

THEMATIC CARTOGRAPHY FOR SOCIAL REFORM IN CHICAGO, 1894-1923

A historiographical analysis of thematic mapping in turn-of-the-century Chicago reveals the role of cartography as a highly politicized method for sorting and labeling urban populations. Progressive Era reformers and sociologists created maps that fixed transient and shifting populations of various ethnic and socioeconomic groups deemed undesirable. Such urban mapping projects demonstrate the application of cartography's ostensible objectivity to justify moral and political judgments about urban populations.

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Between 1894 and 1923, three distinct publications used thematic cartography to map problem areas in Chicago. In 1894, English journalist William T. Stead published *If Christ Came to Chicago!: A Plea for the Union of All Who Love in the Service of All Who Suffer*, an exposé of the city's sin and corruption that opened with a map of the Custom House Place vice district. In 1895, the residents of Hull House published their *Maps and Papers: A Presentation of Nationalities and Wages in a Congested District of Chicago, Together with Comments and Essays on Problems Growing Out of the Social Conditions*, a landmark collection that documented the plight of poor urban immigrants both narratively and graphically. In 1923, Nels Anderson published *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*, in which fellow member of the Chicago School of Sociology Robert E. Park claimed that the urban environment, though initially established by human will, comes to have a controlling effect on its inhabitants. Anderson includes a map of the West Madison Street transient district in this text.

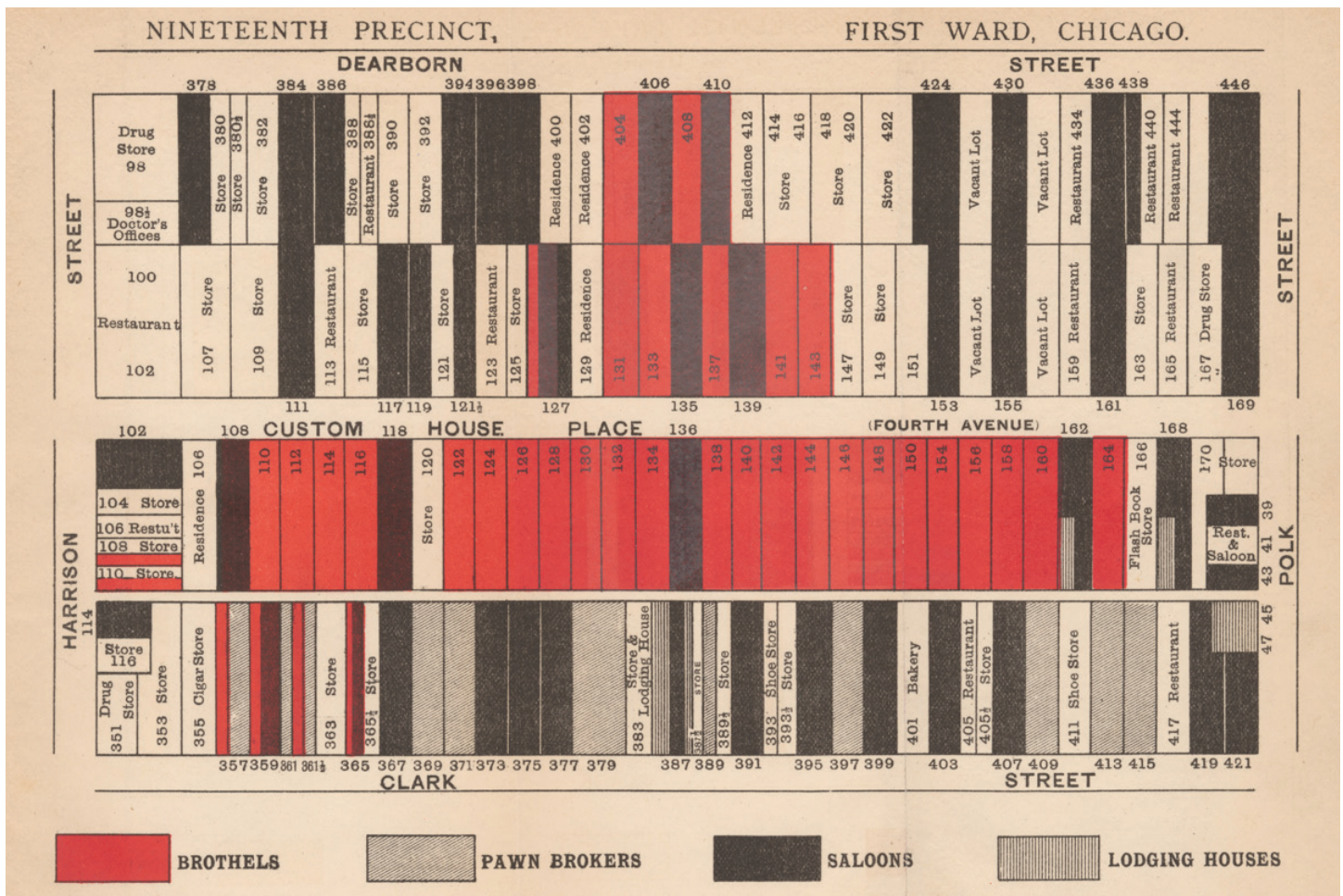
Together, the projects of William T. Stead, Hull House, and the Chicago School of Sociology constituted a genealogy of early thematic mapping in Chicago. Such maps had their roots in an immense cartographic shift that occurred in the nineteenth-century United States, as American thinkers pushed cartography past the mere description of a landscape and toward the revelation of patterns in spatial relationships. In response to rapid urbanization, the Sanborn Map Company began in 1866 to produce new insurance maps that catalogued cities in great detail. This development, as well as the genre of urban disease maps, as established by projects such as John Snow's 1854 map of the London cholera outbreak and Charles Booth's 1885-1903 maps of poverty in London, were the precursors of the cartographically informed urban reform projects that appeared in turn-of-the-century Chicago.

Each set of reformers differed in its ideology and its impetus

to map. However, the premises of all three rested on the notion of the industrializing city as an intrinsically disordered space. Drawing from the premises of earlier insurance and disease maps, these programs all employed cartographic methods in order to analyze the origin of a problem by its distribution over the urban landscape, while also guiding policymakers and the public toward a particular understanding of the spaces they mapped.

Working under Progressive-era enthusiasm for the application of science to social problems, these programs employed cartography as an ostensibly objective method of representing the ethnic, socioeconomic, or institutional contours of disadvantaged or vice-ridden areas of Chicago. An examination of these maps reveals their biases as instruments of social reform. Although the mapmakers made assumptions about their objectivity, the very act of mapping suggests a permanence of demography that was not realistic given the transience the underworld populations represented. Further, the selective mapping of buildings constituted a tool for declaring areas blighted. Considered together, the mapping programs of Stead, Hull House, and the Chicago School illustrate the way thematic mapping functioned in the context of Progressive-era social reform. By making neighborhoods legible in this way, Progressive-era mapmakers exercised the power to mark areas as intrinsically problematic and to justify a program of intervention in accordance with the goals of their reform efforts.

William T. Stead opened *If Christ Came to Chicago!* with a map, "Nineteenth Precinct, First Ward, Chicago," which showed the notorious Custom House Place vice district, located between Harrison and Polk Streets in the city's most infamous ward. The district first came to Stead's attention during his 1893 visit to Chicago, when the district was at its height during the World's Columbian Exposition.¹ Stead arrived in Chicago in October 1893 eager to experience the celebration of progress and civilization of the World's Fair.²



19th Precinct, 1st Ward Chicago by W. T. Stead (1894)
 Source: Division of Rare & Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library

However, he quickly became aware of the strong network of vice and corruption that underlaid the White City. As Carl Smith argues about this period, a pervasive tension between increasing order and destructive disorder shaped Chicago at the turn of the century to the extent that “disorder itself appeared to be one of the defining qualities of urban culture.” In this era:

Americans increasingly agreed that the modern American city, and Chicago in particular, was the disorderly embodiment of instability, growth, and change. They also agreed that it was the center of political, economic, and social power in America, and, as such, was contested ground.³

Considered in this light, Stead’s damning exposé of Chicago’s vice areas emerges as one attempt to gain ground in the fight to steer the development of the city’s character.

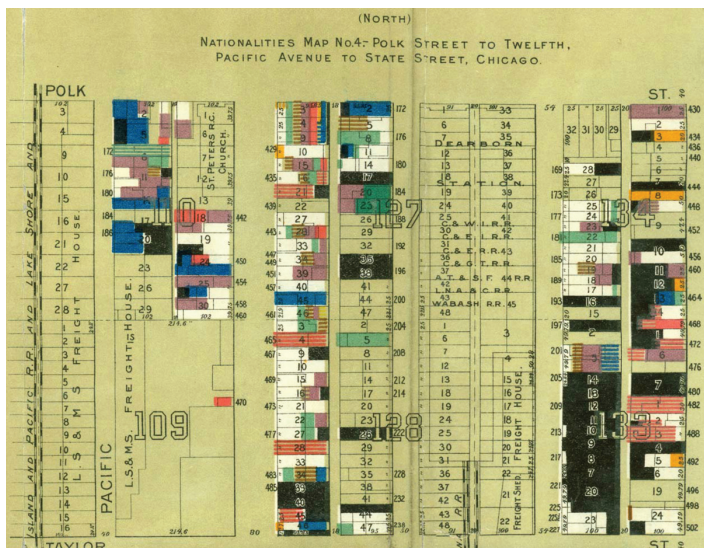
Necessary for the analysis of each of the three mapping projects is a consideration of the mapmakers’ choices in terms of spatial and temporal representation. In accordance with the mapmakers’ intentions to provoke a response in favor of reform, the spaces mapped in each project were presented

to suggest that their conditions would persist over time. Interestingly, Stead acknowledged that any attempt to study a significant portion of Chicago would fall short, as it would inevitably be out of date by the time the scientist published the results. He nevertheless used his map to suggest permanence by treating time and space as reciprocal elements; he believed that by limiting his scope to a single precinct, his study would illustrate truth and yield useful results. Specifically, Stead believed that he had selected a particularly useful representative area:

For the purpose of this survey I have selected the nineteenth precinct of the First Ward, not because it is an average precinct, but because it presents in an aggravated form most of the evils which are palpably not in accord with the mind of Christ. If Christ came to Chicago, it is one of the last precincts into which we should care to take him.⁴

While the map constituted a relatively small portion of Stead’s text, it provides a useful opportunity for analysis of Stead’s reform project as a whole. Its position within the book is important; it appeared on the very first page of the book, before the title page, and was therefore intended to be the reader’s

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Chicago's South Side by Samuel Sewell Greeley (1895)

Source: *Mapping the Nation*

first introduction to the problem of vice in Chicago. As such, it is important to examine what rhetorical work the map did to shape the reader's impression.

A reader who opened Stead's book and unfolded the map was likely to respond to its coloring before all else. Stead indicated pawnbrokers, saloons, and lodging houses by black monochromatic shading, while brothels appear as solid, vivid red. Stead relies on the power of rich color to draw attention, and likely also on the association of the colors red and black with evil and danger. As a result of this targeted use of color, establishments such as restaurants and stores, presumably deemed "morally neutral," were de-emphasized.⁵ "Nineteenth Precinct, First Ward, Chicago" simultaneously alarmed and soothed; the map alerted the reader to a critical moral epidemic occurring over real and identifiable space within the city, while also assuring her of its ability to be contained once visualized. And yet, text is scarce within the map and institutions were not individuated beyond broad categories. This created the sense of a problem that had been identified yet not entirely known, leaving the reader eager to read on. Even before the beginning of the text proper, then, Stead drove the reader to read the moral problem from his map, and to absorb his moral judgement about the Custom House Place vice district, the topic with which the remainder of the book is concerned.

In contrast to the Christian moral outrage that motivated Stead, the agenda of Chicago's Hull House was informed by a secular interest in social reform. Consonant with the settlement house movement, which had been gaining ground in the United States since 1889, founder Jane Addams and the other participants in Hull House's work saw active participation in the community life of the blighted immigrant district on the city's Near West Side as the most effective path to reform.

In 1885, the residents of Hull House published the *Maps and Papers*, the results of a study of the area between Halsted and State Streets, and Polk and Twelfth Streets. Florence Kelley, a highly active social reformer and an associate of Friedrich Engels, worked as the census director for Hull House, and it was the data amassed under her direction that was used to color the maps of the district. Hull House's decision to base its mapping project on statistics is not surprising given the secular, objective current then taking hold in social reform. By the end of the nineteenth century, the parameters and methodologies of the discipline of sociology had begun to form, as evidenced by the founding of the first academic department of sociology at the University of Chicago in 1892. The notion of public health had come to be defined largely in terms of norms and deviation, as made possible by a new analytical tool: statistics. The Hull House, as a liberal institution with an interest in reform, was determined to assist disadvantaged populations by means of "well-modulated interventions."⁶ The desire to improve conditions by intervention drove reformers to "think in terms of a total and unified entity that connected population with its territory," a framework for studying human populations that led Hull House thinkers to seek out relationships between urban residents and the physical environment they inhabited.

In this sense, the Hull House maps inherited the cartographic and analytical traditions established by three earlier types of thematic cartography: the Sanborn insurance map, the disease map, and earlier maps of socioeconomic conditions. Susan Schulten has pointed out the connection between Sanborn maps and maps of urban problem areas.⁷ Responding to the rapid pace of urbanization as well as the all-too-frequent occurrence of urban fires, the Sanborn Map Company began to produce series of immensely detailed maps. Because they were insurance maps, they showed the physical and institutional composition of cities at the level of individual buildings. Similarly, maps of epidemic disease and poverty, such as John Snow's 1854 map of a London cholera outbreak and Charles Booth's color-coded map of relative socioeconomic class in London, employ a high level of detail for an analytical purpose: by mapping individual cases or households over urban space, they could determine how each unit contributed to an existing condition. This was the same analytical purpose that motivated the Hull House maps.

It is clear from the accompanying text that Booth's map had an especially significant influence on Hull House's mapping program. In the preface, it was noted that "the colors in Charles Booth's wage maps of London have been retained," suggesting both approval of Booth's research methods and some overlap between the audiences of the two maps.⁸ The Hull House mapmakers considered their own work an improvement on his, however. Like Stead, the Hull House researchers thought it advantageous that the area surveyed and analyzed was relatively compact, and in comparison to Booth's map, "the greater minuteness of this survey will en-

title it to a rank of its own, both as a photographic reproduction of Chicago's poorest quarters... and as an illustration of a method of research."⁹ In addition to aiding in the establishment of quantitative research methods in the study of populations, the researchers were confident that the visualization of their data would convince viewers of the fidelity of its representation.

The stated goals of the program were explicitly reformist:

The possibility of helping toward an improvement in the sanitation of the neighborhood, and toward an introduction of some degree of comfort, has given purpose and confidence to this undertaking.... Hull-House offers these facts... with the hope of stimulating inquiry and action.¹⁰

ing to exclude population density from the map, the map-makers guided the viewer to a perception of overcrowding more likely to generate sympathy and moral outrage. And, although Holbrook acknowledged that the population was frequently transient, institutions still treated the map as documentation of a condition that would persist in spite of the movements of individuals.¹¹

Similarly, Nels Anderson's *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* opened with a preface by editor and fellow member of the University of Chicago Sociology Department Robert E. Park. In the preface, Park states the imperative for Anderson's study of the area known as Hobohemia: "A changing population of from 30,000 to 75,000 homeless men in Chicago, living together within the area of thirty or forty

“These programs employed cartography as an ostensibly objective method of representing the ethnic, socioeconomic, or institutional contours of disadvantaged or vice-ridden areas of Chicago.”

Knowing that Hull House intentionally mapped a small area in order to encourage reform, it is useful to examine the rhetorical interactions between maps and text. In contrast with Stead's book, the wages and ethnicities maps appear several pages into the text proper, and therefore the reader's introduction to the conditions of Near West Side residents was intended to be verbal. Interestingly, the opening of the text is perhaps best described as a verbal map. Its tone recalls Jacob Riis's 1890 *How the Other Half Lives* or other works of muckraking journalism that would have remained in recent memory at the time of the publication of the *Maps and Papers*. After stating the borders of the area under examination, Agnes Sinclair Holbrook's narration omnisciently guided the reader through the district, gradually revealing the hardships of its residents and laborers. This descriptive mode also established the authority of Hull House. Holbrook included descriptions of factory life only visible from the back door, suggesting a unique level of knowledge the area and its squalid conditions that introduced the maps as the products of long-established experts.

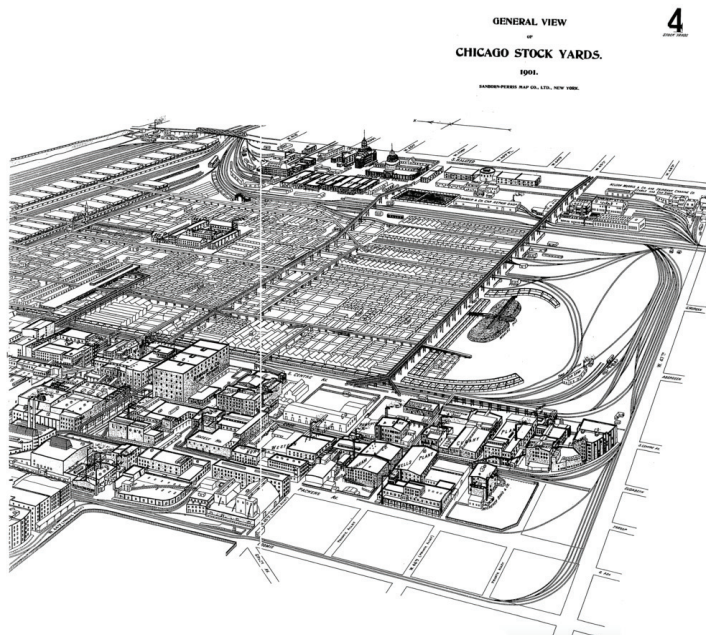
Just as maps of epidemic disease aimed to identify each part of a larger phenomenon, the Hull House researchers parsed the residential buildings of the Near West Side to include each constituent nationality. Holbrook noted that in the nationalities map the individual was treated as the unit, such that the residence of even a single person in a building, which occurred frequently with the prevalence of boarding, warranted his or her nationality's inclusion on the map. In many cases, this convention led to the inclusion of as many as six types of shading in a single building. Thus, by elect-

city blocks, has created a milieu in which new and unusual personal types flourish and new and unsuspected problems have arisen."¹² This analysis thus established the 'hobo problem' as a uniquely contemporary phenomenon brought about by the unprecedented growth of cities. The issue of greatest concern to the researchers was the possibility within a large urban center for antisocial figures to be outcasts from the larger community, living without its regulating or moral influences, while simultaneously forming their own self-sustaining communities on different terms.¹³

Elaborating further, the Committee's Preface states, "the object of this inquiry... was to secure those facts which would enable social agencies to deal intelligently with the problems created by the continuous ebb and flow, out of and into Chicago, of tens of thousands of foot-loose and homeless men."¹⁴ The Committee's Preface corroborated Park in locating the problem and their cause for concern in the deviant lifestyle and pattern of movement of Chicago's hobo population. The preface also identified the ultimate aim of the program. Much like Stead's and Hull House's, Anderson's study was intended to inform reform agencies of the contours and gravity of the problem and the corresponding need to intervene. Through a combination of text and mapping, Anderson advanced those aims by presenting the hobo as a social type with certain negative qualities and tendencies that were inherently problematic for himself and for society.

Before elaborating further on the characteristics of Anderson's map, it is important to understand the methodological precursors of the Chicago School of Sociology. In 1921,

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Sanborn Map: Chicago stockyards (1901)
Source: *Sanborn-Perris Map (ProQuest Information and Learning's Digital Sanborn Maps)*

Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, two prominent members of the Chicago School, published the *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. The student edition of this volume opened with a reference to Auguste Comte, a French philosopher who was among the first to elaborate the terms of the discipline in the 1830s, six decades before its initiation into American academia in 1892. Comte stated of sociology, “its practical aim was to establish government on the secure foundation of an exact science.”¹⁵ Evaluating this claim in the 1920s, Park and Burgess wrote that the discipline had indeed followed this trajectory to a significant extent. However, beginning in that decade, the Chicago School’s work began to shift away from Comte’s notion of “scientific prevision” and toward “a view of human communities and social relations as built ‘on top of’ ecological landscapes and thus not subject to the same inexorable laws as plant and animal ecological systems.”¹⁶

Significant yet under-acknowledged contributors to the development of the Chicago School of Sociology were Jane Addams and, as a result, Hull House. While the University of Chicago began as an academically nontraditional institution, a subsequent conservative turn soon left the sociology profession strictly gender-separated. While male faculty received the title of sociologist and contributed to the academic studies that constituted the early professionalization of the discipline, women were denied access and relegated to social work, considered the non-academic and less critical branch of the field, essentially an outgrowth of the traditional women’s sphere. Gender segregation in sociology continued into the interwar period, when Anderson published *The Hobo*.

At that time, Progressivism, which had spurred the settlement house movement, fell out of favor due to its association with various radicalisms.¹⁷ For that reason, although Burgess claimed that *Hull-House Maps and Papers* marked the foundation of urban studies in Chicago, much of Addams’s influence on sociology was filtered through the work of her male colleagues and went largely unacknowledged. Nevertheless, in revisionist accounts of the development of sociology, the cartographic methodology of Hull House’s Near West Side mapping program is recognized as a vital contribution to the work of the Chicago School in the 1920s and ‘30s.

An examination of the cartographic and verbal portions of Anderson’s study reveals similar rhetorical strategies. Both components of the text delineate a geographical area, the Main Stem on Chicago’s West Madison Street, after imbuing it with a set of problematic characteristics. The Progressive reform goals of the study are presented to neatly correspond to these problems. In the text directly before the map in the 1961 edition of *The Hobo*, Anderson claims that the segregation of the transient community into the small area of Hobohemia is precisely the cause of its problems:

The segregation of tens of thousands of footloose, homeless, and not to say hopeless men is the fact fundamental to an understanding of the problem... This massing of detached and migratory men upon a small area has created an environment in which gamblers, dope venders, bootleggers, and pickpockets can live and thrive.¹⁸

Immediately following this statement is the map. Just as the text condemns the Main Stem by naming several character types universally understood to be immoral or dangerous, the eleven categories of establishments—including cheap hotels, gambling, and saloons—act as signifiers of seediness and moral transgression.


Unlike the maps in both Stead’s and Hull House’s mapping programs, “Hobo Institutions On One Street Along ‘Main Stem’” does not label building addresses or include the make-up of the entire city blocks; rather, it is focused exclusively on the buildings that face West Madison Street. Despite its presence in a sociological study, these elements demonstrate that the map was intended less to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the constituent parts of the main stem neighborhood than it was intended to collapse its complexity and portray a single dimension of the district—namely, the predominance of institutions that support the problematic transient population. Thus, by limiting the cartographic portion of his study to a single, reductionist view of Hobohemia, Anderson aimed to generate concern and make social reformers see intervention as the best response.

Each of these three maps is perhaps best understood as an effort to represent for an outside audience the conditions of the American city at the turn of the century, an era that brought new possibilities for living in the city, but also a time when urban development in laboring-class areas tended to outpace

planning for the welfare of its residents. Under these conditions, the projects of mapmakers shaped the representations of the areas of Chicago they studied in order to impress upon the reader the need for reform. Carl Smith's assertion about the rhetorical power of urban catastrophes in the late nineteenth century applies nicely to these efforts to map urban conditions. He argues:

Defining whether and in what way this or that event was disorderly, disastrous, and potentially catastrophic was an act of power in a struggle in which different people tried to enforce their often disputed vision of urban or-

der as the one that was most normal, proper, desirable, progressive, and correct. The struggle was over the future of America, with which the rise of the city was so closely linked.¹⁹

The role of cartography in this struggle to encourage reform projects is also historically specific. The act of mapping was then most often understood as a neat and objective means of reflecting real spaces and conditions. By treating maps as representations outside the bounds of subjectivity therefore capable of faithfully reflecting the world, these mapmakers were able to employ visual texts in novel ways. 

Endnotes

- [1] Troy Taylor, *Murder & Mayhem in Chicago's Vice Districts* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009), 46.
- [2] Thekla Ellen Joiner, *Sin in the City* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 112.
- [3] Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1.
- [4] William T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago!: A Plea for the Union of All Who Love in the Service of All Who Suffer* (London: The Review of Reviews, 1894), 111.
- [5] "Mapping Virtue and Vice," *What is a Map?: A Collection of Unusual Maps from Maps: Finding Our Place in the World*, The University of Chicago Press, n.d., http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/akerman/maps_virtue.html.
- [6] Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 46.
- [7] Susan Schulten, "Mapping Vice in San Francisco," *Mapping the Nation*, August 6, 2013, <http://www.mappingthenation.com/blog/mapping-vice-in-san-francisco/>.
- [8] Residents of Hull House, *Hull House Maps and Papers: A Presentation of Nationalities and Wages in a Congested District of Chicago, Together with Comments and Essays on Problems Growing Out of the Social Conditions* (1895, repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), n.p.
- [9] *Ibid.*, 57.
- [10] *Ibid.*, 58.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 56.
- [12] Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1923), vi.
- [13] *Ibid.*, vii.
- [14] *Ibid.*, ix.
- [15] Auguste Comte, "Cours de philosophie positive" quoted in Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 1.
- [16] *Ibid.*; B. Robert Owens, "Mapping the City: Innovation and Continuity in the Chicago School of Sociology, 1920–1934," *American Sociologist* 43, no. 3 (2012),
- [17] Deegan, 7.
- [18] Anderson, *The Hobo*, 14-15.
- [19] Smith, 7.