Chicago Essay, Research Paper

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Chicago is a port and transportation center on the southwestern shore of Lake

Michigan in the state of Illinois. It has a population of 2,783,726 and has been the seat of

Cook County since 1931.

Long known as the nation’s “second city,” Chicago dropped to third place among

largest U.S. cities during the 1980s as its population declined during the decade by 7.4%.

Its three-state metropolitan area showed a slight increase, totaling 8,065,633 . Many of

Chicago’s people are offspring of 19th-century European immigrants, attracted to the city

by industrial jobs. Nearly 40% of the population are blacks.

The first steel-framework skyscraper was built (1884) in Chicago, and the city’s

impressive skyline includes such structures as the Sears tower which is 1,454 ft tall, and the

world’s tallest building, and the John Hancock Center. Indeed, the city has given its name

to the Chicago School of Architecture. The Loop, the downtown area, was so named in

the 1890s because of the rectangle formed by the tracks of the elevated trains.

Lake Michigan has a strong effect on the city’s climate, and Chicago has been

nicknamed the “Windy City.” Temperatures range from an average of 25 deg F in January

to 75 deg F in July.

Being the center of a heavily industrialized area, Chicago leads the country in the

manufacturing of telephone equipment, radios, TV equipment, confectionery products,

household products, diesel engines, musical instruments, and frozen and canned foods. Its

largest industry, however, is metal extrusion, particularly iron and steel. Several of the

largest printers and publishers in the world are in Chicago.

The Federal Reserve Bank was founded in 1914 in Chicago, and the city still has a

district bank. The Chicago Mercantile Exchange, the Midwest Stock Exchange, and the

Chicago Board of Trade, which is the world’s largest commodity futures market, are there.

Chicago’s early importance as a transportation center has continued. Today its major

airport, Chicago-O’Hare International, is the busiest in the world. Chicago’s harbor, the

largest on the Great Lakes, handles mostly grain and iron ore.

Chicago has many Universities. The University of Chicago is one of the most

prestigious private universities in the country. Other institutions are the Illinois Institute of

Technology, Northwestern University, and the Roman Catholic-supported Loyola and

DePaul universities.

Chicago has long been a cultural center. The Art Institute of Chicago has a

world-famous collection. The Museum of Contemporary Art was founded in 1967.

Scientific institutions include the Field Museum of Natural History, the Adler Planetarium,

and the Shedd Aquarium–all in lakefront Grant Park–and the nearby Museum of Science

and Industry. The city is home to the Chicago Civic Opera and the world-famous Chicago

Symphony Orchestra.

The site of Chicago had long been an important portage point on the water route

linking the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River. The United States bought a tract from

the Indians in 1795, and the original settlement was a cluster of traders’ shacks outside Fort

Dearborn. After the opening of the Erie Canal, Chicago became the center of the

westward movement, and the arrival in the 1850’s of the first railroad from the east assured

its growth. Industry developed along with transportation, and steel production was a major

boost to the city’s economy. Lumbering and meat-processing plants were also established;

the Union Stock Yards opened in 1865 and successfully operated for more than a century.

Just as Chicago was emerging as a major city, a devastating fire swept through part

of the city, leaving almost 100,000 people homeless and causing millions of dollars in

damage. The city began a rebuilding program, using stone to replace wooden buildings

and creating one of the first modern fire departments in America. Chicago was the site of

the WORLD’S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION OF 1893.

A second major surge of growth occurred toward the turn of the century, when

thousands of European immigrants came to the city. As the labor movement began, union

organizational activities were often marred by violence on both sides–the HAYMARKET

RIOT and the PULLMAN STRIKE were two examples.

At the same time, movement to the suburbs began, and during the 20th century the city’s

population growth began to slow down. The stock market crash halted major building

construction, but the city did host the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition. Major

construction resumed with the election of Mayor Richard J. Daley. Although Daley was

influential as the head of one of the last old-time city political machines and stressed urban

renewal, downtown Chicago deteriorated as city dwellers moved to the suburbs.

The city made history in 1979, when Jane Byrne became Chicago’s first woman mayor.

Following her defeat in 1983 mayoral primaries, Harold Washington was elected the city’s

first black mayor. He was reelected in 1987 but died later in the year. In 1989, Daley’s

son, Richard M. Daley, was elected mayor.