Jean Gimbel Lane Prize - Best Digital Humanities Project

The Blessings of Res Publica

by

JENNIFER ZHAN

Course: Ancient Rome in Chicago (HUM 325-6)

Quarter: Fall 2015

Professor: Francesca Tataranni

The Blessings of Res Publica

Link to my final video on the Statue of the Republic in Ancient Rome in Chicago Story MapJS (first stop):

Link to the Canvas e-Portfolio that collects the results of the research I conducted on the history, style and reception of the Statue of the Republic throughout the fall quarter 2015 (clickable sections are listed on the left side of the screen, clickable pages for each section are listed on the right side of the screen):
https://canvas.northwestern.edu/eportfolios/346?verifier=dNIpqj8X72Aw8FURNkKYkFgNANkoldxDX1YLL

Video Script:
If you’ve ever driven around the Hayes-Richard traffic circle in Jackson Park, Chicago, then you’ve seen the shining figure of the Statue of the Republic. Though imposing in appearance, it is actually a much smaller replica of a statue displayed during the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, which Chicago had won the honor of hosting.

Resting on a booming economy and explosive urban growth, it was the city most emblematic of America’s rising status. However, this rapid expansion also earned Chicago a reputation as uncultured and inhumane, a hell of a city. The exposition, through the neoclassical majesty of the White City, would provide Chicago with the opportunity to rehabilitate its image, while also demonstrating the legitimacy of America’s claim to hold a place in the genealogy of Western civilizations and empires. Though the accouterments of Roman imperial grandeur seemed antagonistic to the spirit of a republic proud of its liberty, the Statue of the Republic evidenced the nation’s attempt to combine the two.

Sculpted by Daniel Chester French, and drawing inspiration from the Athena Parthenos and the Statue of Liberty, the Republic served as the focal point of the fair. Having stood over 100 feet tall, it towered over the Court of Honor. Settled on the east end of the Grand Basin, it faced the figure of Columbia perched on the Columbian fountain at the west end. The placement seemed to suggest that, Columbia, America personified, was sailing towards a more perfect republic as the country reached new heights. The statue of the Republic infused the imperial opulence of the White City with the guidance, or at least veneer, of America’s founding principles.

Like many of the buildings at the expo, the statue was not meant to last long. In 1896, it perished in a fire. However, neither it nor the fair was forgotten. The inspiration of the White City and the efforts of director of works Daniel Burnham launched the City Beautiful Movement, a campaign reflecting Chicago’s hope that progress was still compatible with beauty.

In 1916, the president of the Art Institute, commissioned French to sculpt a bronze replica of the statue to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Columbian Exposition and the centennial of Illinois’s entry into the union. The current statue is twenty-four feet tall, entirely covered in gold leaf, and resting on a ten-foot pedestal. Featured on the corners of the pedestal are fasces, a bundle of twelve rods bound to an ax, which during the Roman republic signified the magistrates’ power to command. However, like many of the fasces that decorate buildings in the United States, these fasces have an extra rod and lack an axe, transforming them from a symbol of authority and control
into one of the states’ unity. On the statue’s bosom rests a breastplate shaped like an eagle with outstretched wings, and in its right hand lies a globe with an eagle perched on top. The eagle, as the national bird, has long represented the strength and courage of our country. However, several critics of American foreign policy have compared the eagle to the one found on the military insignia of the notably martial Romans.

The *Republic* was designated a Chicago Landmark on June 5th, 2003. Surprisingly, the statue does not resonate culturally with the people of Chicago. On the contrary, to many of them it represents little more than a visually striking traffic circle ornament. Some who do know the history find its reduced size and now prosaic environment disappointing, wondering at the appropriateness of replicating a monument that was never meant to last outside of its specific context of the Court of Honor.

Nevertheless, even if its symbolism lies dormant, the replica, by its very existence, still maintains a dialogue with the original. It serves as a memorial to one of the great formative events of the city’s history, a memento of a time when the nation and Chicago were sailing high and dared to entertain the dream of creating a New Rome for the New World.

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<tr>
<th>Sec</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Audio</th>
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<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>Music</td>
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<td>4-9</td>
<td>Zoom in on the Hayes-Richard intersection sign</td>
<td>If you’ve ever driven around the Hayes-Richard traffic circle in Jackson Park, Chicago,</td>
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<td>Drive around the statue</td>
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The peristyle—Burns effect to focus on statue

31-34 Union Stockyards, pan over

which Chicago had won the honor of hosting. Resting on a booming economy and explosive urban growth,
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<th>35-40</th>
<th>Chicago Loop 1900, pan out</th>
<th>it was the city most emblematic of America’s rising status. However</th>
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<td>41-54</td>
<td>Meat butchering, Burns effect to focus on pigs</td>
<td>This rapid expansion also earned Chicago a reputation as uncultured and inhumane, a hell of a city. The exposition,</td>
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<td>54-64</td>
<td>Chicago World’s Fair 1893 (color painting), pan across</td>
<td>through the neoclassical majesty of the White City, would provide Chicago with the opportunity to rehabilitate its image</td>
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<td>121-130</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Court of Honor from Admin Building" /></td>
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<td>131-143</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Looking West From the Peristyle" /></td>
<td>of the Republic infused the imperial opulence of the White City with the guidance, or at least veneer, of America’s founding principles.</td>
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<td>144-157</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="White City on Fire" /></td>
<td>Like many of the buildings at the expo, the statue was not meant to last long. In 1896, it perished in a fire. However,</td>
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<td>Newspaper headline</td>
<td>to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Columbian Exposition</td>
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<td>190-210</td>
<td>Pan up from plaque to statue</td>
<td>The current statue is twenty-four feet tall, entirely covered in gold leaf, and resting on a ten-foot pedestal. Featured on the corners of the pedestal are fasces, a bundle of twelve rods bound to an ax, which during the Roman republic signified the magistrates’ power to command. However, like many of the fasces that decorate buildings in the United States, these fasces have an extra rod and lack an axe, transforming them from a symbol of authority and control into one of the states’ unity.</td>
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<td>211-223</td>
<td>Pan across pedestal angle</td>
<td>On the statue’s bosom rests a breastplate shaped like an eagle with outstretched wings and in its right hand lies a globe with an eagle perched on top. The eagle, as the national bird, has long represented the strength and courage of our country. However, several critics of American foreign policy have compared the eagle to the one found on the military insignia of the notably martial Romans.</td>
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<td>224-235</td>
<td>Pan up side of fasces</td>
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<td>236-244</td>
<td>Zoom in on breastplate</td>
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<td>245-253</td>
<td>Pan up right arm, ending on eagle in right hand</td>
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<tr>
<td>254-259</td>
<td>Zoom in eagle from left side</td>
<td></td>
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<td>260-266</td>
<td>10Kmiles</td>
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<td>264-270</td>
<td>Roman aquila</td>
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Bibliography:


"Great Statue of the Republic." Chicago Tribune, November 19, 1892.


