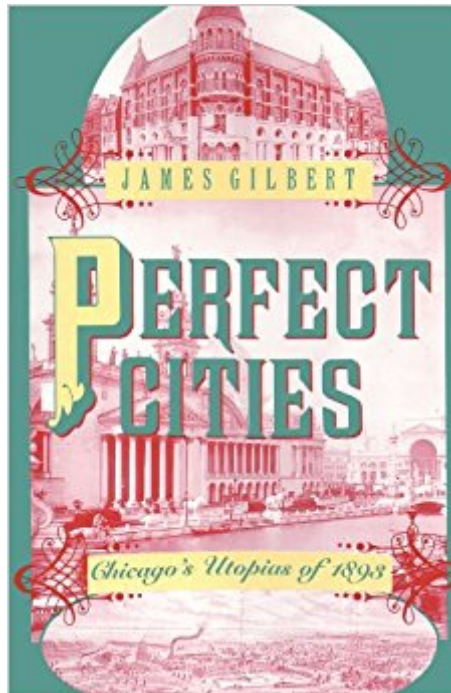




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Perfect Cities: Chicago's Utopias Of 1893



Synopsis

In this elegant and sensitive look at the milieu of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, James Gilbert examines the three utopias that were designed to bring order to the chaos of urban life: The World's Fair itself, George Pullman's community for his workers, and Dwight Moody's evangelical crusade. Gilbert draws upon a rich selection of fiction, collective biography, architecture, photographs, and souvenir books to show how these experiments each acted as a middle-class prescription for coming to terms with the new cultural diversity and competition resulting from the disruptive forces of technological change, commercial enterprise, and pluralism. "Mr. Gilbert's splendid book opens the door on a conflicted past, and provides an indispensable perspective on the troubled and troubling struggle we face today between old and new, unity and diversity." "Alan Trachtenberg, New York Times" "Perfect Cities is a remarkable account of a struggle for cultural definition. Chronicling the byplay between cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity, unity and diversity, James Gilbert not only throws light on Chicago's past but also provides insight that can be applied to the cultural debates of our own time." "Adria Bernardi, Chicago Tribune" "What Gilbert has done is to enable the reader to experience the grand utopian visions of the times, yet at the same time see the cantankerous reality that made the visions impossible." "Henry Kisor, Chicago Sun-Times"

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Gilbert examines the three utopias that were designed to bring order to the chaos of urban life: The World's Fair itself, George Pullman's community for his workers, and Dwight Moody's evangelical crusade.

I have no idea why the author wrote this. It is so disappointing yet well written. It reads as if it were an unwanted assignment given on a hated subject painstakingly and laboriously completed with great bias just to annoy the assignee. The author criticizes every aspect of the Colombian Exposition (specifically the architecture), the town of Pullman, its creator, and Moody the evangelist as if each and their undertakings had no merit what so ever. The idea that the whole concept of the exposition, city, and crusade was to "rearrange the urban world of the future" is just unsupported. The purpose of the fair was to showcase Chicago, industry, its builders, and make a profit. The purpose of the city of Pullman was to provide exceptional housing and make a profit. The purpose of the Moody institute was to preach the gospel (in at that time an unconventional way) and collect enough offering to support the institute and Moody's other charities. That's it and nothing more. All three subjects had positive and negative aspects. Concentrating on only the negative aspects to support a philosophical failure as perceived by the author gives us a well written book containing only half the content to make it whole. I can only wish someone would balance this by providing us with the other half.

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