PART IV

RACE AND REPRESENTATION

11

Erecting the Skyscraper, Erasing Race

Adrienne Brown

The skyscraper may seem like a strange place to tell a story about race at the turn of the century. All the architects who designed the first generation of skyscrapers that we know of were white. Iconic images of heroic-looking men working high above the city to construct these structures widely circulated through American mainstream periodicals in this period, but the presence of the many Mohawk Indians who appear in these photographs went generally unacknowledged for decades.[1] We know relatively little, moreover, about the black and eastern European laborers who dug their foundations and cast their steel supports. Even the place of the black elevator operator in skyscrapers was uncertain in this early era, as union records mark the hesitations of these organizations to allow black men to work in such close proximity to white women, who were increasingly occupying skyscrapers as workers and customers.[2] While several other architectural forms more readily suggest a connection to race either through their association with racial minorities—think plantation structures, tenement buildings, or vernacular architecture such as shotgun houses—or through direct lines of influence between architects and minority subjects—Josephine Baker's encounters with architects Le

Corbusier and Adolf Loos for instance—the skyscraper seems to be the least "raced" of all.

In my book, *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race*, I examine responses to the early skyscraper across a number of genres in order to show how the early skyscraper was both shaped by debates about racial formation emerging in the United States at the turn of the century while also shaping how race was perceived, imagined, and experienced in urban centers. While seconding the growing chorus of architects and architectural historians, many of whom are featured in this volume, pushing their disciplines to better address the historical neglect of race as a category of analysis, I came away from my interdisciplinary work on the skyscraper believing that the responsibility for thinking about race's relationship to the built environment belongs just as much to scholars of race as it is does to those of architecture. In other words, not only must architecture take up matters of race with more urgency, but critical race studies must also more fully attend to the range of ways the built environment plays a role in shaping what literary critic Anne Cheng has called the material life of race.[3]

Much of the scholarship on architecture and race has so far focused on recovering race's influence on architecture's design, attending to how architects and planners both explicitly and implicitly imagined architectures to be in service of specific raced populations or racialized ideologies while at the same time contributing to the direct marginalization or indirect neglect of others. And the early skyscraper's archive certainly lends itself to such a reading. When looking at writing emerging from the industries and professions most responsible for the skyscraper's early materialization, race's role in shaping its material and aesthetic development is a fact hidden in plain sight. It pervades period accounts of steel manufacturing and skyscraper construction in which managers used preexisting racial antagonisms between workers to better exploit their labor and in debates amongst architects about preventing a "miscegenated" facade scheme for the skyscraper from surfacing. These instances affirm William Gleason's central claim in *Sites Unseen: Architecture, Race, and American Literature* that "the built environment is always shaped in some way by race whether such shaping is explicitly acknowledged or understood."[4]

I very much subscribe to Gleason's claim and underscore the need for scholars to continue investigating the ways race shapes the built environment across different contexts, geographies, and historical eras. At the same time, I more strongly wish to pursue the inverse of this claim—that race is always shaped in some way by the built environment. While the humanities have gone through a "spatial turn," embracing an analysis of space as a way of understanding the production of the social, scholars have been slower to explore the ways that, as Dianne Harris writes, "space is equally significant in the construction of ideas about race and identity."[5]

While Gleason's argument about the built environment's racial foundations can be corroborated using the methods and archives that have typically fallen under the domain of architectural history (if not its ideological orientations), the claim that race is always shaped by the built environment is most productively pursued and unpacked not only by architects and architectural historians but by scholars of race working from within a variety of disciplines to chart race's ontology and epistemology, its comparative formation across regions, and, even more basically, how race is perceived and felt in distinct built spaces across time. To tell the story of racial perception in any time or place necessitates considering how the built environment helps determine its operations. As architecture changes, so do the measures of race, a condition that should encourage scholars in a multitude of disciplines to think about race in more site-specific terms—decentering national and regional contexts in order to attend to the more immediate types of material landscapes that condition racial experience.

The skyscraper, originally envisioned as an economically efficient way of managing the large populations that were overwhelming downtown corridors, appears in a range of materials between the 1880s and 1930 as an obstacle to racial perception and differentiation. From its distancing apex—reducing bodies to specks—to its interior spaces housing large numbers of people who may never meaningfully encounter one another, to the shadowy mega-blocks it formed at street-level, the skyscraper called attention to the malleable nature of perception. Prompting writer Henry James to put the verb *seeing* itself in quotation marks when faced with its overwhelming size, the skyscraper suggested the ineffectiveness of emerging Jim Crow practices and the de facto segregation more common in the North to regulate racial contact in spaces in which bodies appeared indeterminate.[6] Writers representing the skyscraper during its first forty years accused this architecture of making it harder to anchor racial knowledge in either invisible blood or visible skin, unsettling what it meant to both perceive race and feel raced.[7]

But in what follows I focus on a different aspect of the skyscraper's history—considering the skyscraper not as a site where bodies more generally are perceived as raced but as a stage framing the bodies of construction workers whose labor was often viewed as spectacular, theatrical, and available for public consumption. I focus here on builder William Starrett's 1928 monograph on skyscraper construction in which race proves to be an inconvenient detail when rendering the exceedingly large onsite workforces it was his job to organize and manage. Representing his employees' bodies more like instruments belonging to the larger operational network he steered, Starrett's monograph demonstrates the role the perceivable racial detail played in determining how these men would be consumed and, not uncommonly, made disposable.

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Skyscraper construction workers were nearly as iconic in the skyscraper's earliest era as these buildings themselves. Moving across high beams with seeming fearlessness, workers commonly known as "beamwalkers" attracted large crowds of people upwardly craning their necks to watch their spectacular feats of labor.[8] Beamwalkers were, as novelist Faith Baldwin described in a 1931 novel, the "star performances of this theatrical spectacle played out against the backdrop of an indifferent and challenged sky."[9] But whereas the beamwalker attracted attention because of the heights at which he worked, the many other types of laborers who worked on skyscraper construction sites alongside and below them fascinated the public due to their sheer numbers, with thousands of men working on site at any given moment. The busyness and nimbleness on display at construction sites compelled the public to stop and stare. As one *New York Times* article from 1929 notes, "While the spectacle which the building of a skyscraper presents has become a familiar one in New York, the people of the metropolis still find in it their favorite drama of the streets," going on to describe the "fascinated groups of people on the street," "endlessly engross[ed]," who "stare" with "lively interest" at the "infinite activity involving the men of a hundred trades."[10] Skyscraper construction sites were dynamic places around which urban residents congregated en masse to watch these various types of laboring bodies in motion. Within the modern city in which most large-scale industrial operations were housed behind closed doors, as tragically demonstrated by the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, or situated outside the city, as was true of logging, migrant farming, and coal mining, skyscraper construction was distinct for being the largest industrial operation regularly visible to the general public within city limits.[11] But skyscraper construction sites enticed readers and viewers far beyond city limits. Images, cartoons, and articles featuring skyscraper laborers circulated frequently within American newspapers and magazines around the turn of the century, consumed by audiences who might never see a skyscraper in person but could still be awed by the death-defying feats its construction entailed.

The erection of the Empire State Building gives us a window into the magnitude of this work. Completed in one year and forty-five days, several months ahead of schedule, the 102-floor skyscraper required 7,000,000 man-hours to be built, with as many as 3,400 laborers working on site at one time during peak construction.[12] But even as the feat of building something as large as the Empire State building could be said to exemplify the power of man, affirming a teleological narrative of civilization's progression, skyscrapers seemed to simultaneously throw human agency into question, with writers wondering how it was possible to ascribe these superhuman structures to the efforts of mere men. As Mary Borden describes

in her 1927 novel, *Flamingo*, while the city's skyscraper-filled landscape suggested "some super human agency had been at work here," upon closer inspection, "the strange thing is that men should believe they build this city."[13] Relying on "machines a thousandfold more powerful than men" for the city's erection, it seems incredible to her narrator that "the men of the city, the citizens of New York, they called themselves, thought they were doing it."[14] Given the widespread concern about the completed skyscraper as an agent of dehumanization, answers to who (or what) was capable of producing such a structure proved expansive and expansively erratic.

The spectacular nature of the skyscraper construction worker's labor, the job's inherent danger, and the incredulousness expressed by members of the public that men alone could be responsible for these seemingly extra-human structures resulted in this figure taking on an ambivalent iconicity. Referred to as a degenerate "man-monkey" and the more noble "cowboy of the sky," the beamwalker in particular was simultaneously a hero and a freak, a daredevil and an object of pity, a "nigger-head man" and a "man who knows his business," an evolved "specialist" and mechanistic cog.[15] He, like most of the other workers on the skyscraper, appeared to the public as, to use Anne Cheng's terms, an undecidable amalgamation of modernism's "three foundational, distinctive categories"—the animal, the human, and the mechanical—which, despite their "ideological separation," were often rendered as "stylistically identical" in modernist aesthetics.[16] Modernism's interest in this trio, I would add, originates in the much longer historical preoccupation with solving the representational riddle of the worker, conceived of simultaneously as an abstract surplus, a less-evolved species, a machine to be industrially optimized, and a catalyst for a future proletarian consciousness. The modernist tendency to represent the animal, the human, and the mechanical as stylistically similar must also be understood in relation to the specifically raced history of indeterminable personhood foundational to the emergence of chattel slavery.

One of the key decisions writers and artists had to make when representing skyscraper laborers was whether to focus on the living or dead. The alleged number of laborers' lives lost during the construction of Empire State in particular wildly fluctuated in the period following its completion. As historian John Tauranac explains in his history of the Empire State's erection, it was rumored that as many as one hundred men died between the demolition of the old Waldorf-Astoria and the construction of the Empire State Building in its place. Writer Edmund Wilson pegged the number at forty-eight, while a gruesome illustration in the socialist literary magazine, the *New Masses*, featuring jumbled white corpses stacked against a dark city backdrop, put the total at forty-two (figure 11.1).[17] To end such speculation, Empire State's general contracting company, Starrett Brothers & Eken, released the real figures. Out of an average of six hundred men employed in

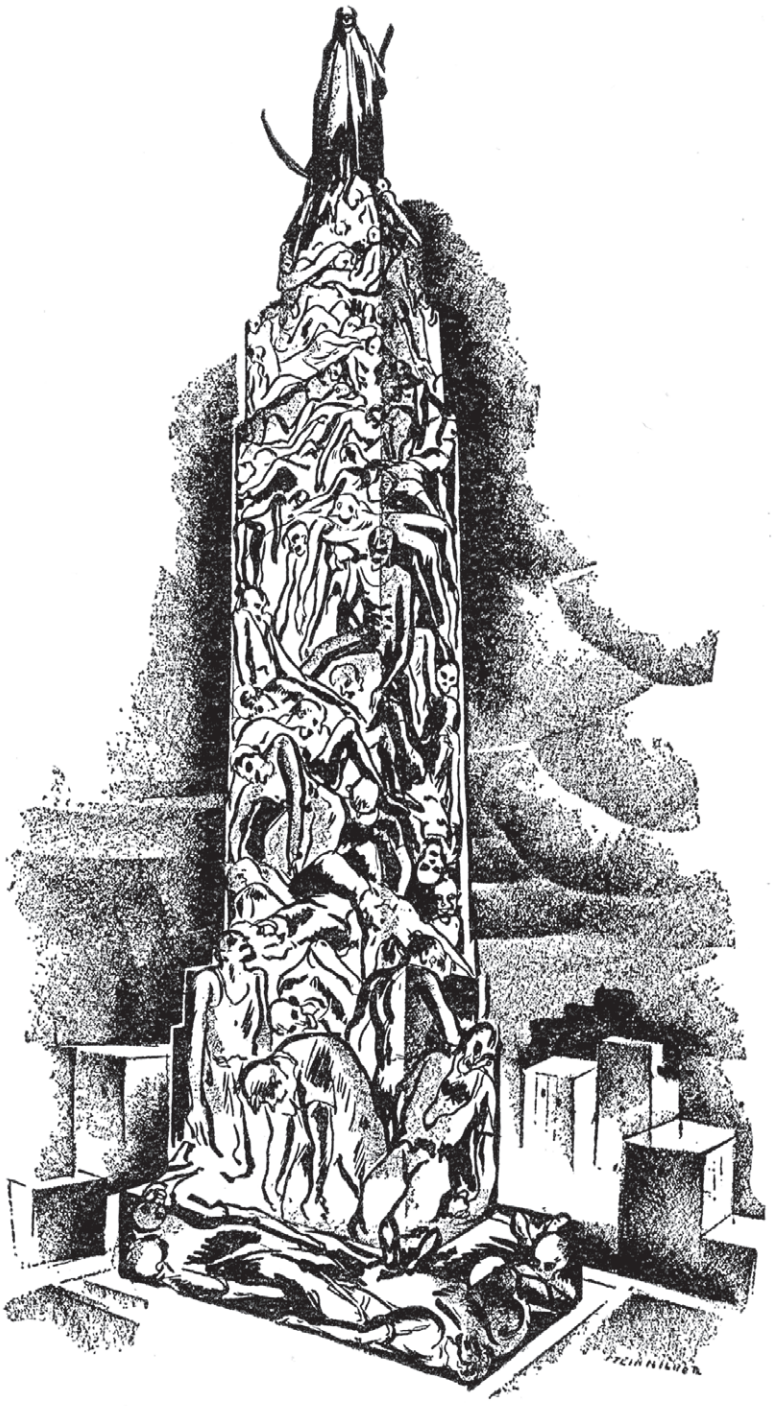


Fig. 11.1 Walter Steinhilber, "42 men killed constructing the Empire State Building . . . 'the building was completed on time.'" From the *New Masses*, June 1931.

the demolition of the Waldorf-Astoria and five thousand men employed on the construction of the Empire State building, five workers had been killed on-site: one worker was hit by a truck as he was sawing a plank; the second ran into a blast area; the third stepped off a scaffold; the fourth fell down an elevator shaft; and the fifth was struck by a hoist.[18]

The Starretts had much to gain by reigning in the erroneous accounts of construction fatalities. Picking up where the architect's role as designer left off, the builder, also known as the general contractor, was responsible for turning the idea for a building into a cost-efficient reality, supplying and coordinating the materials, laborers, equipment, and services needed for it to be finished on time and on budget. A building may have been designed by the architect, but it was produced by the contractor in concert with the laborers he gathered and coordinated to make its erection a profitable reality. The Starrett brothers actively worked to displace the perception of the architect as sole designer of a building, arguing through books and biographies that the erection of a building was an aesthetic work in and of itself, separate from, if not greater than, the formal properties of the completed product.[19] Not only were the exorbitantly inaccurate death tolls for Empire State bad for profits and for their reputation as businessmen—they were bad for their budding aesthetic reputation, threatening to sour the greatest testament to their organizational artistry.

Their most extensive argument for the beauty of the work of building appears in the 1928 monograph *Skyscrapers and the Men Who Build Them*, written by Col. William A. Starrett, the younger of the two Starrett brothers.[20] The first book dedicated entirely to the structure, *Skyscrapers* opens by recuperating the completed building type as an aesthetic object, lamenting that "the skyscraper has had to submit for forty years to the abuse and patronage of aesthetic critics, many of them architects of note." But Starrett was much more interested in connecting the skyscraper's importance to its "beauty of power," a beauty he ultimately deemed inseparable from the powerful hands of its builders.[21] In line with this thinking, most of Starrett's three-hundred-page book treats the completed skyscraper as a matter of secondary importance to the extraordinary organization of the labor force behind its construction. As Starrett writes, "When one views it as a great and complicated operation involving skill and daring, with a wealth of adventure and the joy of fulfillment of a hard task well done, the scale of bigness may again grip the imagination, and in the story of how it is all done may yet be held the romance of a triumph no less stirring than the victory of battle, or the leading of a nation into the paths of peace and prosperity."[22] It is this "scale of bigness" that Starrett attempts to capture for much of his book.

Starrett remains largely committed to rendering building in the terms of romantic masculine adventure, displacing the *New Masses'* portrait of construction

as a cold factory of killing with a narrative of stirring unity. Yet his first chapter renders the scene of building on a very different scale—that of the intimate and familial—assimilating the skyscraper into progressively smaller units of belonging. *Skyscrapers* opens with the unit of the nation, declaring the structure to be "the most distinctively American thing in the world."[23] Framing the skyscraper as "all American and all ours in its conception, all important in our metropolitan life," Starrett quickly paints a picture of the nation defined by its citizens' shared appreciation for it.[24] Transitioning from a vision of the skyscraper as completed icon to its status as a large-scale construction site, he narrows the unit of belonging down to the metropolis, turning the city imagined by many as untenably heterogeneous into one "whole citizenry" united around the spectacular feat of skyscraper construction fueling "our pride of civic acquisition."[25] Construction for him is a "drama" choreographed by builders and enjoyed by "the enthusiastic spectator who gazes with admiration at some feat of skill and daring performed before his very eyes."[26] Starrett frames the scene of building as an act of communal gazing—and thusly civic polity—as city residents together "recognize it as another of our distinctive triumphs, another token of our solid and material growth."[27]

From national iconography to the more specific drama of metropolitan belonging, Starrett goes on to scale skyscraper construction down even further to the unit of family. He acknowledges four Chicagoan "chiefs" who served as the original pioneers of the skyscraper—architects William Le Baron Jenney, Daniel Burnham, John Root, and William Holabird—rendering them as folk heroes of sorts, cataloging their rough-and-tumble pasts. He then weaves his own family history into this tale of the skyscraper's invention. Not only was he "a boy in Chicago when the first skyscraper arose," but he "knew most of the architects and engineers who devised and erected them, and served as a cub under some of them."[28] Belonging to "a family of builders, one of five brothers who have designed and built a vast number of skyscrapers," Starrett ends this first chapter by turning this national epic of the skyscraper into a family yarn, referring to Daniel Burnham as "Uncle Dan" and relaying the "Scotch origin" of his own family as they proved to be integral to the expanded history of construction the book sets out to provide.[29]

Through these narrowing constructs of the nation, metropolis, and the family, Starrett stresses skyscraper construction as not just homogeneous but homogenizing, inaugurating a process of belonging that works first as a symbol, then as a stage, and finally as a domestic drama. As the national body is ultimately displaced by the familial one, the text distinctly marks the skyscraper's bloodline as Anglo-American, emerging from the Scotch origins of the Starretts in addition to the pedigrees of its four "chiefs." Erased from this intimate family tree, perhaps unsurprisingly, is an acknowledgement of the actual American Indians who worked on this structure as well as the myriad of immigrant and ethnic laborers who joined

them.[30] In his casual use of the word *chief*, Starrett invokes the figure of the Indian while vanishing the place of his actual body—active in skyscraper construction longer than Starrett's family—from the scene of building entirely.[31]

While race becomes a way to genealogically and metaphorically mark the elite world of architects and builders as a close-knit tribe, when Starrett moves into the body of the book where he details the various stages and categories of labor required to erect a skyscraper, the language of race suddenly disappears. Not only does Starrett decline to invoke race in his descriptions of the various laboring bodies at work on the skyscraper's "scale of bigness," but he foregoes marking their bodies in any particularizing fashion. Men are tersely described solely by what they do—"work-gangs sweat and toil behind chugging, hissing air-drills," "the man tightens his pull on the now idle rope"—rather than in terms of their physical characteristics.[32] Starrett attends more to the equipment the men work with than to the men themselves. In fact, the one time a racial descriptor enters his descriptive lexicon, it is used to describe a machine—"a small winch or 'niggerhead' that looks like a steel spool" attended to by "a watchful man."[33]

A similar investment in deemphasizing the sovereign worker emerges across the seventy-two images Starrett chose to include in *Skyscrapers*. Periodical profiles of skyscraper laborers preceding his monograph tended to feature tight shots of workers' bodies juxtaposed with the abstract city above which they perch, as in the iconic *Lunch atop a Skyscraper*, or kinetically engaging the machinery they operated, as did many of the celebrated images taken by photographers Lewis Hines and Margaret Bourke-White. By contrast, the majority of the images Starrett includes in *Skyscrapers* do not feature individual laborers but instead focus on either the machinery they operated, often dwarfing them, the completed buildings they helped to construct, or capture empty or sparsely populated construction sites, giving a sense of the vastness of the enterprise in the absence of any visible workers (figures 11.2–11.4). When workers do appear relatively close in the frame, they are often looking away from the camera, their faces obscure and their bodies blurred in motion.

Starrett's decision to render individual laborers as generally nondescript in both the prose and images within his book sits in stark contrast to how skyscraper labor was being portrayed not only in photographs but a range of other forms of print media during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, dutifully marking the race of laboring bodies in an almost ethnographic fashion. Juxtapose Starrett's unraced workers, for instance, with the emphasis on racial difference demarcating skyscraper laborers featured in the 1911 *Everybody Magazine* profile, "Just Wops," cataloging the "Dagos, niggers, and Hungarians" who were treated as "unintelligent, sweating workers who could be killed without counting."[34] Or see the 1905 film *The Skyscrapers of New York*, featuring a character named Dago Pete getting in

Courtesy of Starrett Brothers, Inc.

Foundation of the New York Life Insurance Building, New York. The excavation was blasted out of solid rock and is one of the largest rock excavations ever attempted in Manhattan. In the deep basement the rock had to be excavated for over 72 feet below the street level. The rise and fall of the line of solid granite of the Island of Manhattan is clearly shown along the walls.

Fig. 11.2 From William Starrett's *Skyscrapers and the Men Who Build Them* (New York: Scribner's, 1928).

a fight atop his skyscraper jobsite, or Willa Cather's short story from 1912, "Behind the Singer Tower," featuring a gang of "twenty dagos" ultimately treated as disposable by their rapacious foreman.[35] Langston Hughes wrote two poems featured in 1926's *The Weary Blues* highlighting the contribution of black labor to the skyscraper's construction.[36]

Courtesy of Underpinning & Foundation Co., Inc.

After a tube has been driven a certain depth, a blast of air under pressure of 100 pounds per square inch is suddenly released. The explosion forces the material within the tube out of it.

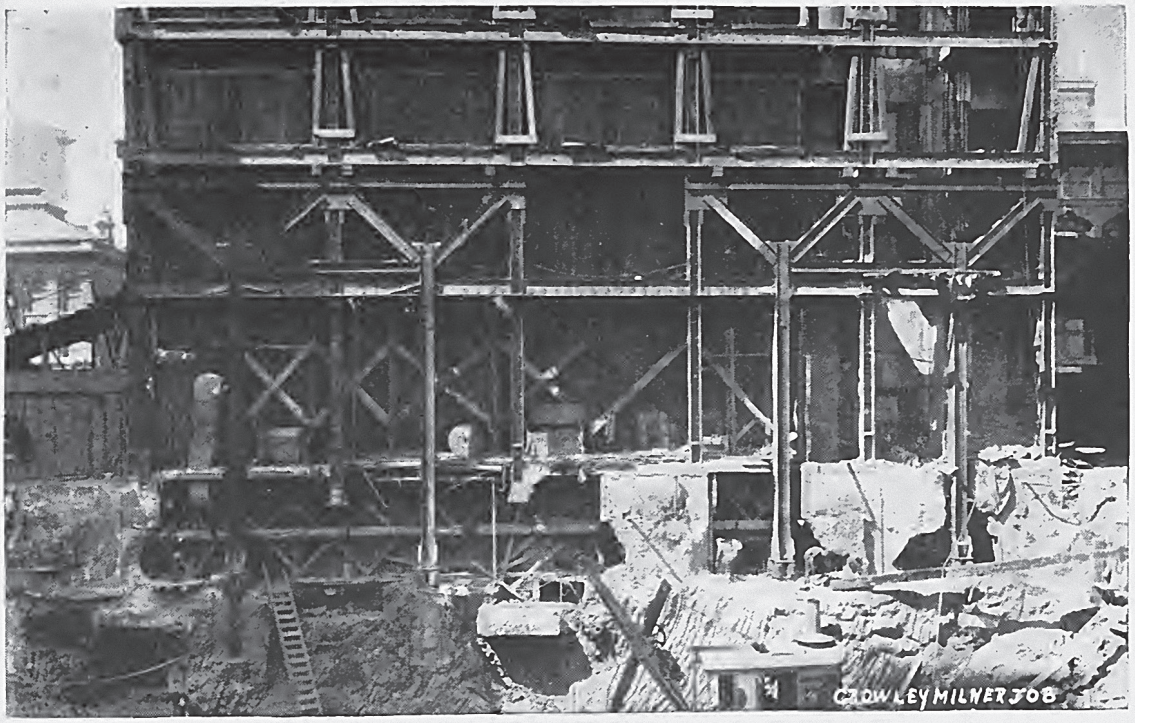
Courtesy of George A. Fuller Co.

An open caisson with interlocking edges of steel sheet piling. They are made in various lengths, and when driven, present a continuous barrier against quicksand and water. Such a cofferdam is cross-braced at intervals as it is driven, and the material excavated from the inside.

Courtesy of the Foundation Co.

The enormous supply of compressed air necessary for a large caisson job is indicated by the machinery shown above. This plant was temporarily on the iob for the American Telephone Company Building, New York.

Fig. 11.3 From William Starrett's *Skyscrapers and the Men Who Build Them* (New York: Scribner's, 1928).



An addition to this building in Detroit made it necessary to replace the columns below the second floor and add piers forty feet deep for the new columns. Temporary trusses were installed and the load of about 500 tons to the column was transferred to temporary piers and columns which were pretested to overload. The new columns were then installed.

Hudson Department Store, Detroit. Making the general cellar excavation after the caissons, columns, and cellar walls had been installed in pits and the steel work erected.

Courtesy of Spencer, White & Prentis, Inc.

Fig. 11.4 From William Starrett's *Skyscrapers and the Men Who Build Them* (New York: Scribner's, 1928).

Contrastingly, journalists interested in glorifying construction for mainstream and middlebrow papers as a testament to capitalism's awesome power tended to emphasize skyscraper construction sites as the domain of a heroic white workforce. A 1908 piece from the Munsey periodical the *Scrap Book* titled "Men-Monkeys Who Build Our Babels" reported ironworkers as being "principally Irish, English and American, with a sprinkling of Italian."[37] A similar article about skyscraper construction from 1908 by Ernest Poole notes the presence of an incompetent "Mac" and "a slow-minded Swede" amidst the "American English, Irish, French Canadians, Swedes, now and then an Italian" on-site before acknowledging the "two full-blooded Indians" also present. Cromwell Childe's 1901 profile of skyscraper workers warns that "a nigger-head man"—a term describing a worker manning a specific kind of tool known as a "nigger-head," but which also potentially alludes to this figure's lower status on the worksite—who fails to "know his business" can put his coworkers at great risk. The article goes on to note with relief, however, that most skyscraper laborers were not in fact of such stock. First describing the "absence of dialect" he heard on-site, Childe goes on to testify to the Anglo roots of most of the workers he observed: "Nearly all are workmen that are widely traveled, nearly all are American-born with any provincialisms they may have had knocked off by contact with men from other sections. Americans, Scotchmen, Irishmen, Englishmen, make up the roll of these iron-workers, with a few Canadian Indian half-breeds, who are highly esteemed for their endurance, strength, and skill." In articles like this one, the skyscraper construction sites appear the ideal melting pot, forging assimilative intimacies for the "nearly all"—deracinating those whom the author wants to claim as part of one happy Anglo family while marking out those with Indian blood as literal "breeds" unto themselves despite their mixed ancestry. When the specters of Mohawk labor do appear, it seems to be largely in the service of securing white laboring solidarity in terms of kinship from which these men were exiled.[38]

Starrett, by contrast, does not paint an image of skyscraper construction as a model of melting-pot democracy—depicting how the act of construction folds together variously raced bodies to create a collective unit, as was a common trope for writing about labor in the period—nor does he double-down and stereotype certain jobs as held by specific ethnic groups as was the norm in the popular press. Rather, he refuses racial markers all together. For a text dedicated to bringing the machinations of skyscraper labor to the public's attention, race is a detail that goes dutifully unseen in his rendering of the "drama" of building beyond the first chapter. Starrett's decision to deracinate the scene of skyscraper construction fits his agenda for *Skyscrapers and the Men Who Build Them*—to redistribute the layman's attention away from the individual laborer and toward the less visible and more artful mechanisms of capitalist organization making the visage of the heroic

laborer possible. In making generic the bodies of skyscraper laborers and describing them more as instruments animated by capitalist organization rather than as animating agents themselves, Starrett combats the visual power of the sovereign worker on high, an image available every day to passersby and further reinforced by the numerous images that accompanied popular stories of skyscraper construction in the press. For the inquisitive spectator whom Starrett depicts as wondering "where does it all come from? Whence these planks these rivets and forges, these hoists for material, all arrived as if by magic?" his answer ensures that the harder-to-see labor of the builder's organizational technique gets its due credit. Starrett writes of the scene of construction that "it is all a part of the builder's plan." "Yes the *things one sees* and *a thousand things unseen* come not by magic, but as the result of vigilant and organized forethought." By refusing to mark race in his descriptions, Starrett draws the reader's attention to the "thousand things unseen" by those eyes locked in on these death-defying bodies at the expense of the less visible artistry of managerial organization.

Race's strategic presences and absences in *Skyscrapers* prove integral to Starrett's efforts to portray his role as builder as something more than practical, rendering it as a practice with an aesthetic pedigree all its own. Race, a crucial detail of ethnographic curiosity in other accounts of building, becomes in Starrett's hands an inefficient remainder to be smoothed out as he would any other inefficiencies within the act of building. In a manner reminiscent of modernist architect Adolf Loos, who famously found the use of ornament in contemporary design to be "a symptom of degeneracy in the modern adult" that was a holdover from "alien" and "primitive" cultures that the white Western world had evolved beyond, we find Starrett similarly framing his organizational aesthetics in terms of sleek utility.[39] He creates a world in which particularizing details become unnecessary ornament encumbering the scene of building made light and fluid by the artistry of coordinators. Whereas Loos advocated solving the problem of ornamentation through substitution, replacing it with a more minimalist design aesthetic, Starrett solves his resistance to the "ornamental" detail of race with "the scale of bigness," a scale incommensurate with the more detailed one needed in order for perceivable bodily details believed to denote racial difference to come into focus. The typical narrative about this period situates modernist design as drawing inspiration from industrialism. Starrett suggests, however, that industrialism had its own discreet interests in depicting large industrial scenes as strategically unadorned, at least in relation to the racial detail.

There is, however, one final glimpse of race in *Skyscrapers*, exiled from the city's vertical center for much of the text only to reemerge at its horizontal periphery at the conclusion. Remaindered by much of Starrett's text, it seems appropriate that race should reappear in Starrett's description of what happens to the remaindered

materials of demolished buildings upon their removal: "Go to remote parts of the city, in the tenement districts, where racial colonies huddle together in out-of-the-way sections, where thrifty foreigners are making their first struggles with property ownership, and there you will find these second-hand materials being put to good use. Sometimes these structures are grotesque and laughable; sometimes they are put together with considerable effort at design and good arrangement; but they are to building what the wearers of second-hand clothing are to the patrons of the new and fashionable shops."[40] Race, along with the outdated materials of capitalist production, are depicted by Starrett as ending up at the city's periphery, rendered here as not just spatially outside the city, but temporally beyond it as well, as "thrifty foreigners" make late attempts at urban ownership by recycling the accouterments of disassembled buildings. Garbed in the trappings of urbanity's past, these "racial colonies" are described as masquerading in the dress of a city that no longer exists. Discourse about the relative evolution of civilizations popularized by race science as well as the "race aesthetics" of someone like Loos surely shadows this vignette of peripheral "colonies" out of time.

While race strategically falls out of focus when Starrett renders urban modernity on "the scale of bigness," he conveniently scales down in this scene to bring both race and racial ornament into view, if only to more soundly dismiss their importance. But Starrett's appeal to the racial "grotesque" in this passage, framing architecture's racial afterlife in terms of reductive mimicry, ultimately depends upon the racial erasures he performs elsewhere in *Skyscrapers.* It is those earlier racial erasures that allow him in this moment to forget that members of these racial colonies, too, were present at the scene of building as both participants and spectators. With this passage, Starrett reproduces the general history of architectural modernity that has cast marginalized bodies as outside, beyond, or in non-relation to building, overlooking how race gets constructed in these very performances of non-relation. Starrett's raceless "scale of bigness" requires these smaller scale "peripheral" colonies for its own stability, demonstrating his continued need for racial perception in civic and social spheres even as he depicts his workforce as operating more efficiently without it.