

Devil in the white city essay sample



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Erik Larson's non-fiction best seller portrays murder, magic and madness that occurred at the fair that changed America. The construction of The Columbian exposition began in 1891 and if on time was to be finished by 1893. This gave world famous architect Daniel Burnham a little over two years to achieve the impossible. There were other problems than just building the fair, there was corruption and decay in the city which made things more problematic. The book tells the story from two different personal aspects during the time of the great world fair: 1. Daniel Burnham, the head director of works for the Columbian Exposition. Immediately after the fair he gained the respect he deserved and was asked to help design other major cities. 2. The other aspect was from the life of H. H. Holmes. He was a cunning serial killer who used the world fair to lure his victims to their death. With this book, Erik Larson makes it possible to explore American History from different points of views. He also balances the grisly details with the far reaching implications of the World's fair.

The books recommended audience is any reader in a mass audience who would like to read a narrative with all the wonders of newly discovered history and the thrills of the fiction that Erik Larson created. The story is broken down into five sections, and each section is broken down into numerous chapters. Part 1: Frozen Music. In this section Erik Larson highly evaluates some of the troubles that the Columbian Exposition. However without the help of the "greatest architect" (14), no progress would be made toward the completion of the great fair. A major problem for the forty five men in charge of the Columbian Exposition was that after six months

they still haven't decided where the fair was going to take place. Especially with the slim time line, perfecting the fair on time seemed hopeless.

The vote passed to hold the park at Jackson Park seemed well to some but in the end it was a last ditch effort for a place to hold the fair in Chicago. "The park's greatest flaw was a report upon the landscape" (96). The selection concludes with Burnham and other architects selecting the board of architects. Part 2: An Awful fight. Begins with all the architects getting rough drawings ready for the building and attractions that the park will have. "As the day passed, it was apparent that a picture had been forming in the minds of those present- a vision for grand and beautiful than hitherto presented by the richest imagination"(115). In the White city which is the nickname for fair, the devil starts to develop. The devil in this story is the charming H. H. Holmes, who is an undiscovered psychopath.

Erik Larson based conclusions on Holmes due to his "behavior, swindles, multiple marriages, his charm, and eerie ability to detect weakness and vulnerability in another person," fits the description of a true psychopath. Opening day becomes apparent and nobody even imagined the fair being completed on time. Part three: In the White City: one of the more exciting sections in the book, and you will discover that the fair is not as successful as it was expected to be. However on opening day, officials estimated that a half of a million people visited Jackson Park that day. "This indicates that Chicago's fair would become the most heavily attended entertainment in the history of the world for the time being" (239). After opening day, the amount of people who visited the fair decreased dramatically. The main reason was the fact that half the buildings and attractions were not completed on time.

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When the Ferris wheel was polished, visitors grew, and America knew that they out did Eifel and the Paris Exposition. This section ends with the closure of the fair. The last day was Chicago day and it was even busier than opening day. The Columbian exposition was the most successful fair in the world's history. Part 4: Cruelty Revealed: H. H. Holmes was the Devil in The White city. As the fair came to an end Holmes killing of innocent people came to an end when he was arrested for the murder of Benjamin Pietzel. " Holmes is greatly given to lying with florid ornamentation" (340). Soon to be, detective Frank Geyer discovers all of the killings conducted by Holmes and the furnace in his castle. Holmes is waiting in prison until the day of his hanging. Part 5: Epilogue The last crossing: the conclusion to the book summarizes life after the fair for mainly Daniel Burnham and H. H. Holmes.

Daniel Burnham became a highly celebrated Architect during the late 18th century and " other cities came to Burnham for city wide construction plans. Among them were Fort Worth, Atlantic City, and St. Louis" (374). Burnham turned them down to focus on his beloved city of Chicago. Burnham's success at the world's fair gave him a reputation as one of the greatest architects ever. As for H. H. Holmes, his life comes to an end when he is hung at Moyamensing Prison. Even though Holmes was a psychopath killer, he was never forgotten. The Columbian Exposition shaped the way future fairs are made. Now every fair in America has a mid-way. The White City as the fair came to be called, was a place of madness and magic that helped change America. This started the birth of industrial technology and artistic expression in America.

American thrived during the Gilded Age, especially in Chicago during the time of The Columbian exposition. Local businesses and the economy thrived. The fair expressed the pride America had during the gilded age. America was humiliated by France from the Paris exposition, which gave them superiority over America. Burnham and other architects said that they will out do Paris and Eifel no matter the cost. Chicago succeeded against all odds and this turned into one of America's greatest forgotten miracles. Not only did the Columbian Exposition give America a substantial economic boost and help the second industrial revolution, but it shaped the way of upcoming America. New ideas and architecture was based off of the way the fair was in Chicago. It was an influence to the beautiful city movement. Grand buildings and big decorative cities were influenced by Chicago.

Also the exposition helped out the Second industrial revolution by promoting the use of steel for buildings and railroads. All these factors allowed America to grow and expand during the Gilded Age. However the Gilded Age brought corruption and decay to the city. In the white city, Europeans fled to America and Chicago for work and the pay rate was higher due to the gilded age. One thing the immigrants did not know was the poor treatment the workers got especially in Chicago. Workers would work all night and day no matter what the weather was just so the exposition could be finished on time. Hundreds of workers had been killed and injured during this time period. Corruption filled the streets of Chicago during the time of the fair.

There were so many murders and robberies that the police force could not keep up with the crime. This was the prime reason H. H. Holmes got away with most of his kidnappings and murders. Overall, The Devil in the White

City tells a true story in regards to the earlier years in the start to America's success. Perhaps without the creation of the Columbian Exposition our major cities of today would not be the same. " A dynamic, enveloping book... Relentlessly fuses history and entertainment to give the nonfiction book the dramatic effect of a novel... It doesn't hurt that this truth is stranger than fiction." - The New York Times