

**Intervention Symposium—“Plantation Methodologies: Questioning Scale, Space, and Subjecthood”**

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**Plantation Anticipation: Apprehension in Chicago from Reconstruction America to the Plantocratic Philippines**

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Chicago, Illinois is often considered to be on the periphery of the plantation. William Cronon’s famous narrative of Chicago’s relationship with the “Great West” positions the burgeoning city at the edge of American expansion into plantation agriculture in the Midwest and industrial farming on a national scale. Cronon (1991) materializes Chicago out of 19<sup>th</sup> century American predictions for capitalist growth into these plantation futures. While Cronon describes Chicago’s role in predicting and constructing the “value” of the frontier, we could also characterize the city as an anticipatory hub between the twin plantation figures of the pre-war American South and America’s 20<sup>th</sup> century colonies. During the Reconstruction years, Chicago emerged as a logistical center, channeling America’s railroads and telegraph lines into itself. As parts of this communications node, Chicago newspapers and military police served to convert white anxieties about Black migration from the plantation South into new techniques and technologies of prediction that became transportable across a newly imaginable informational plane of US imperialism.

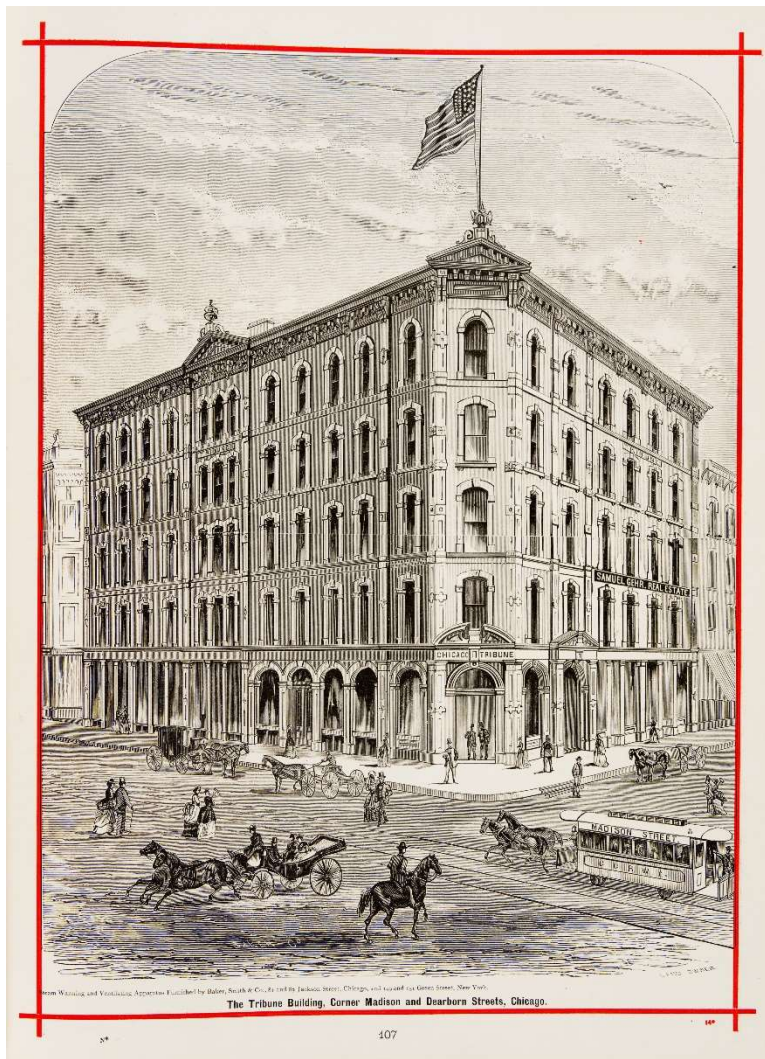
This brief essay glances at an affective atmosphere in Chicago between 1875 and 1890, where white anticipations of African American migration from plantations in the South were translated into new information sciences and policing techniques that made their way to plantations in places like the Philippines. I explore the feelings and practices that circulated among white residents of Chicago, paying particular attention to the ways racialized expectation

became communicable as formatted and packaged “information”. As Raymond Williams (1961: 48) suggested, these textures of expectation among past figures are hard things to attend to. Yet such feelings were fundamental to linking plantations which at first seem so spatially and temporally distant. Scholars of the plantation might benefit by attending to these nodes of future-feeling to identify how communicative geographies such as Chicago are central to both the activities of industrial cultivation and anticipation for its racialized reproduction.



**Image 1:** Railroad map of Chicago, 1879 (source: Chicago History Museum, IChi-039624; reproduced here with permission)

On May 3, 1879 the *Chicago Tribune* published a greatly anticipated investigatory series entitled, “The Negro Exodus: Causes of the Migration from the Negro’s Point of View”. This series was the latest in a long sequence of deeply uneasy reports dating from 1860. From its location at the communicative center of all major US rail and telegraph lines, the *Chicago Tribune* undertook an imagined responsibility to inform its Midwestern audience of Black peoples’ movements and behaviors. Early articles, such as an 1860 racial population estimate, bemoaned, “Forty-six millions of human slaves (by 1900)! Well might Jefferson turn on his dying bed and exclaim as he vainly sought to solve the problem of the future” (Tribune 1860). The next year, a piece titled “They Would Stay at Home” desperately batted away recurring images of Black migration from the plantation by speculating at the mentalities of Southern Blacks, reassuring the *Tribune*’s 100,000 readers that Black laborers felt a profound attachment to Southern soil and climate, which discouraged their movement north (Tribune 1861). Just two years later, a short, resigned note confirmed white Chicagoans’ fears of “The Negro Exodus” to Kansas and the Midwest (Tribune 1863).



**Image 2:** Tribune Building, housing the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper, 1873 (source: Chicago History Museum, ICHi-064385; reproduced here with permission)

The 1879 “Negro’s Point of View” series differed from previous reports by examining its own methodology for deducing Black peoples’ intentions for migration. The series introduced more and more intensive methods for excavating the depths of Black peoples’ behaviors. The series begins with interviews with Black migrants and detailed descriptions of their neighborhoods. The interviewer asks questions about the costs of living and the fear of losing voting rights. Although the reporter acknowledges the impact of the end of Reconstruction and its various

protections, he disavows these claims by suggesting that “The Negro is a Migratory Animal ... it takes little to start him or keep him going”, owing in part to the way that “slaves were ‘toted’ about a good deal in their old days by their masters and are used to travel” (Tribune 1879a).

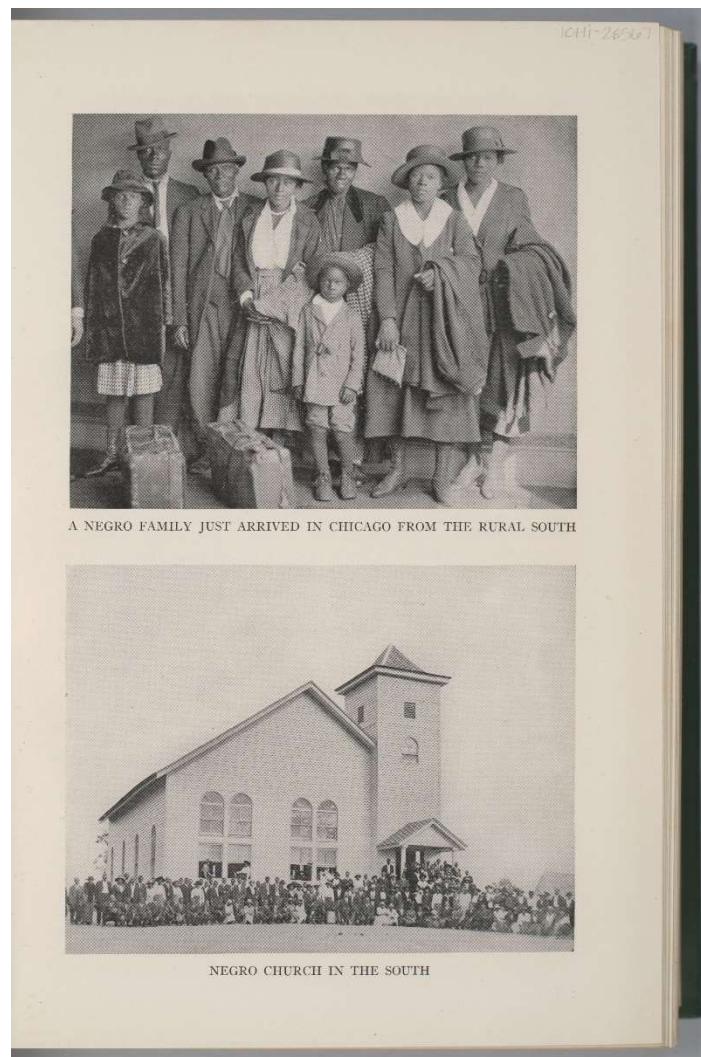
At the climax of the “Negro’s Point of View” series, one could imagine white Chicago readers waiting eagerly for clearer predictions about Black migrants’ motivations and intentions. The next day, May 3, the *Chicago Tribune* presented its showstopping report from its correspondent in Vicksburg, Mississippi entitled “Letters Written by Negroes in Kansas to their Friends South”. In this report, the writer discusses his skepticism of earlier methods of recounting expert testimony or interviews with Black migrants. He argues that Black migration remained unpredictable with these previous methods, and that Black interviewees were unreliable and “do not talk freely to any white men here [and] say nothing candidly ... to their employers” (Tribune 1879b). He apprehensively rationalizes,

there probably is not a white man in the country [well] informed as to [Black peoples’] fears and hopes. But there is one way of testing the question still more accurately. The negroes who have gone to Kansas have written letters home. These letters have been passed from hand to hand. They are not intended for effect on public opinion anywhere ... but for private perusal entirely. They must be sincere. (Tribune 1879b)

In this apex report of its series, the *Chicago Tribune* not only conducted its fact-gathering through the mass surveillance of Black peoples’ letters, but it also transformed decades of anticipatory fears in the wake of the Southern plantation into a predictive apparatus. The letter opening that the correspondent and his colleagues engaged in harkened back to earlier forms of enumerating Black people as “risks” through written slave passes and patrols (Browne 2015: 52; Hadden 2001; Muhammad 2010: 3). But I further argue that the *Tribune*’s practices, and its readers’ anticipations, established an emerging desire for formatting, fastening, and packaging communication (Koopman 2019). White correspondents understood Black migrants’ letters to be parcels of inner motivations that could not be acquired otherwise. The letter was seen as an early informational package, containing symbols in a communicable message that could be used to

enhance future predictions (Shannon and Weaver 1963). The *Tribune* thus attempted to package Black peoples' widely varying intentions and behaviors into relayed messages for eager Chicago readers.

The correspondences that were forwarded along telegraph and telephone lines carried with them white Chicagoans' eager anticipations and terrified premonitions. Such expectations constituted the affective orientation of the *Tribune's* predictive apparatus. The material container of the letter became a site of both terrified speculation and justification for rendering its contents into predictive "information". The audience's clamoring demand for accurate reports about Black peoples' "perceptions, enjoyments, and reasons" meant that these communications had to become increasingly specific, fastening Black lives and bodies into information about the future of the city (Tribune 1879a, 1879b). Such informational appetites became the anticipatory basis for 20th century enumerative practices. As Colin Koopman argues, informational fastening, or the atomization and separation of facts from Black peoples' bodies, became commonplace during the Great Migration in the practice of racial statistics, criminology, and health policy directed at Black migrants (Koopman 2019: 12, 22). I further suggest that this desire for packaged information was itself made transferable into geographies beyond Chicago, and beyond the United States.



**Image 3:** Black family and Southern church, 1918 (source: Chicago History Museum, ICHI-028567; reproduced here with permission)

White Chicagoans' prolonged concern over predicting Black behaviors and intentions materialized in 1877, when the city became a central hub of militarized response to a nation-wide railroad strike. Adjutant General Richard C. Drum, who commanded the Military Division of the Missouri (Western Frontier) in Chicago from 1873 to 1878, took control of Chicago's military response to the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. In 1879, after his final year in the city, Drum moved to Washington, DC and proposed the establishment of the Military Information Division

(MID) (Powell 1890). Drum founded the MID “to prevent domestic violence of magnitude”, likely drawing from his experience in Chicago and the techniques of prediction that were rehearsed in the city’s racial apprehension (quoted in Angevine 2001: 141). The MID, which was formally established in 1885, maintained close ties to Chicago’s local information collection system, adopting a Bertillon identification system of collecting and storing intelligence cards at the time that the National Association of Chiefs of Police established their central bureau of identification in Chicago in 1896 (McCoy 2009: 23). By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chicago’s police force had expanded tenfold to 2,196 officers, and Drum’s MID had amassed over 300,000 intelligence cards: small letters of information which contained anxious predictions that resembled the *Chicago Tribune*’s analysis of Black migrants’ letters 17 years earlier.



**Image 4:** Great Railroad Strike, 1877 (source: Chicago History Museum, ICHi-004893; reproduced here with permission)



The affective atmosphere into which the MID intensified its own predictive techniques later traversed the Pacific Ocean into the Philippines. Alfred McCoy argues that the American introduction of communication technologies and surveillance techniques in governing the Philippines constituted the United States' first information revolution (McCoy 2009: 18). Colonial police trained in the anxious habits of the MID, rendered the Philippines a laboratory for securitized speculation. McCoy further contends that these informational "capillaries of empire" embedded themselves into the Philippines' plantocratic-security state as well as US domestic surveillance practices. I add to McCoy's argument by suggesting that trained feelings of white apprehension translated into imperial mechanisms for governing the Philippines through systems of intelligence cards, telecommunications infrastructure, policing units, and management sciences.

Reminiscent of the psychological investigatory projects that saturated Chicago's public life, the MID and its successors developed techniques for psychological examination and personality typing led by another Chicagoan, Harry Hill Bandholtz. Akin to the intense behavioral questioning that emanated from the *Tribune's* articles on "The Negro Point of View", Bandholtz sharpened the MID's informational sciences by training Philippines police forces in the neurotic art of collecting every imaginable fact about Filipino behaviors and disseminating disinformation (McCoy 2009: 178). Ultimately, the US colonial plantocracy in the Philippines built its authority around information infrastructures which had been trained on apprehensive practices and feelings emanating from Chicago's racialized geography.



**Image 5:** Manuel Quezon, president of the Philippines, attending a US police convention in Chicago (source: Chicago History Museum, DN-0067971; reproduced here with permission)

I end this short essay by suggesting that the informational networks that extended from the image of the American South, through the anticipations of Chicago’s public, and that animated the governance of colonial plantations in the Philippines, were part of a deeply felt affective atmosphere (Berlant 2012; [see also, in this collection, Chao; Hetherington; Rudge](#)). I ponder upon Katherine McKittrick’s (2013: 8) reference to the plantation as a “logistical grounds” with its own rules and patterns of facilitating control and surveillance ([see also, in this collection, McKinson; Paredes; Strange](#)). Inspired by this formulation, I suggest a closer attention to the imbrication of anticipations that seem to traverse such geographies. How can we analyze the

ways that subjects remember and anticipate the plantation, and what might this temporal attunement disclose about the conditions of possibility for communicating these feelings across such distant geographies? Whereas white Chicagoans felt each racial portend of the *Tribune* as an informational gap, how do Chicagoans (white, but also Black and Latino) today feel their anticipatory present? What techniques and practices supposedly extend, as information, over such a gap? And what shadows of the plantation stretch across those feelings?



**Image 6:** Shadows of the new Tribune Building, 435 N Michigan Ave, Chicago, IL; photograph by Raymond W. Trowbridge (source: Chicago History Museum, ICHi-080341; reproduced here with permission)

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