

The Restoration of Nell Nelson

An Investigation of the Chicago Daily Times' Exposé: "City Slave Girls"

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Project Description:

This project seeks to restore Nell Nelson's instrumental work in exposing the cruel and unsanitary working conditions of Chicago's manufacturing industry of the late nineteenth century. Nelson's series, "City Slave Girls," was published in *The Chicago Daily Times* in late-July, 1888. Nelson was a pioneer of investigative reporting and provided ground-breaking work in Chicago. The series completely exposed the mistreatment of the women and children that worked in Chicago's manufacturing industries. The success of her series is a bewilderment considering the extensive inversion of social norms represented in the writing of her exposé. The "City Slave Girls" series put into question the practices of the most prestigious men of Chicago; yet, Nell Nelson was a woman unable to even vote due to the gender restraints of her time. Through her satirical and witty writing, Nelson beat the adversity of being a female news reporter and the publication of the series gained attention from Chicago's political representatives along with the owners of the very industries she scrutinized. Although the significance of the series was recognized at the time of publication and for some time after, Nelson's role in exposing the hardships of the "City Slave Girls" lacks any proper representation in all realms of history. The "City Slave Girl" series is a monumental resource of information for women's history, labor history, and the history of undercover journalism.

There are three main facets of this project. First and foremost The Restoration of Nell Nelson requires a complete digitization of the three sources where Nelson's "City Slave Girls" series were published: the originals from the *Chicago Daily Times*, a published book version (abridged and currently accessible to me only on microfilm), and *The White Slaves of Free America* by John T. McEnnis (large snippets of the articles within the context of this pro-unionization book OCR text available courtesy of [Harvard University's Digital Library](http://harvard.edu/digital)). Each of the sources provides its own hurdles in obtaining code-ready, plain text. This is the most important aspect of the project because there is currently no complete archive of this series digitally available in searchable text. The second facet of the project is the selecting of a logical tag set developed within the TEI guidelines that will govern the markup of all three sources. Finally this project intends to provide data visualizations and conclusions to research questions of related importance to the series.

One of the beginning research questions posed was what kind of information was altered and excluded. Why if all of the sources were published within the same year (1888) do both of the book versions exclude important aspects used by Nelson in the original newspaper series detailing the corruption. The analysis of the texts began questioning: what was left out and/or changed? How did the book publications provide a different variation to Nelson's clearly disgusted image portrayed in the original *Chicago Daily Times* publication? In the fall of 2014 a co-editor of the project, Shane Daube, showed interest in representing the connotation of the three main character types within the series: the male personae, the female personae, and Nelson. He wanted to compare (using the minimally transcribed data in development) the three different voices and the variation of voice connotations within the original articles versus the article parts in *The White Slaves of Free America*. Using XQuery and SVG Shane developed a graph visualization that provided interesting conclusions in regard to the extreme alterations made between versions. He provided variation data that otherwise would only have been derived and made obvious after thorough investigation of both sources. As for the fall of

2015 The Restoration of Nell Nelson project is still in progress. Current focus continues to be centered on the first two facets of the project; however, the transcription of more articles and book chapters has led to new research questions and further development of the beginning inquiries (discussed later in this proposal).

Methodology:

The Restoration of Nell Nelson Project began as an in-depth capstone paper and presentation for completion of a History based Social Science Bachelor's degree. During the beginning stages of research it became apparent that the "City Slave Girls" series lacked any representation in history and more generally any collective digital representation. Then, using the research and source from which the history capstone was built, the project took a turn into digital humanities scholarship. In the spring of 2014 the first transcriptions were made of some of the original articles. The transcriptions were developed from PDF files of poorly photographed images of the newspaper series (which is why this is a section of the project that is still being developed). In the summer of 2014 contact was made with [Harvard University's Digital Library](#) in order to receive the McEnnis text. Harvard provided an OCR version of that original text; therefore, in the fall of 2014 the initial work on the project included the use of regular expressions to clean up some of the OCR mistakes in order to produce a clean, plain text. Then in the fall of 2014 I developed a complex [RelaxNG schema](#) that provides a systematic way to code all three sources. With the schema in place we used XML to markup 4 original articles and 3 corresponding chapters of the McEnnis text. Using those initial exploratory XML documents inside of an XQuery database we were able to notice trends in representations of the voice element (personae and connotation voiced) between the two versions. The conclusion was that the book significantly reduced Nelson's witty remarks and inverted the sexual innuendo of the male personae (the foremen and owners of the industries Nelson was exposing) so that it appeared as if advancements were being made on behalf of the female personae (the working women). This shocking revelation developed into a [data visualization](#) using the information pulled from the XQuery database and graphed using SVG. Then once the project entered stages of website development, also in the fall of 2014, we wrote JavaScript to enhance user interface with the SVG graph. Throughout the following year, leading to now (Fall 2015), work has continued on the transcription of articles and the XML coding of both articles and the McEnnis chapters. The project is currently in the OCR process of the second book source transforming the microfilm version provided by Penn State. We are currently in the beginning stages of developing a map from Chicago in 1888 that would have all of the companies and places named from the original articles plotted with descriptions. A key component of Nelson's original articles was that she provided exact addresses and descriptions of the companies she was exposing. A map representation would highlight Nelson's bold statement of listing full company names and addresses; a statement extinguished in both book versions. The project continues to undergo website development in regards to website aesthetics adjusting the CSS and developing XSLT style sheets that will transform the XML files into HTML.

Future Development of Scholarship:

As The Restoration of Nell Nelson project continues into its second year of website progression and third year of in-depth research/investigation new questions for future scholarship also are developing. Students of the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg Digital Humanities course this fall have shown interest in making further visual analysis of the versioning between texts. There also is a substantial interest in the relation of the voice/personae element with the specific issues Nelson worked to expose. Once the archival aspects of the project are complete and the entirety of all the sources are available there will be many opportunities for more research questions to develop. With each new research question there is prospect for increased data visualizations and more in depth conclusions. As this

project grows the editors would like the opportunity to work with the original copies of the newspaper articles. Before completion of the archived material there is hope to re-photograph the articles and render better images of them to display on site alongside the transcriptions. The transfer from the project-specific, RelaxNG schema to working under the TEI is a large step the project plans on taking in order to expand the utility and value of the project within existing digital humanities' scholarship.