of this, the Ludvik players performed plays ranging from traditional Czech plays to new plays penned by the immigrant community such as *The Grocery Woman of 18th Place* ("Ludwig's Society"). The choice of plays shows a reconciliation between the bifurcated ideas of foreign and domestic, homeland and hostland, as immigrant playwrights were writing Czech language plays set on Chicago streets.

These neighborhood theatre examples demonstrate diasporic identification in which each group used performance to negotiate the meaning of their dispersal, imaginatively continue their relationship with their homeland, and navigate their life within the hostland. According to Kim D. Butler, "diasporan representation of the homeland are part of the project of constructing diasporan identity, rather than homeland actuality" (205). In the case of these immigrants, the community space in the neighborhoods and the cultural products therein were not replicas of the realities of the homeland or homeland culture but incorporated imaginative aspects and aspects of the United States. Although in reality Poland was partitioned, *Queen Jadwiga* presented a unified land governed by a queen played by an American citizen. Czech Chicagoans continued the homeland tradition of using Czech language theatre to present ethnic nationalism but one of their protagonists was a grocer on 18th Place instead of a peasant in Prague. Italian Chicagoans substituted "Chicago" for "Venetian" or "Sicilian," creating a specific Italian identity rooted in the United States. Immigrants celebrated American civil liberties that guaranteed that their ethnicity in the form of their language, homeland colors, and criticism of ruling powers could be presented onstage without censorship or punishment. By producing plays set in Chicago, making patriotic statements about the United States, and hoping to announce their ethnic "colony" to their neighbors, these immigrants embraced the Americanness of their identity and demonstrated that they could be voting American citizens, ethnically Slavic or Italian, and in support of the United States and their homeland simultaneously. Rather than being forced to choose between being foreign or being American, immigrant theatrical events allowed performers and spectators alike to build and celebrate a hyphenated immigrant-American identity.

Immigrant theatres as exemplified by the Polish, Czech, and Italian theatres here are just a few case studies of dozens of immigrant theatre experiences at the end of the nineteenth century in Chicago. Russians, Swedes, Lithuanians, Slovaks, Slovenians, Ukrainians, and countless others had theatres in Chicago at this time. Foreign language press articles



that tell of these (largely) amateur theatricals detail the night's entertainment as including presentations of homeland culture and language alongside songs, plays, and lectures demonstrating the group's connection with and loyalty to America. Many evenings included historical lectures, meals, and singing of the "Star-Spangled Banner." This type of theatre event allowed communities to identify themselves as both American and as members of an ethnic tradition and made a space where that hyphenated identity had a place in the future all while reframing the city of Chicago.

## Conclusion

The presentation of nationality and ethnicity in immigrant theatre was different from the presentation of nationality and ethnicity at the Fair and generated different concepts of ethnic people's position in America both in time and space. Unlike the stratified foreign buildings and exhibits of the Fair, the theatre buildings and civic halls that hosted immigrant theatre were American and Czech or American and Polish simultaneously. Immigrant theatre reconciled disparate geographic spaces and temporalities, providing an opportunity for the Czech Crown lands to exist on 18th Street and for Queen Jadwiga to speak to Poles on the northwest side of Chicago. Neighborhood immigrant theatre performed a synthesis of the past, the present and the future and collapsed past and present, homeland and hostland. In contrast, the Fair presented America to itself and the global community as future only.<sup>5</sup> The Fair itself was less a presentation of the global community that embraced ethnic populations living in the city as part of the global community and more of an idealized picture of America in relation to other countries; America was the pinnacle of evolutionary success and the Fair was a "manifestation of all that was good in American life" (Rydell 40). Although American life may have included a rich, ethnic past and contemporary interaction with immigrants, the Columbian Exposition did not emphasize the role or presence of immigrants in American society. In much the same way that the author of the *Standard Guides* bragged that Chicago was cosmopolitan because it of its numbers of foreign-born people, foreignness at the Fair was an example of the increasing worldliness and international power of America rather than a prideful presentation of American ethnic communities or American ethnic past. In contrast, Chicago immigrant theatre events allowed members of the community a forum to remember a shared past but also a place to imagine and construct a future in America. Immigrant theatre generated a place and time to construct and exist as a hyphenated identity for thousands of Italian, Czech, and Polish-Americans in the face of larger cultural productions that either erased the hyphen or failed to represent these communities altogether.



The alternative that neighborhood theatre presented was likely attractive not just to the community making the theatre but to non-community members as well. As mentioned earlier, the immigrants were culturally segregated but geographically integrated. The unpublished biography of Emma Rouse, the daughter of a German immigrant father and English immigrant mother, describes living in Pilsen in a building owned by a German woman with a Chinese laundry in the basement (18). She states, "we lived in a foreign settlement so had children of all nationalities in our classes. Many of the children talked in the native tongue of their parents, at home, but were good in English in school" (38). Rouse depicts her life as a series of interconnected instances of ethnicities overlap. Likewise, the neighborhood around Hull-House, whose theatre developed just after the ones outlined here, was ethnically diverse and, as such, the founders of Hull-House and its drama saw theatre that presented ethnic identity and pride as a force that could unify the ethnically diverse neighborhood (Hecht 32). Given the demographics of these neighborhoods, if places like Thalia Hall, Polish Hall, or Hull-House held a dinner accompanied by a lecture and/or a play, it is unlikely that everyone in the hall was of one ethnicity. In this way neighborhood immigrant theatre as located in buildings open to all and in the center of diverse populations was unique in that it provided a forum for people to intermix, and for ethnically heterogeneous groups to share their ethnic heritage with one another but come together with their shared pride of the new country.

The Columbian Exposition, changing immigration patterns, and growing tourism in American cities at the end of the nineteenth century affected one another and the city of Chicago. Although the Columbia Exposition did not create immigrant theatre in Chicago, it did cause new reasons for its growth and promotion. Originally created for specific ethnic communities, immigrant theatre likely attracted non-ethnic Chicagoans, Chicagoans of varied ethnicities, and tourists. As the ethnic neighborhoods became more permeable due to developing transportation technologies (such as the elevated trains) and intermarriage, one of the many relationships that immigrants were forming in their community halls, churches, and theatres was that of themselves to non or differently-ethnic peoples. The flow and blending of people at cultural events, be it the Exposition or Czech language theatre, in part defined what it meant to be an urban American at the end of the nineteenth century. Theatre was a means by which Chicago immigrants located themselves in the expanding city and in the world. They used theatre to re-imagine, renegotiate, and introduce their ethnic identities to one another and outsiders, and so like the city and the Exposition, immigrant theatre was an experiencing of a world in miniature. □



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I am defining nationality as a subject's relationship, both legal and cultural, to a given state. I am defining ethnicity as a subjects' "shared beliefs, values, experiences, loyalties and a subjective sense of common origin among self-defined groups of people" (Buchanan).

<sup>2</sup> Following the work of diaspora scholars Khachig Totolyan and Kim D. Butler, I use the word "diasporic" here to acknowledge the way that the turn-of-the-century Chicago immigrants in my case studies actively and imaginatively constructed and negotiated their ongoing relationships with both their homeland and their hostland.

<sup>3</sup> Generally the foreigners displayed within the Fair proper were those from the Western hemisphere and from sovereign countries or empires whereas the foreigners displayed on the Midway were colonial subjects and/or from Eastern countries. That being said, many exhibits broke this general rule. For example, at this time Persia was its own, sovereign nation but was presented on the Midway and not with a foreign government building within the fairgrounds. Also, Japan and Siam had foreign buildings within the Fair, but China and Java were on the Midway. In some cases, such as Germany, groups had displays both inside the fairgrounds and on the Midway.

<sup>4</sup> For more about the difficulties of central European laborer immigrants in America, see Debouzy.

<sup>5</sup> This being said, some ethnic-American Fair-goers probably did experience a diasporic identity while at the Exposition. As stated earlier, Fair-goers, like all audiences, had the ability to make their experience of the Exposition their own. However, the limits to circulation and thrust on a non-ethnic America made it more difficult for immigrants to embrace their ethnic-American identity than it was for them to do so in the neighborhoods.

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