

The idea plan: making and breaking the 1992 Chicago World's Fair

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This dissertation analyzes the failed 1992 Chicago World's Fair through several lenses in order to explore four separate but connected processes: planning and designing a large urban fair, protesting that fair, and creating an archive. In doing so, I highlight the fact that all events are historically contingent, undermining the idea that events are the result of inexorable historical processes. The case of the 1992 Chicago Fair provides an opportunity to glimpse a historical process suspended in time: there is not a satisfying conclusion to a fair that didn't happen, but there are both memories and a sizable archive. The planning and design chapters focus on how the fair planners made decisions, and on how they worked both with and against city and state governments as well as the Bureau of International Expositions. Using newspapers and documents culled from several archives as well as the official depository for fair materials, the Chicago History Museum, this narrative reveals the many missteps of the fair planners, and points to several specific factors that contributed to the fair's failure. The protest chapter adds to the growing analysis of protest movements in the 1980s, and situates the protestors' strategies in the social and political contexts of Chicago. The last chapter looks at the archive of the archivist. Archivist Evelyn Wilbanks' personal papers regarding the fair are also housed at the Chicago History Museum, and reading them leads to an investigation of the place of the archivist in the production of history.

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