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"It's All Happening at the Zoo:" Plural Visions of Landscape, Animals, and Humans in the Early Days of the Bronx Zoo

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“It’s All Happening at the Zoo:”

Plural Visions of Landscape, Animals, and Humans in the Early Days of the Bronx Zoo

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelors of Arts

By

Rebecca Merten

Lewiston, Maine

23 March 2012
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Introduction

A trip to my grandparents’ house in northern New Jersey was not complete without a trip to “Grandma’s Zoo.” (Why Pa was left out of the naming, I cannot be sure.) Truth be told, I cannot remember much of my early trips to the Bronx Zoo—only that it was far superior to the oft-visited smaller zoo near my home. Yet, I remember enjoying my visits and have continued to visit zoos and enjoy them in adulthood. Zoos have played a larger part in my life than they may have for other people; I went to a summer camp at the zoo by my house every year, volunteered there when I was too old for camp, and then worked as a counselor when I was even older. Many people visit zoos each year, nostalgically remember their trips to the zoos, and develop an interest in animals through their visits.

What I did not realize during my early trips to zoos was that zoos themselves were highly constructed spaces, where someone, or rather many people, over a long period time, had considered, manipulated, and created every aspect of the zoo that I was experiencing. Of course, I could tell that the painted rocks were fake, that someone had made the cages, and that someone had poured the cement path that led me through the zoo. However, the realization that someone had actively chosen to plant the tree under which I was sitting, dictating where I rested, or that someone had chosen to place the lion next to the tiger, causing me to draw comparisons between the two, was a realization that came later in life. Clearly my point is not new—zoos and parks are constructed spaces. I also began to wonder about zoo history, curious about how they became the institutions they are today. I knew
little, only a “black legend” of sorts wherein zoos evolved from barren cages to large eco-parks. I decided to study them, expecting to learn about a meteoric rise from large halls filled with small cages to bastions of conservation and education. What I learned was more complicated than the oversimplified and idealized popular history of zoos with which I was familiar.

This thesis attempts to understand this construction in the context of the early Bronx Zoo (1896-1912) in order to investigate late nineteenth century and early twentieth century ideas regarding the natural world. It is guided by two questions. First, how were natural elements, animals, and even a human in one instance, understood and presented in the Bronx Zoo? Second, what can this tell us about how humans understood the world around them? Rarely have zoos been considered holistically, not just as places where animals were caged but also as parks. The scholarship on parks is extensive, but it only touches on zoos and other additions to the park landscape in passing. This thesis considers zoos as a sum of their parts—from their landscape design and architecture to the animals they put in their cages—ultimately arguing that this sum was not entirely cohesive. The goal is to consider the Bronx Zoo as an entity and to understand the complexities and contradictions within this entity.

The thesis is broken down into three parts: Landscape and Architecture, where the landscape development and its plurality are examined; The Animal, that considers the various ways in which animals were displayed and the values assigned to them; and The Human, where I examine the exhibition of Ota Benga, an African man the Bronx Zoo displayed in the Monkey House in September of 1906. In
constructing its environment, animal displays, and even a human exhibition, the Bronx Zoo valued elements of the nonhuman world while at the same time presenting them in plural ways that physically articulated the complicated relationship humans have with the world around them.

Some of the terminology used in this thesis requires explanation. Plural, in its simplest definition, means “more than one,” and plurality is a useful term to evoke the richness of the multiple perspectives found in the Bronx Zoo exhibitions. There are multiple presentations and valuations of animals and the environment that are not necessarily connected or cohesive. Historian Elizabeth Hanson referred to zoos as hybrid institutions between definable categories. She used hybridity to explain the ways that “zoos occupy a middle ground between science and showmanship, high culture and low, remote forests and the cement cityscape, and wild animals and urban people.”¹ Yet, within a zoo, plurality is a more useful word because it implies coexisting differences whereas hybridity implies the creation of a whole, using various and disparate parts to make one cohesive unit. This is an unhelpful way to consider zoos because the underlying goal becomes finding the cohesive factor. I am interested in the disparate nature of zoos because through their multiplicity we can see our complicated and contradictory relationship with the nonhuman world. As humans, we live with contradictions and complexities. In terms of animals: we eat them; go on safaris to see them; hunt them; and include them in our families as pets. In the larger world, we do not have a cohesive hybrid understanding of animals; we apply various meanings to them in different contexts.

The same thing happened (and happens) in the Bronx Zoo. Various cultural ideas and beliefs are manifested within a single space. Their spatial unity does not make the presentations cohesive; the presentations and their meanings are plural.

Another word I use is nonhuman. The term nonhuman is effective in containing the landscape and animals of the Bronx Zoo. A synonym for it could be “nature,” but I do not want to overuse the word nature because it carries various meanings and definitions. As Raymond Williams explained, “Nature is the most complex word in the language.”² I use the word nonhuman because I am not looking to enter into this conversation. By nonhuman, I mean plants, trees, landscapes, and animals, which is one narrow definition of nature. These elements might have been placed or constructed by humans out of their normal context, but I still consider them part of the nonhuman because that is how the Bronx Zoo leaders viewed them. I do use nature occasionally, but I intend to use it in this singular context. Also, nonhuman does not mean untouched. For instance, I would consider the physical landscape of the Bronx Zoo as a part of the nonhuman even though it was heavily designed. All parts of the Bronx Zoo were designed and manipulated. The only real cohesion of all of these elements, the land and the animals, was that they were entities that the Zoo leaders considered a part of the natural world at their disposal to design and present. This encompassing reach is what I am interesting in exploring.

The focus of this thesis is the Bronx Zoo leaders’ vision and design—how they considered the nonhuman world and how they in turn presented it. It analyzes

² Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 184.
what was presented, how it was valued, and why it was presented. Without more primary sources, we cannot fully know how the displays and exhibitions impacted visitors. This thesis uses the rich sources documenting the Bronx Zoo’s planning and organization. One can only hope that more sources will come to light, such as diaries describing zoo visits to elucidate visitor experience. This is not to say that zoo directors’ presentations did not affect visitor experience. It absolutely did. Rather, as zoo historians Bob Mullan and Gary Marvin explained, “We must not assume however that the visitors share the interests of the director and his staff. They bring with them to the zoo a complete set of mental perceptions predisposed to respond in a particular way.”

In short, we cannot assume that all of the Bronx Zoo’s presentations resonated with its visitors in the ways the Zoo leaders intended. My analytical focus is the exhibiting authority of the Bronx Zoo leaders represented through the New York Zoological Society’s publications—*Annual Reports*, *Zoological Bulletins*, and *Popular Official Guides*. While these sources are not without their limitations, they give thorough overviews of the Zoo’s development and articulate the logic and reasoning behind the Zoo leaders’s actions.

The thesis focuses on the conception, planning, and development of the Bronx Zoo up through 1912 when construction of the original plan for the Zoo, initially created in 1896, was completed. While the Zoo would never reach a point of stasis wherein nothing was changed, deleted, or added, this short amount of time offers a manageable perspective of the initial goals and visions of the origins of the Zoo, how they materialized, and how they changed due to practicalities and

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competing philosophies. Even within these initial years changes occurred. The Bronx Zoo is a useful zoo to examine as a physical articulation of the nonhuman world because it was always firmly guided by leaders with vision and intentions, unlike some contemporary zoos that meandered through their early years. Further, it is an important zoo and one that was and is, in many people’s eyes, the premier zoo in the country.

The framework for this thesis is based in scholarship but also based in personal experience. Zoos are not particularly well studied, and the historical zoo is even less analyzed. However, there are discussions of zoos from different disciplines that highlight various aspects of them, emphasizing the multiple ways that zoos can be understood and the different facets of people’s relationships to animals.

The historian who presented the most thoroughly analytical and holistic American zoological history is Elizabeth Hanson. Her book, Animal Attractions, centered around the main thesis: “While zoos do express human power over the natural world...the process of collecting and exhibiting wildlife has been more complex than a display of dominance.” Her book outlined the complexities and pluralities that existed in zoos, focusing on the various types of animal displays, and the practicalities that hindered aesthetic visions. She argued that other scholars have oversimplified zoos, stating that they have focused on “the power relations implicit in the human gaze at caged animals, interpreting it as symbolic of imperial

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5 Hanson, 8.
power over colonial subjects,” how animals are anthropomorphized by zoo visitors, or have used “zoo animals as stand-ins for humans, comparing zoos to prisons, for example.” 6 Her book focused on animals in zoos and their procurement, only mentioning the spaces in which they were located briefly. Mullan and Marvin have offered similar points regarding the place of zoos in society. They argued that zoos are challenging places because they offer people a chance “to consider their place in relation to the natural world and...to see and experience what they are not.” 7 This examination of the Bronx Zoo mirrors these sentiments. Zoos are challenging places that echo our complicated relationship with the nonhuman world. This thesis also attempts to develop a holistic picture of all forms of the nonhuman, not just animals, displayed within one zoo.

Other scholars have highlighted the power relationships implicit in zoos. In *Metamorphoses of the Zoo*, philosopher Ralph Acampora argued that zoos have historically been “symbols of power and venues for entertainment.” 8 In an article within the book, philosopher Bernard Rollin argued, “zoos do not celebrate animals but our mastery over them.” 9 Historian Yi-Fu Tuan argued that, among other reasons, people go to zoos because a visit “allows them to feel superior to the caged beasts.” 10 Many scholars have focused their research on how zoos are a physical manifestation of our belief that humans are superior to animals and that people go

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6 Hanson, 8.
7 Mullan and Marvin, xiv.
to zoos so that they can participate in this physical mastery. Some have taken this assertion of power and likened animals to humans who have suffered in institutions like jails and mental hospitals. Sociologist Linda Kalof argued in *Looking at Animals in Human History* that the same type of history regarding spectacle “haunts both the history of zoos and the historical treatment of the mentally ill.” Historians cover a wide range on this point of dominance. Some argue that displaying power relationships, allowing people to feel more powerful than animals through a physical display, is the singular reason for zoos. Others believe that it is one facet among many. Others still believe that this power display of animals is akin to power displays regarding marginalized and confined humans.

A similar belief that is frequently cited as the drive behind zoos is that they are displays of colonialism. In order to have a zoo, a society has to have the ability to travel to different parts of the world and bring back spoils. Historian Sally Gregory Kohlstedt articulated this point when she argued, “Zoos relied on and, in not so subtle ways, reinforced ideas of imperialism and authority.” Cultural geographer Kay Anderson called zoos “colonial institutions.” John Berger, whose work, “Why Look at Animals,” is a common theoretical starting point for scholars trying to understand zoos, articulated that, “public zoos were an endorsement of modern colonial power. The capturing of the animals was a symbolic

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representation of the conquest of all distant and exotic lands.”

These points all argue that zoos are manifestations of colonialism, institutions that display the far-reaching grasp of global powers.

Others have argued that zoos represent humanity’s separation from and marginalization of the natural world, believing that we only became interested in animals when they were no longer a part of our everyday lives. Acampora articulated this sentiment when he stated that humans “seek out diverse life-forms when their own territories become too anthropocentrically homogenous or monocultural.” Berger argued, “Public zoos came into existence at the beginning of the period which was to see the disappearance of animals from daily life.”

These scholars perceived zoos as the products of an industrialized society wherein daily lives were no longer focused on animals.

Yet, these varied interpretations from zoo scholars cannot tell the whole story. For one, wealthy elites have kept private menageries since there have been wealthy elites. Animal collection perhaps began 5,000 years in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China. Collections also existed in the Western Hemisphere before Spanish conquest. There was no single point of origin for animal collections. They happened throughout the world, and independently of each other, an indication of a common, if not totally universal, desire to view animals. Zoos have been founded in geographically, temporally, and culturally diverse locations. This means that zoos

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15 Acampora, 1.
16 Berger, 258.
17 Kisling, preface.
cannot simply be manifestations of colonialism or a desire to become reacquainted with an animal world from which humans are no longer a part because they have been present in too many different circumstances.

There must be some other reason driving the continued popularity of zoos, a more universal one. One answer could be, as some historians and theorists have argued, that the universality is people’s desire to see animals subordinated to them. However, I do not think it is this power dynamic that drives zoo development. There are other historians who corroborate this sentiment, but the main reason I disagree with the dominance analysis is visceral, not scholarly. The universality is simple: people enjoy seeing animals. The experience evokes a sense of wonder and connection that many of us value.

While scholars have discussed this idea, I think it is something we can relate to on a personal level. Many of us have had exciting encounters with animals. My most amazing zoo experience occurred during a winter visit to the St. Louis Zoo. My mother and I found ourselves in one of the few indoor enclosures, the ape house, where gorillas, orangutans, and chimpanzees were exhibited in what we perceived as spacious accommodations separated by glass from the viewers. We stood for a while, watched, and, as we were about to leave, a mother and her young son (maybe four) came in. The son sat down right against the glass, and a gorilla came over and sat down next to him. Then, they played. The son had a blanket, the gorilla a burlap sack, and they essentially played peek-a-boo for the better part of an hour.

When it was time to go, the mother said, “see you next week” to the gorilla (though

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18 I am remiss to use anthropomorphic language though that is really what it looked like. Also, many higher level mammals have the capacity for activities like play.
primarily so my mother and I could hear). As they exited, the gorilla realized they were leaving, chased after them along the length of the enclosure, watched as they left the building, and then went back to the seat he had occupied before they arrived. It happened over four years ago, and I still remember it vividly. I think this type of wonder has to be one of the basic drives behind zoos. They create moments of connection that can be appreciated by humans from various cultural contexts—from Mesopotamia to a twenty-first century metropolis.

Mullan and Marvin articulated this point. They argued that a “basic fact which has been with zoos from their inception: animals exhibit a wondrous power over humans.”19 People go to zoos because they are excited and fascinated by them. In 2011, around 175 million people visited accredited Association of Zoos and Aquariums zoos throughout the country.20 That’s more than double the amount of people who attend professional baseball games annually.21 This popular draw is not new: in 1909 more than a million people visited the Bronx Zoo, and that was twice the amount that visited the Manhattan’s American Museum of Natural History, which was a more conveniently located attraction.22 A recent New York Times article addressed their draw. The author, Diane Ackerman, referenced her own nostalgia and feelings of connection with zoos, and she is not alone. A study in Japan revealed that people were less stressed after a visit to the zoo. Others showed that

19 Mullan, xv.
22 Hanson, 3.
zoo-goers felt connections within at least one animal by the time they left the zoo and even a greater sense of the context of the world in which humans exist.\(^{23}\)

We cannot forget this sense of wonder when we consider historical zoos. Historically approaching them allows some distance, however, which makes for a more inclusive analysis, but we should also remember the emotions we have when visiting zoos. By understanding the zoos of the past, what they thought was worthy of exhibition, and how they went about doing it, perhaps we can better understand the zoos of today and the larger picture of how humans consider the world. My focus is neither to try and justify zoos nor to try and critique the validity of a belief system of cultural and species dominance that makes them possible. Rather, I accept that zoos exist as institutions made by humans and for humans and attempts to answer why they exist in the way that they do and what larger implications that has for our understanding of our world.

“At the Zoo” is not Simon and Garfunkel’s most famous song. It begins, “Someone told me it’s all happening at the zoo, I do believe it, I do believe it’s true.” When they sang, “it’s all happening at the zoo,” they expressed the liveliness of zoos. A trip to the zoo includes a barrage different sights, like swinging monkeys and children running around, sounds, like bird squawks and donkey heehaws, and smells, like fried food from the concession stand and animal odors in enclosed “jungle” spaces. They are places that excite the senses. I am aware that Simon and Garfunkel were not referring to plural constructions and presentations of the

\(^{23}\) Diane Ackerman, “Why We Love Zoos,” \textit{New York Times}, February 12, 2012. It should be noted that these positive feelings are not universal. People arguing against zoos filled the comments section of this online article. One of the authors referenced in this thesis, Ralph Acampora, even entered the discussion.
nonhuman world when they sang the song. Yet, the phrase, “it’s all happening at the zoo,” stuck with me. While a little hyperbolic, it emphasizes the two main points of this thesis—plurality and value. “It’s all happening” implies a place where people want to be, a place where things are going on. An overarching quality of zoos is their consistent popularity. This popularity exists because people enjoy seeing animals; they value the experience. Bronx Zoo leaders hoped to sate people’s desire to see animals. It was “all” happening at the Zoo because Zoo leaders, like their visitors, valued animals and their presentations. The other point of the thesis that I read into this song lyric was plurality. “It’s all happening at the zoo.” While not everything is happening in a zoo, many conceptions of the natural world were presented within the Bronx Zoo simultaneously; these conceptions were neither cohesive nor unified. The early Bronx Zoo constructed its landscape, presented animals, and once a human in plural ways. While not “all” relations and understandings of the nonhuman were happening in the Zoo, many were. This thesis will examine how it was all happening at the Bronx Zoo both in terms of its plurality and the overarching value assigned to the nonhuman.

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24 The song is filled with metaphors that ascribe human attributes to animals, like “pigeons plot in secrecy,” playfully anthropomorphizing animals and animalizing people.
Chapter One: Historical Context and Bronx Zoo History

The Bronx Zoo and other zoos that developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were born out of intersecting movements and interests that contextualized the nonhuman in different ways. These movements included a newfound veneration for the natural word, collecting the exotic, and a cemented scientific and emerging popular belief in Darwinism. All of these new ideas shaped the way people, including the Bronx Zoo leaders, considered the nonhuman. Before moving to an in-depth examination of what the Zoo presented and how it presented it, this chapter will contextualize the time period of the Bronx Zoo’s origins and give a historic overview of the Bronx Zoo. The Bronx Zoo was developed when people venerated outdoor spaces and attempted to preserve them while simultaneously endeavoring to collect and order the larger world; understandings about the nonhuman world were plural, setting the background for the Bronx Zoo’s plurality.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the United States began to care more about natural spaces. When Frederick Jackson Turner announced in 1893 that the frontier was closed, people had been concerned for some time that maybe parts of the United States’ “wild” space should be saved. In 1872, Yellowstone National Park became our country’s first true national park, indicating that the federal government was interested in the country’s open spaces. Environmental historian William Cronon explained, "wild country became a place not just of religious

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redemption but of national renewal.”26 Open space was becoming a matter of governmental and civic importance. Yet, not everyone could get to the great outdoors, and it is no coincidence that the veneration of the West coincided with zoo and park development. Many Americans would have to settle for constructed urban green spaces like parks or zoos. As Hanson explained, “Park and zoo planners hoped to evoke the expected aesthetic responses in their visitors without burdening them with the travail and expense of a train ride or long breaks from work. Parks and zoos were tourist attractions on a local scale.”27 Parks, zoos, and the animals within them could harken to the greater expanses and uniqueness of the country. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, people believed in nature as a rejuvenator of the soul.28 While El Capitan in Yosemite National Park could rejuvenate the soul, a day at the park could also have positive effects.

At the same time that green spaces in the United States were becoming more valued, so too was a desire to collect artifacts from around the world and display them. In his article, “Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays,” David Jenkins explained that, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, “the number, size, and complexity of natural history museums increased dramatically in Europe and the United States.”29 By 1900, the United States had 250 natural history museums,30 with the American Museum of Natural History in New York City opening its doors in

27 Hanson, 132.
28 Mason, 3.
30 Jenkins, 244.
This increase was fueled by a desire to collect the world. Anthropologists traveled far and wide with “the explicated goal of collection as many ‘authentic’ ethnographic artifacts as possible.” The museums would then display and order the artifacts, believing that people could learn just by seeing them. There was a great desire to present the collection in some sort of scientific order. In presenting exotic artifacts in a logical manner, natural history museum served dual goals of educating and entertaining.

There was also a desire to order everything and understand it in terms of Darwin’s theories of evolution. By the end of the nineteenth century, scholars and intellectuals commonly believed in Darwin’s theories, that life had slowly changed over time from basic organisms to complex life forms, and evolution was becoming a popularly held belief as well. This Darwinian understanding had important implications. Exhibits in museums displayed specimens in their perceived place and order. Jenkins explained that natural history museum displays “increasingly came to exemplify categories that preserved the hierarchical structure of scientific classification.” However, Darwin’s ideas did not end with classifying animals by a specific order. The classification extended to humanity. Darwin’s ideas rationalized and created a scientific context for a racial hierarchy that was already in place. For

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32 Jenkins, 244.
33 Jenkins, 243, 245.
35 Jenkins, 246.
37 Jenkins, 261.
example, historian Robert Rydell argued in *All the World’s a Fair*, ”American culture at the turn of the century was imbued with racist ideas and that... prevailing assumptions were given added support with the popularization of evolutionary theories about race and culture.”

Thus, there was an increasing interest in both the natural wonders of the United States and in the exotic, a desire to understand the world in evolutionary terms, an increased ability to bring back objects that represented the exotic, and a popularly believed scientific theory that supported the superiority of lighter skin and their cultures.

This was the context in which cities began to develop modern zoos. The first zoos began in the 1860s and grew more popular as the century closed. However, animal shows in the United States had a long history. Animal presentation began slowly and intermittently during the eighteenth century with itinerant owners who traveled with a bear or other animal to pubs and town squares. Zoo development began in earnest in a post-Civil War United States. The Bronx Zoo was not the first zoo to be established; a handful of well-organized zoos pre-date it, most famously the Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and National Zoos. The vast majority of other zoos that pre-date the Bronx Zoo were more haphazardly formed—depositories for donated animals within a city park. Over the course of time the name, used to refer to zoos has changed. Zoos of this period wanted to distinguish themselves from the animal collections of the past. They did so by using the name zoological garden, instead of menagerie, which conjured up images of dank, tiny cages and collections that had no

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connection to scientific study.\textsuperscript{40} The Bronx Zoo considered itself not a zoological garden but a zoological park. A menagerie had no scientific basis, and a zoological garden implied cramped quarters and a rigidity in design that the Bronx Zoo sought to avoid.\textsuperscript{41} The Bronx Zoo’s Director, William Hornaday, was insistent on the use of this phrase, believing it alone instilled the appropriate level of importance to the Bronx Zoo.

Unlike other cities, New York City already had its great country park, and located within Central Park was a menagerie. The menagerie was centrally located and popular, containing around two hundred animals.\textsuperscript{42} Yet, there were some—particularly those with money and influence—who did not like the small menagerie and had a grander vision for New York City’s public animal collection.\textsuperscript{43} In 1884, a group of gentlemen, Theodore Roosevelt among them, created the Boone and Crockett Club with the basic goal of preserving big game from those who hunted it indiscriminately, as opposed to their group, who hunted it in a gentlemanly way.\textsuperscript{44} Ten years later, one of the Club’s two main goals was to “establish a zoological park in New York City.”\textsuperscript{45} Like the establishment of national parks, these men wanted to ensure the survival of America’s uniqueness and symbols of its western lands. To the Club, but especially to its representatives pleading its case in Albany, the meager

\textsuperscript{40} William Bridges, Gathering of Animals: An Unconventional History of the New York Zoological Society (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 115-117. I will be using zoo as a term of convenience and also because the distinctions are blurry at best (though zoo leaders would have disagreed).

\textsuperscript{41} Bridges, 115-117. This book offers the most comprehensive history of the Bronx Zoo and was written by one of the Zoo’s directors during the 1970s.


\textsuperscript{43} Roy Rosenzweig, 347-8. Some disliked the smell, others the crowds. Some people thought it was a pedestrian attraction that had no place in the city’s premier country park.

\textsuperscript{44} Bridges, 4-5.

\textsuperscript{45} Bridges, 5-6.
Central Park Menagerie did not do enough. They envisioned the largest zoological park in the country that showcased a variety of animals with special attention to the showcasing and protection of American big game. Their wish was granted when the New York legislature “chartered the private New York Zoological Society and gave it control of public resources—city land as well as municipal funds—to create the new zoo,” in 1895. The newly chartered New York Zoological Society (NYZS) began its work the following year.

The charter also provided that this park would be accessible to all. In granting land to the NYZS, the charter stated that, “The said Zoological Garden and its collections shall be free to the public without the payment of any admission fee or gratuity whatsoever for not less than seven hours a day on at least five days of the week, one of which shall be Sunday and also on all legal holidays.” This is an indication that the Zoo was truly meant to be enjoyed by and regenerative for all. Parks were believed to, as historian Galen Cranz stated, “do much to help alleviate the problems of city life,” and the Bronx Zoo would be a part of this alleviation.

The New York Zoological Society was not simply going to create a zoo; they set out to create the greatest, most innovative zoo in the world. Powerful citizens and the government of New York thought the city needed a zoo in order to be a world-class city, or rather that they needed the best zoo, along with other public

46 Bridges, 6-7.
47 Rosenzweig, 348.
48 Bridges, 31.
49 “Grant of South Bronx Park to the New York Zoological Society,” Second Annual Report, 1897: 140. All of the Annual Reports were accessed online via archive.org though physical copies also exist at the Wildlife Conservation Society Archives (WCS). The date listed is the year upon which the publication reported, not the year of publication as this is how the reports are classified on the website.
amenities, in order to be the greatest of all the world’s cities. The NYZS was at least partially motivated by making New York a great, or the great, city of the world. As the *New York Times* explained in 1896, “Although this city [New York] will possess the largest and best zoo, Pittsburg[h], Buffalo, San Francisco, Boston, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, and half a dozen other cities are now ambitious to surpass European zoos.”\(^{51}\) It was a great zoo race. Just like cities of the world needed parks, gardens, and museums, they also needed zoos. As Kay Anderson explained, “Adding a zoo—as well as a museum, library, and art gallery—appears to have been part of the process of converting...into a 'city' of affording a sense of permanence, wealthy, and metropolitan identity.”\(^{52}\) If New York City wanted to become the great city of the world, it needed a great zoo.

Soon after the NYZS’s incorporation, it chose William Hornaday as the Director for the new Zoo. He would strongly guide the planning of the Bronx Zoo and the implementation of these plans. His general vision was realized with some exceptions due to both animal requirements and a changing aesthetic on the part of the Board of Directors. He had been a driving force behind the development of the National Zoo in Washington D.C., one of the premier zoos in the country, but left because he was frustrated with the constant hindrances to his vision.\(^{53}\) He was also a noted taxidermist, specifically famous for his natural looking displays, and had traveled the world collecting specimens for Harvard’s Museum of Comparative

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\(^{52}\) Anderson, 36.

Here we can see the direct connection of zoos and natural history museums; there was a lot of crossover among the professionals and aesthetics in the two. Hornaday believed in comparatively large and naturalistic exhibits that enhanced the presentation of animals, though he also tried to apply museum exhibition styles to living specimens. He favored less ostentatious exhibits and houses and focused more on greenery and natural elements. He also thought zoological gardens should help to conserve animals he considered important, like large American mammals. He believed that close proximity between animals and viewers promoted education and entertainment.

Planning the Bronx Zoo was a multi-step process. During his first year as Director, Hornaday visited Europe to research its zoos and also chose a site among available options in New York City. The First Annual Report of the Zoological Society explained that they planned on a zoo that was bigger than the average zoological garden (though smaller than a game preserve). The animal collection would be larger, the enclosures would be more commodious for animals, and there would be a greater emphasis on conservation, spaces for artists, and animals from the United States. It would also have a positive effect on all of the citizens of the city and would be more accessible than any park before. The Zoo would have a calming and tranquil effect because of its bucolic scenery. Yet it would also be educational, with a large selection of animals arranged by their taxonomic order and ample signs to promote learning.

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54 Hurst, 8.
Hornaday chose the site, the southeast corner of the Bronx Park in 1896 and was content with his choice. Before it was the Bronx Park, the area was privately owned land. There were farms and mills, some of which the city hoped to use for the Park and some that the Park hoped to lease. Much of the land was a part of one large estate, and much of the land was not particularly developed. The Bronx Park, at this time, straddled New York City and Westchester County. The Bronx River bisected the Park with everything to the east Westchester and everything to the west, including where the Bronx Zoo would eventually be situated, New York City. The city purchased the land via eminent domain, paying around 1.2 million dollars to seven different recipients. The purchase via eminent domain indicates the city's and state's commitment to preserving green space in their booming city. By purchasing the land now, they could ensure there would be open spaces for their residents. It seems like the land purchases—the Bronx Park was only one of many parks purchased—were forward thinking actions. Further, the city's purchase shows that the land was at least somewhat attractive park space; they chose to buy this area and not another one. A later New York Times article reported that “Bronx Park was one of the most beautiful of the six new tracts of park property and would probably require less labor in the way of improvement.” This mass procurement of public park space indicates the increased value that government placed on it.

56 Bridges, 33.
58 “Visiting Bronx Park.”
The plan for the Zoo was completed and presented in 1896. Ground was broken in 1898 after some edits to the plan as well as its approval by the NYZS and the New York Board of Parks. The Zoo opened in 1899, although the original plan’s execution was not completed until 1912. The Zoo opened with the Reptile House and Aquatic Bird House completed. Some of the outdoor enclosures were completed as well like the ranges for moose, bison, elk, and caribous, the Bear Dens, the crocodile enclosure, the Wolf Dens, and the Prairie Dog Village. By 1906, the year when Ota Benga was displayed in the Zoo, the Bronx Zoo was still in the midst of completing its initial plan. According to the Eleventh Annual Report, the Bronx Zoo contained 3,624 specimens, representing 818 different species. By 1912, the original plans for the Zoo had been completed with some major modifications. According to the Seventeenth Annual Report for that year, the Zoo had 1,248 species and 4,827 specimens, an incredibly sizeable collection.

Contextualizing the time period of the Bronx Zoo’s development begins to shed light on how plurality within the Zoo came to be and explains that this plurality was the effect of larger movements. These movements were not cohesive; the veneration of open green spaces in the United States was a different movement than the desire to collect the world or understand everything in a Darwinian context. Their causes and drives were not necessarily interrelated. Yet, the commonality was that now, in a much more direct and organized manner than ever before, people

62 Bridges, 41.
63 Bridge, 52.
65 “New Zoological Gardens.”
and institutions were assigning value to nonhuman elements. Yellowstone became a national park because various people and the federal government valued its landscape enough to protect it. Natural history museums began to spring up because people thought artifacts and taxidermied animals were worth seeing in order to understand the larger world. It is in this plurality of understanding the nonhuman and valuing it in substantial but different ways that the Bronx Zoo created a space that presented plural exhibitions of its environment, animals, and Ota Benga.
Chapter Two: Landscape and Architecture

Different sights and sounds punctuate a trip to the Bronx Zoo. One leaves the city’s busy streets and enters a quiet, wooded area. Parts of the Zoo seem almost park-like, with trees everywhere and buildings tucked into them. Other parts seem more ostentatious and formal, like Baird Court where Madagascar, the Monkey House, and some administrative buildings sit. Other places are modern, like the World of Darkness, an imposing, black concrete building nestled among trees. There are also buildings that attempt to recreate far-off places. As an institution that has developed and evolved over more than a century, it makes sense that the space has various types of buildings and various landscapes.

However, it is not just in the context of the Zoo’s entire history that this variation of architecture and landscape design developed. Even in the first thirteen years of the Bronx Zoo, there were dual ideologies that created a plural landscape within the Zoo. Bronx Zoo developers had varying opinions on what a zoo should look like in the nineteenth century. Zoos were spaces that presented animals, but they were also parks (and often contained within parks). As such, their aesthetics frequently were geared toward creating sanitized versions of the preexisting, undeveloped landscape. Zoos also presented a chance to build grand and ornate buildings, an opportunity upon which many capitalized. While this variation existed in parks and zoos across the country, it is perhaps best crystallized in the Bronx Zoo because the Zoo, along with having strong leadership, was designated to be a zoo from the beginning of its development as a public green space. Many other contemporary zoos were placed within an already designed park, and their leaders
had less direction in the zoo’s aesthetic, instead having to work within the parameters of the preexisting design.

Through its variety of landscape and approaches to the exhibition of the nonhuman, the Bronx Zoo exemplified the plural understandings of nature that existed at the time. Hornaday’s dominant aesthetic valued but also manipulated the environment while Baird Court was an intentional addition that complicated this vision by physically manifesting man’s domination over nature. This chapter will first consider Hornaday’s vision for the Zoo, its execution, and its consistency with contemporary aesthetics and movements. It will then consider Baird Court in the same context. Last, it will consider the plural space that the varied philosophies created.

Zoo historians Bob Mullan and Gary Marvin described the constructed space of zoos. They explained:

> When the visitor enters the zoo he enters a realm constructed of walkways, roads, buildings, cages and enclosures, and populated by creatures of man’s choosing and displayed for man’s enjoyment. It is a realm conceived by humans imagination and controlled by human effort.\(^{68}\)

While it is one thing to understand and articulate that zoos are constructed spaces, the next step is trying to understand why and how these spaces were constructed and the complicated relationships with the environment that they manifest.

Hornaday’s and the NYZS’s deference to and adulation of nature are most easily understood in the context of the Zoo’s organization and planning. During this time, the Zoo leaders spoke in abstract terms and were able to develop ideas about

\(^{68}\) Mullan, xxii.
how they considered and wanted to present nature. For the most part, their initial planning and the ideas set forth drove the development of the Bronx Zoo. Thus, looking at the planning of the Zoo offers insight into its development through simple and streamlined articulations.

Hornaday’s first duty as Director was to choose the site for the Zoo among four options in various parks.69 He ended his tour with the South Bronx Park and was convinced it would be the ideal site. The way in which he described the Zoo’s setting indicates his deference to nature:

I shall never cease to enjoy my discovery of South Bronx Park! Nor will I ever forget my unbounded astonishment at finding...that there nature has made a marvelously beautiful and perfect combination of ridge and hollow, glade and meadow, rock, river, lake and virgin forest, and that man has mercifully preserved it all from defacement and destruction.70

Hornaday was elated by his choice. This was his chance to create a great zoological park, and he had found the perfect location with diverse topography, water, and few obvious signs of human impact. Hornaday’s discussion of the site emphasized his value he placed on natural elements within a zoo. He wanted two things in a location. First, varied topography was important. If the animals were to be exhibited in their natural settings, as Hornaday intended, there needed to be a range of locations. When they began to plan and place exhibits within the Bronx Zoo, they carefully surveyed the land, considering how various elements would work for the various animals.71 Second, he wanted a location that he perceived as unspoiled and

69 Bridges, 30.
70 William Hornaday as quoted in Bridges, 31.
untouched—that was what excited him about this site. It appeared to be virginal. He did not want an overwrought park. He and the NYZS would be constructing the land but, like many other landscape architects of their time, they spoke about such design and development in very specific terms.

The language of the early Annual Reports indicates the specific lens through which Hornaday and the NYZS understood their manipulation of the landscape. The Society idealized the park space and had faith in their ability to organically use it in ways that other, lesser zoos had not. They thought of their own manipulation of nature in very creative, unrealistic terms as exemplified in the First Annual Report:

In by far the greater number of zoological gardens or parks, the choicest landscape features have been artificially created; here it remains only to skillfully, artistically and sensibly adapt the work of nature....The society now has before it a series of preliminary plans... these plans do not involve the cutting of a single tree.

Clearly, the NYZS wanted to project, and most likely believed, that their choice of location was the best one possible. Further, they intended to use their ideal space in innovative (superior) ways. The space would be winding and intimate, without multiple exhibits in close proximity. They would use the space to create a peaceful, natural looking zoo for mostly nonnative animals.

Further, consider the language that they used to explain their construction of the park, which encapsulated how they viewed what they were doing to the environment. They highlighted that they were “adapting” the land, while other zoos were “creating” environments. The language assumes an inherent difference between the two in regards to human intervention in nature. Yet, this distinction is

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72 This is not to say that the land was “pristine,” only that they valued its perceived pristineness.
arbitrary. When does adaptation become creation? It probably occurs when animals, enclosures, fake rocks, and viewing areas are added. The nature was still artificial and created. The Bronx Zoo may have been a less manipulated place than other zoos or landscapes, but it was still manipulated. Yet, the creators found it important enough to distinguish between “create” and “adapt.” They wanted to emphasize the naturalness of their park to those reading the First Annual Report.

The creation of the crocodile exhibit exemplifies this desire to develop, or in the NYZS’s words, “adapt,” natural elements. They chose a well-suited area for the Crocodile Pool and manipulated it. As the Third Annual Report stated, “a beautiful basin in the granite ledge adjacent to the southeastern corner of the Reptile House has been lengthened by excavating soil and rock.” The result was a pool made out of rock. It had natural elements, which was Hornaday’s main focus. Yet, it was still heavily developed; they carved out rock. This is where the line between “create” and “adapt” becomes nonexistent. They created a pool. They adapted the rock to suit their purposes. What is important is that they chose to emphasize adaptation. They “lengthened” the area because they valued this sort of deference to natural elements.

The intention of exhibit design was clear: keep them natural looking. While this was certainly a valiant and understandable goal, it is important to note its flaws and simplicity. The Zoo leaders were trying to create natural looking exhibits within the terrain of the Bronx Zoo, but they were creating these exhibits for animals for which the Bronx terrain would not be an appropriate fit. On some level, Bronx Zoo

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leaders understood and believed that it was beneficial to enclose animals with organic elements, like grass and trees. They thought it would be better for bison to have some type of grass and dirt beneath their hooves than cement or for a prairie dog to have some dirt so that it could burrow. Yet, there was little discussion of the inherent contradiction that the “natural” environments they created were not natural for the vast majority of animals that would soon inhabit the Bronx Zoo. For example, the Zoo wanted to enclose pronghorn antelope in a sizeable, grassy, flat exhibit because that would best mimic their home environment.\textsuperscript{75} The mimicry, however, can never be exact. Pronghorn antelope live on vast plains in the middle of the country. The topography of the Bronx is not the same as Kansas, the size of the exhibit could not equal the vastness of the Great Plains, the presence of other species of animals was completely absent, and it was impossible to replicate the size of a large herd or social groups within the Zoo. As Mullan and Marvin explained, “nature itself cannot be reproduced.”\textsuperscript{76} That is, even if the Bronx Zoo put all of its energy into making a perfect fabrication of an animal's native environment, it still could not be done.

The NYZS leaders wanted to create naturalistic environments to enhance their visitors’ experiences and to accommodate their animals comfortably. Yet, their discussion of naturalistic exhibits was naively optimistic. They failed to realize the limitations of trying to recreate natural environments, although, the limitations soon became clear once animals were added to the landscape. There is a plurality in this understanding of environments and animals. The Bronx Zoo wanted to place

\textsuperscript{75} Bridges, 73.
\textsuperscript{76} Mullan, 77.
animals in naturalistic spaces that were aesthetically pleasing but foreign to the animals. They were assuming that an open plain was an open plain, conflating the Great Plains with a grassy field in the South Bronx Park. This created a plurality because they placed nonnative animals in native environments, interlaying an exotic (or at least distant) animal with local surroundings. Putting the two together did not create cohesion; it created coexistence.

While the *First Annual Report* extolled that things only needed to be adapted and not created in order to develop the Bronx Zoo and its exhibits, it becomes clear that this type of nuanced consideration did not apply to all elements of the pre-existing environment. Underbrush would have to be cleared in order to have a park and paths, the natural flowing rivers of the area had to be diverted, sewers had to be erected, and a pond was to be created and maintained from the rivers. Yet, in order to fell a tree, a collective decision had to be made. According to the land grant to the NYZS, the Park Department had to be consulted for the removal or addition of any trees. This indicates that trees were not something that could be destroyed without permission; they were important. But, the same could not be said of the shrubs and weeds around the tree.

The New York Zoological Society and the New York City Park Department had a good sense of what they considered worthy parts of nature. While trees are certainly a part of the natural surroundings, they are not the only part. The

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organizations wanted to keep what they considered the useful, “pretty” parts of nature, the parts that provided shade to patrons and broke up the landscape as they gazed over the park. That the Bronx Zoo wanted to keep trees is a noble goal. Yet, in doing so, they compartmentalized nature. The items that created their nature were the parts that fit into their larger vision. The trees were adulated; the underbrush was a messy side effect that could be omitted.80 By removing the other elements surrounding the tree, the Bronx Zoo designers took the tree out of its context. The Zoo presented an artificial and developed space that highlighted only the preexisting nonhuman elements Zoo developers believed to be important.

William Cronon’s discussion of nature offers some insight into Hornaday’s reverence for, yet simultaneous manipulation of, the Zoo’s landscape. In Uncommon Ground, he explained that, “Ideas of nature never exist outside a cultural context. The main reason this gets us into trouble is that nature as essence, nature as naïve reality, wants us to see nature as if it had no cultural context, as if it were everywhere and always.”81 Hornaday’s simultaneous adulation, manipulation, and compartmentalization of the landscape were the cultural context for understanding “nature” at the time. Nature had some inherent goodness, but it needed a human’s guiding hand in order to reach its full potential. In designing the landscape, the Zoo leaders believed that they were enhancing, not creating, an artificial space.

Nonetheless, even within the early park reports where there was a great deference to nature, there was still some contradictory language. The

understanding and depiction of the landscape was in the hands of Zoo leaders. While they sometimes idealized it, talking about the nonhuman in very agreeable terms, they occasionally did not. The Third Annual Report, from 1898, depicted a much different vision of the land. When the NYZS was in the stages of convincing the government and potential patrons to support the Zoo, the space was perfect. While in the process of actually constructing the Zoo, the area was depicted as a wild space that needed taming, claiming, “of all the 4,500 acres of public parks acquired... during 1884 no other portion has remained for all that period so thoroughly unknown, so overlooked, and so neglected.”

Hornaday described it was:

...an unbroken wilderness, to the eye almost as wild and unkempt as the heart of the Adirondacks. It was a jungle of ragged forest trees, brambles, bushes, and tall weeds. There were three extensive bogs, in any one of which an elephant might easily have become entombed.

The dominant language in the Annual Reports is certainly that of “adapting” the land as opposed to this excerpt of reining in a jungle. Yet, the Annual Report’s discussions of the land as “wild and unkempt” added to the legitimacy of the Park. The truly unique spaces in the world were “wild and unkempt.” Describing the Zoo area as such would have connected it with the type of nature that was in National Parks, adding to the perceived authenticity of the public park. It also made their enhancement and civilizing of the landscape all the more impressive.

The buildings were also designed to fit into the landscape as opposed to tower over it. Hornaday hoped to nestle them among the trees, trying to cut down as few trees as possible. The buildings were not supposed to dominate the

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landscape; the natural elements were. As such, the first buildings were never higher than the tree line, and they were tan and gray. Buildings in this style included the Reptile House, pictured below. Other buildings, ones that housed animals but were not necessarily meant for visitors, were simpler wooden structures. When visitors were in front of a building or range, they hopefully would not have been able to see much else, as everything would have been tucked away in the landscape. In this way, Hornaday attempted to solve the practical problem of needing buildings while keeping the overall aesthetic focused on the land itself and its elements.84

The Reptile House was one of the first buildings in the Zoo. Even today, the building sits by itself along a path, low slung among the trees and with muted colors. (Photo by author.)

In 1897, the NYZS presented its plan for the Bronx Zoo.85 It was a very spacious plan covering 262 acres. There were large enclosures intended for plains animals and more traditional outdoor exhibits which were smaller and clustered together by taxonomic order. There would also be houses and aviaries as well as a children’s play area. There were plans for a sea lion pool, beaver pond, and prairie dog colony. The Bronx Zoo’s initial plan had quasi-central courtyard, but it was

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purposely not rigid or formal. In general, the design spread the buildings and exhibits across the many acres of the Zoo, a clear result of Hornaday’s reverence for the topography of the space and the desire to highlight the natural elements of the South Bronx Park. There were also practical reasons at play. For example, the buildings were kept toward the center while the ranges were relegated to the periphery. This was because the buildings would need heat, and it would be more convenient and efficient to have them in close proximity to each other.

The design of the Bronx Zoo as Hornaday initially outlined it made use of the preexisting features and attempted to manipulate them to create the ultimate zoo space. This sort idealization and design of nature was not revolutionary for the time, though the way in which Hornaday applied park aesthetics to zoo development was an innovation that other zoos would mimic. Hornaday’s naturalistic vision of the Zoo was very much in keeping with the picturesque aesthetic of parks. As historian of parks Galen Cranz explained, “The goal for the American pleasure ground was to heighten the idea of naturalness with forms suggested by nature but not to rely on what nature actually provided.”86 This is exactly what Hornaday wanted to do. He wanted to show deference to natural spaces but improve upon them. The First Annual Report articulated that the Zoo would be constructing practical structures but would not lose sight of “preserving the natural beauty and wildness of the spot.”87 While he was creating these spaces for animals and Zoo visitors, Hornaday was relying heavily on the same aesthetics that were popular for parks. At this point in time in the United States, people had

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86 Cranz, 26.
begun to earnestly value outdoor space as inherently good for people. Privileged elites traveled to the countryside for retreats and to commune with nature. Those who could not, the poorer residents of cities, could find the same type of retreat in urban parks.

Parks were thought to civilize people. They were not only valued as relaxing oases but as relaxing oases that had a practical purpose. They would help in developing more civilized citizens. They would promote family values; rather than spend his day off at the saloon, a father could spend the day taking his family to the park. Cronon argued that this idea was not new: “No less important was the powerful romantic attraction of primitivism—dating back at least to Rousseau—the belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living.”88 Cronon related this idea to perceived “wild” places, but the park was the closest many would come to the frontier, and the people designing the parks understood this. The Second Annual Report articulated this sentiment. It stated, “the poorest people are those who suffer the most, because it is so difficult to place within their reach great areas of pure air, and restful woods, and waters.”89 Cities were great ills, and the remedy was getting outdoors, a difficult task for the poor, urban classes. The NYZS hoped to help remedy the problem. They believed that their Zoo would help the poorest people

88 Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 76.
get to the outdoors; they called its development “a philanthropic enterprise of the first magnitude.”

This was the cultural ideal that partially drove development, what Cronon called “nature as moral imperative.” A very specific vision of nature fit into this moral imperative. Nature was thought to be regenerative in a very specific way and with a very specific aesthetic. Hornaday’s vision of manipulation and deference was in keeping with his time period’s understanding of nature and its utility. Even though the Bronx Zoo was a zoo, it was set within a park. Also, given the fact that it was free most days, people would have used the Bronx Zoo in connection with the larger South Bronx Park. A day at the Park might involve a quick trip into the Monkey House. A day at the Bronx Zoo might end with a picnic in the park. In this way also, the Zoo made the Park a plural space.

Further complicating the Zoo as a space was that there were other “moral imperatives” at play. While most of the original 1896 plan was followed, changes, deletions, and additions occurred for a variety of reasons. These changes created a less cohesive, more diverse landscape. It is important to note, however, the aesthetic and emphasis outlined above found its place throughout the early development of the Zoo and can still be seen today during a visit to the Bronx Zoo. Most of the Zoo feels like a wooded park, giving the visitors the intimate feeling that Hornaday was trying to create. However, this feeling is not consistent throughout

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the Zoo, and the greatest departure from Hornaday’s aesthetic took place during the Zoo’s early years.

The most major stylistic change in the Zoo was to Baird Court, which had been in the original plans though in a different form. The area of the Court had fewer trees than other areas of the park and was a fairly flat area before construction. Because of this, the area was always intended to be a cluster of buildings though the original plan for them was less symmetric and in keeping with the architecture of the other buildings in the Zoo. Baird Court was finished in 1912, completing the construction of the Zoo’s original plan. However, by the time it was done, it was far more rigid and without natural elements that Hornaday venerated and on which he tried to focus the zoological aesthetic.92

Even today, Baird sits differently within the landscape than other parts of the Zoo. In most of the Zoo trees surround the buildings, the paths are winding, and the land has gentle slopes. Baird Court presents a very different image: it sits on flat piece of land, and buildings are symmetrically placed around a rectangular concrete courtyard. The few trees are arranged linearly, and there is a sea lion pool in the center. The Elephant House, with a tall domed top that juts above the tree line, sits on one end of the Court, and the Concourse is at the other. The Concourse sits at the bottom of a grand staircase (the only one like it in the Zoo), and a road encircles the large Italian Fountain at the bottom of the stairs. It is clearly stylistically different than the rest of the Zoo in its architecture, symmetry, lack of trees, and flat gradient.

92 Horowitz, 433.
There was controversy surrounding the change from the original plan of the Court to the one that was actually implemented. As historian Helen Horowitz illustrated, it is clear through personal letters that Hornaday was distraught by the changes. In fact, he was angry. The new design, which was approved in 1899, included the cutting of fifteen trees. In a letter to his wife, Hornaday lamented, "I am afraid of it. It is not necessary for the trees to be cut, and I will be drawn and quartered before I will ever admit that it is." There was debate among the Executive Committee as well. Some agreed with Hornaday, arguing that the new plan was “quite out of humor with the beautiful features of this portion of the Park.” Other Zoo leaders disagreed with Hornaday’s adulation of natural elements. They wanted create a more formal area within the Zoo, setting it apart from the general flow of the Zoo’s design and the Park’s topography. The new plan

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93 Horowitz, 435.
94 Horowitz, 433.
95 William Hornaday to Josephine Hornaday, August 18, 1897, box 1, Hornaday Papers, Library of Congress, as quoted in Horowitz, 433.
96 “Statement from the Chairman of the Executive Committee and of Sub-Committee upon Plans relative to the places of Baird Court and the Concourse,” Art and Architecture, Landscape Architects; re: planning Baird Court and the Concourse, et al., 1899-1903 Folder, Subseries 3b, Madison Grant Collection, Wildlife Conservation Society Archives, Bronx Zoo, New York, New York.
oriented the Court along a different axis that seemed contrary to Hornaday given the
topography. The new plan also placed the Court on one single level, which
required a lot of grading, “walling the sides,” and widening the space. The changes
were downplayed in the Annual Reports so as to avoid a controversy but are
apparent in the different plans of the Zoo during these years. Ultimately, the more
formal design for Baird Court won and was constructed, adding to the plurality of
the landscape of the Zoo.

Hornaday’s anger indicates that he believed the changes to be contradictory
to the overall aesthetic that the Zoo that had already established. He understood
that the additions would add plurality to the Zoo’s aesthetic, though he probably
would have used stronger language. The NYZS, in constructing Baird Court against
the articulated wishes of its Director, was knowingly adding plurality to the Zoo
landscape. They were adding an area that devalued the nonhuman and that
emphasized human superiority over it. Landscape Architect H.A. Caparn articulated
that the formal design of Baird Court “results in a complication of natural with
formal treatment.” This plurality was not happenstance; it was purposeful.

Formalizing Baird Court echoed changing aesthetics and changing ideologies
that were becoming popular across the country. Horowitz claimed that Baird Court
was meant to resemble the Court of Honor at the 1893 Chicago Columbian
Exposition, with a formal and symmetric court in the center surrounded by less

97 “Statement from the Chairman of the Executive Committee and of Sub-Committee upon Plans
relative to the places of Baird Court and the Concourse.”
98 Bridges, 47.
99 H.A. Caparn to Henry Osborn, November 8, 1902, Art and Architecture, Landscape Architects; re:
planning Baird Court and the Concourse, et al., 1899-1903 Folder, Subseries 3b, Madison Grant
Collection, Wildlife Conservation Society Archives, Bronx Zoo, New York, New York.
ornate grounds. People idealized the Court of Honor and the rest of the White City at the Chicago World’s Fair and that was the Fair leader’s intentions. Historian Robert Rydell explained that the White City in the 1893 Columbian Exposition was a “manifestation of what was good in American life and as an ennobling vision Americans should strive to effectuate.”

The Bronx Zoo mimicked this aesthetic, as did other parks and zoos. Cranz explained that the movement to more formal buildings and structures within public green spaces started after the Chicago World’s Fair and continued to be popular during the first third of the twentieth century. The Fair was an important event from which many civic institutions, including zoos, took cues. While some aspects of the Bronx Zoo blended into the elements, others stood dominantly over them, and none stood more strongly than Baird Court. Here, landscape elements were not the centerpieces; the buildings, distinctly human elements, were. While other parts of the Zoo controlled the environment, it was done in more subtle ways that still presented and highlighted nonhuman landscape elements. Baird Court did not do this. It presented a very ostentatious and controlled aesthetic that was the antithesis of Hornaday’s vision. Horowitz argued that one of the main goals of the NYZS, through Baird Court, had become to “bring to an urban population not wilderness but civilization.” Certainly this was a function of Baird Court, but the

100 Horowitz, 436.
101 Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 40.
102 Cranz, 55.
103 Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 6.
104 Horowitz, 443.
site served other functions as well, like the promotion of the greatness and resources of New York City through its ornate structure.

The differing philosophies behind the Bronx Zoo’s dual aesthetics, both of which hoped to civilize the Zoo’s visitors, indicate the Zoo’s acceptance of plural displays of the landscape. The concurrent focuses were contradictory, but both found a place within the Zoo. Hornaday’s vision dominated the majority of the landscape and emphasized a manipulated “naturalness” that focused on nonhuman elements within the Zoo. Baird Court, as a formal, rigid, and imposing square, stood against the rest of the Zoo’s aesthetic, seemingly in defiance to it. One’s focus was to hide construction by manipulating natural elements and by tucking the obviously manmade elements into the scenery. The other sought to do the opposite, leveling the ground and building large ornate structures. Yet, both hoped to civilize Bronx Zoo visitors. The way in which the environment fit into this singular charge was plural, or rather contradictory.

The first piece in constructing the Zoo as a holistic space is the landscaping itself. Within this one aspect of the larger Zoo, the Bronx Zoo offered layered visions. While Hornaday may have been unhappy with the change, the larger NYZS allowed it to happen and was the impetus for the change. Within less than fifteen years, they created two dueling aesthetics within one space. They did not try to unite them by formalizing Hornaday’s larger aesthetic or deforming Baird Court. Instead, they were content with the varied aesthetics and the messages that they sent regarding the nonhuman world—one that adulated it and one that contradicted it—within their Zoo.
Chapter Three: The Animal

When I was younger, my family braved a particularly long and hot day at Grandma’s Zoo. By the end, my little feet were tired, and my parents were ready to finish their day of shepherding us through the Zoo. Then, my older brother realized something my parents hoped he’d forgotten: we had missed the okapi. The okapi was on the complete opposite side of the Zoo, and nothing would do except to traverse the Zoo in order to see it. We walked to the other end, looked at it for no more than two minutes, turned around, and walked back.

What my older brother did was not so different than what the Bronx Zoo leaders did regarding animal viewing: he was placing value on seeing a specific animal for multiple reasons. The okapi was inherently worth seeing; it was cool, as my brother would have told you. (He also could have told you all of the facts he had memorized about it.) The okapi also interested him because of its evolutionary place (its closest relative is a giraffe!). Further, it is a rare animal both in the wild and in zoos (we could not see one at the tiny zoo by our house). If we had missed it, my brother would have considered our day incomplete because we would not have seen the entire scope of the Bronx Zoo’s impressive collection.

The plural understandings my brother assigned to the okapi resonated with the types of values placed on animals in the historic Bronx Zoo. While plurality in understanding can be understood in the multiple value assignments to an individual animal, such as my brother placed on the okapi, it can be more thoroughly understood by looking at the various modes of exhibition within the Bronx Zoo.
These plural exhibition modes were no accident nor were they part of a rigid hierarchy that assigned specific and relative value to all animals.

The plurality of exhibition modes were manifestations of different contextualizations of animals—Darwinian organization, popular interest, cultural importance, and naturalistic aesthetics—though their common value is evidenced through their very presence and the consistent emphasis on their visibility. This chapter will consider four exhibit spaces and the motivating factors behind their presentation. It will then explore the overall commonalities and pluralities among these exhibits. The four exhibit spaces to be examined are the Beaver Pond, which emphasized a naturalistic aesthetic, the Antelope House, which emphasized taxonomic order, the Bison Range, which emphasized conservation and the uniqueness of the United States, and the Small Mammal House which represented a desire to collect the world.

The Beaver Pond was an enclosure where Bronx Zoo leaders attempted to apply the naturalistic aesthetic of the Zoo’s landscape in an exhibit. The Beaver Pond reveals Zoo leaders’ desire to display at least some animals in what they believed to be endemic, appropriate settings. It was set off by itself, in a wooded area with little else around it, placing the animals in a naturalistic setting and offering peaceful solace for the zoo-goers. While this type of exhibition was common in zoos of the time, it was certainly not the only type of presentation. Many public green spaces had deer parks that were essentially enclosed areas within designed parks. It was thought that these types of exhibits could enhance the overall park aesthetic by
showing animals in their natural settings. The Beaver Pond was created in the same vein, though required more technical mastery than a deer park did.

The Zoo leaders also hoped that the beavers would behave normally in their enclosure. The First Annual Report stated that the only trees cut down in the Zoo would be ones felled by beavers. They hoped that the beavers would cut down trees with their teeth, build a dam and lodge, and act as beavers should. This indicates a notion that animals might be more comfortable in a more “authentic” environment. The Zoo leaders hoped that the beavers might act normally given the chance and, therefore, put effort into creating an environment where this might occur. This did in fact happen to an extent, but the beavers quickly felled all of the trees in the enclosure and other arrangements had to be made.

This exhibition also indicated that value was placed on seeing beavers in a naturalistic habitat. The New York Times explained, “To watch this operation of dam building will be one of the most interesting sights to visitors.” People would be able to witness firsthand how a beaver behaved and understand what it constructed. They would be able to see the animals interact with their environment. In its First Annual Report, the NYZS articulated that they thought the “ideal vivarium” for animals was one that “most closely approximating those with which nature usually surrounds them, in spaces so extensive that with many species the sense of confinement is either lost or greatly diminished, yet at the same time sufficiently limited that the animals are not inaccessible or invisible to the

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106 It also indicates Hornaday’s deference to nature and reverence for trees.
107 Bridges, 74.
visitor.”¹⁰⁹ This meant that the naturalistic aesthetic of the Beaver Pond was seen as both beneficial for the animal and for the visitor. Further, the beavers could be maintained within the larger park aesthetic, and the overall civilizing effect of the landscape could be maintained.

Not only did the beavers exist within the Zoo’s aesthetic, they enhanced it. Beavers, unlike many of the other animals in the Bronx Zoo, are endemic to the area, if not to the Bronx specifically. Thus their presence could heighten the perceived authenticity of the environment. It harkened to the American wilderness in a way that the Antelope House could not. Consider the language employed in the 1909 *Popular Official Guide* to describe the Beaver Pond: “The spot is so secluded, so silent and primeval, that it seems like the heart of the Adirondack wilderness.”¹¹⁰ The Beaver Pond was a designed exhibit, but the designers attempted to evoke a sense of wilderness. They hoped the exhibit would heighten the authenticity of the Zoo’s landscape as a natural environment. This type of viewing would have multiple benefits; it would add to the natural elements of the overall Zoo aesthetic, offer the visitors great insight into animals, and give the animals appropriate accommodations. While Zoo leaders attempted to live up to this plan and its encompassing goals for the Beaver Pond, different values and focuses took precedent in the development of other exhibits.

In a short walk back to the less “primeval” part of the Zoo, visitors found the Antelope House. The House, completed in 1903,\textsuperscript{111} presented a stark contrast to the naturalistic exhibit found at the Beaver Pond. The Antelope House reflected the taxonomic fixation of zoos and other turn of the twentieth century institutions as well as the practicalities that hindered cohesive presentations. The Antelope House had twenty-four interior enclosures all connected to outdoor spaces. Its aim was to display African and “tropical” antelope, and it also housed elephants, hippos, rhinos, and giraffes.\textsuperscript{112} The building had a long corridor down the middle with a few potted plants, cages on each side, some windows in the walls, and skylights.\textsuperscript{113} The interior cages were bare rectangles, perhaps with some hay scattered on the grass. The exterior enclosures were rectangular, caged dirt floors with some trees.\textsuperscript{114}

This image of the interior of the Antelope House in 1906, shortly after its opening, shows the layout, complete with skylights and simple cages. (\textit{Zoological Bulletin}, no. 12, January 1904: 126.)

\textsuperscript{111} Bridges, 215.
One of the Bronx Zoo’s goals was to educate its visitors, and they thought that the best way to do this was to present animals by taxonomic order. While today’s zoos might be more concerned with education about ecosystems or animal adaptations, the focus at the turn of the century was on ordering animals. This ordering is apparent in the separation of the Zoo into the Antelope House and similarly themed areas. For example, the 1909 Bronx Zoo had a Bear Den area, Reptile House, Aquatic Bird House, Large Bird House, Camel House, Asiatic Deer area, Duck Aviary, Fox Dens, Llama House, Ostrich House, Primate House, and many more. In exhibiting the animals in such groupings, Hornaday and other Zoo leaders believed that visitors could learn about evolution by simply comparing evolutionarily related though different species, like comparing various antelopes to each other. When the Zoo leaders referred to the animals in their collection as “specimens,” on some level, they were not using the word as a term of convenience. As in natural history museums, they arranged all of the animals by taxonomic order to create a living museum, complete with living artifacts.

Taxonomic ordering was the default system of organization. In the *First Annual Report*, Hornaday stated that they hoped to fill the Zoo with “good examples of the principal orders, families and sub-families of the higher land vertebrates.”

This order was mentioned passingly and without explanation because this was the assumed mode of organization for the turn of the century and required little explanation. The *First Annual Report* dwelled on articulating the goals of naturalistic exhibit display. Yet, it did not articulate clearly that the other animals, the ones that were not going to be in outdoor ranges, would be indoors and arranged by taxonomic order. It was simply assumed. In fact, it is difficult to find a passage in the *Annual Reports* where the Bronx Zoo leaders specifically articulated their desire to arrange the animals taxonomically and explain evolutionary change by placing animals side by side to allow visitors the opportunity to compare. It was the understood mode of educational animal presentation during the turn of the century. For example, in an editorial to the *New York Times* where someone questioned the educational value of the Bronx Zoo as a whole, they mentioned that they completely understood the utility of a zoo in teaching a child how to “distinguish a tiger from a leopard at first glance, or to note the nice points of difference between a hyena and a coyote.” The author of this article was arguing against the educational value of zoos, but, even in doing so, the one way that the author did suggest the Bronx Zoo’s validity was in its ability to set up comparisons between animals. Placing animals next to one another and learning the similarities

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and differences between them was the universally understood context in which to understand animals.

The exhibitions themselves, however, could not be so clear-cut. The Antelope House also exhibited hippos and rhinos. This was because they were considered necessary animals for a zoo but had no other place to be exhibited. Practicalities hindered the hope of displaying animals in a purely taxonomic order. The additional animals surely would have diluted the Bronx Zoo’s vision from the visitors’ perspectives. The taxonomic display would have been confused by the presence of other animals that were not a part of the intended evolutionary display. These animals’ presences indicate there were other Zoo goals that complicated taxonomic arrangements. One of these was the desire to have an extensive collection, exemplified by the rhinos in the Antelope House and by the existence of a Small Mammal House.

The Small Mammal House, completed in 1905,\textsuperscript{118} was designed in a similar style to the Antelope House but more densely packed. The cages themselves were small, and, in the \textit{Popular Official Guide}, Hornaday explained that this was because the animals required “little space, but plenty of care.”\textsuperscript{119} The interior was a long hall with a mostly windowed roof to allow for light, a corridor down the middle with guardrails, and a few potted trees.\textsuperscript{120} Imagine walking down a hall with 176 cages of various sizes, sometimes stacked on top of each other, and filled with animals lining


the walls.\textsuperscript{121} The cages were rectangular with cement floors, brick walls, iron bars, and little else save for a food or water bucket. The outdoor spaces were small pens with dirt floors that did not connect to all interior cages. The animals in the Small Mammal House included leopards and various cats, foxes, wild dogs, badgers, squirrels, porcupines, capybaras, armadillos, echidnas, sloths, and anteaters.\textsuperscript{122} The Small Mammal House also contained a beaver, which would have been more clearly visible than its fellow beavers in the Beaver Pond.

This 1906 image of the Small Mammal House shows the vast amount of cages that were inside. The right side shows the larger cages that were for animals like big cats. The left side shows the cages that were stacked on top of each other where the smaller mammals, like squirrels, would have been. (Zoological Bulletin, no. 16, January 1905: 194).

\textsuperscript{121} The Small Mammal House,” Zoological Society Bulletin: 193. The cages came in three sizes, seven feet wide and five feet tall, four feet wide and three and a half feet tall, and three and third feet wide and two and half feet tall.

The house had its purpose from the Zoo’s perspective, serving as a sort of catch-all for the mammals that did not have their own houses.\textsuperscript{123} As historian Thomas Veltre explained, “In effect, the zoo was an encyclopedia of life, illustrated with live animal exhibits.... A popular belief evolved which held that a great zoo should be as comprehensive as possible, containing (like a good postage stamp collection) one of everything from all over the world.”\textsuperscript{124} A comprehensive zoo collection was one that contained many types of animals. That was the idea and driving force behind many of the exhibits in the Bronx Zoo, simply to have as many species of animals as possible.

This motivation to display as many animals as possible can be understood through various lenses. It can be interpreted as a sort of carry-over from the aesthetics and organization of natural history museums. In this sense, it was important to collect everything. As Jenkins explained, there was an obsession with

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collecting artifacts from around the world and, in this case, animals were the specimens being collected. The display can be understood as a part of the quest to have the best zoo in the country. The quality of a zoo was measured in the quantity of animals. A bad zoo had few animals. The best zoo had every animal. In order for the Bronx Zoo to be the best, it had to have as many animals as possible.

This focus on quantity can also be viewed as a representation of vast colonial power. Berger called animal display the “symbolic representation of the conquest of all distant and exotic lands.”\textsuperscript{125} The animals were the symbol of the breadth of the United States’ growing power in the world. Yet, there could have been more explicit displays of colonialism if Zoo leaders were not so interested in taxonomic order. The animals were not arranged geographically or in any other context that would have obviously manifested a colonial understanding of animals. This was done in other zoos, however, and animals were placed within buildings that supposedly represented the culture of their country of origin.\textsuperscript{126} In this way, the Bronx Zoo could have clearly contextualized its animals as artifacts from around the world, explicitly symbolizing animals as exotic relics. Yet, the Zoo did not do this; it placed North American mice next to South American mice next to African mice. Darwinian order was the more explicit, persistent, and important mode of exhibition. Further, Mullan and Marvin argued that zoo-goers have cared little about where animals were from or how they got there, making animals less effective vehicles for displaying colonial might.\textsuperscript{127} Many did not care what species of animal or its origins

\textsuperscript{125} Berger, 259.
\textsuperscript{126} Anderson, 37.
\textsuperscript{127} Mullan, 74.
while viewing an animal, simply that it was interesting to watch. For instance, many people enjoy looking at monkeys, but they are not interested in where the monkey is from, what type of monkey it is, or even that it is different than an ape.\textsuperscript{128}

This “catch-all” exhibit style indicated a value in quantity. In order to educate people about the world and entertain them, the Zoo attempted to show a great diversity of animals. While today we might place value on seeing an animal in its natural environment or watching a video of an animal do something amazing, like hunt or fly through the air in slow motion so we can see how the wings move, zoo leaders of the early twentieth century valued the presentation of as many different animals as possible. Today, we can see all of the animals of the world on the Internet, through videos, and in truly amazing ways that were not fathomable one hundred years ago. Zoos of today have to compete with these modern types of presentation, and a simple bare cage with little else in it might not compete, even if the zoo is presenting a real animal. Quality over quantity is more important today, and this is a reversal of past beliefs.\textsuperscript{129} In 1912, the Bronx Zoo exhibited over 1,200 different species. Today that number is around 600, half of what it once was.\textsuperscript{130} While 600 is still a substantial number, all other things being equal, one would expect there to be more animals now given technology, refined animal husbandry techniques, and relative ease of transportation. But, in a world where the Internet did not exist, it must have been exciting to see the dazzling range of animals and learn about the world’s biodiversity.

\textsuperscript{128} Mullan, 74. Also an indication that the taxonomic ordering did not have its intended goal.

\textsuperscript{129} This is true for other reasons as well, like that the animal trade has become more responsible.

The Small Mammal House reflected an emphasis on quantity, but it also demonstrated an emphasis on visibility. A visitor may have gone to the Beaver Pond and not been able to see the animal, a common problem in the enclosure.\textsuperscript{131} They could have encountered another, more visible beaver in the Small Mammal House.\textsuperscript{132} This means that beavers in the Zoo were displayed in two ways. The Beaver Pond emphasized the naturalistic aesthetic and authenticity of the Zoo, and Zoo leaders hoped it added authenticity to the pastoral landscape. Its display in the Small Mammal House would have been a sparse cage with little context. The multiple beaver displays exemplify the plurality that existed within the Zoo. Depending on what beaver exhibit a visitor saw, they would experience the beaver in entirely different contexts. Also, the Zoo was willing to display the beavers in different ways. They were not conflicted in presenting a single species in plural exhibit spaces. Both exhibits appealed to different goals of the Zoo. The Beaver Pond attempted to typify the natural environment of a beaver and also added to the larger aesthetic of the park. The beaver within the Small Mammal House was visible. Visitors could see its buckteeth, paddle-like tail, and learn about the beaver through viewing it. The animal itself was valued in different ways, both as it enhanced the landscape and as an entity worth seeing in and of itself.

While the Small Mammal House manifested the value in quantity, the treatment of the bison in the Zoo was based on their symbolic importance in the country. The Buffalo Range, constructed for the Bronx Zoo’s opening, was located in the southeastern corner of the Zoo. The area contained more spacious exhibits than

other parts of the Zoo; the whole range was twenty acres and exhibited various plains animals. The exhibit was enclosed by fencing and carved into a small hill, surrounded by woods. On one end, a deck was built into the hill from which the visitors overlooked the small herd of bison gathered on a dirt filled range.

The Zoo attempted to create a naturalistic exhibit for the bison, trying to recreate a large plain from the middle of the country in New York City. One of the reasons that the Bronx Zoo even existed was out of concern for the diminishing bison population, which spurred the creation of the NYZS. Bison represented the American West—the uniqueness of the United States—and the disappearance of the animal would mean that the United States had foolishly squandered one of its most important legacies. As John Mack Faragher explained in his foreword to Hornaday's treatise on bison conservation, “in the twentieth century the buffalo became one of the nation’s most important icons, a symbol of both wildness and the terrible cost of

134 Bridges, 97. The exhibit was in keeping with Hagenbeck’s overall aesthetic of no physical barrier but distance, despite Hornaday’s proclaimed dislike for the aesthetic.
development.” By preserving bison, Hornaday and the Bronx Zoo were leading the symbolic charge to preserve the American West.

The spacious bison exhibit and NYZS’s commitment to the species’ conservation reflected the bison’s importance. They had two enclosures, one for display and another, slightly more distant from view, for breeding. Even though the NYZS thought that many other animals around the globe were also endangered, as is clear from their Popular Official Guides, they did not try particularly hard to save those animals. Rather, they brought them from great distances (many did not survive the journey) and displayed them in sparse cages, like those found in the Antelope House and Small Mammal House, frequently without a potential mate. Bison were viewed differently because they were important to the United States. The only sincere conservation efforts in the Bronx Zoo were geared toward big game from the United States.

While there were small mammals from the United States in the cages of the Small Mammal House, some, like beavers and prairie dogs, also had larger, outdoor exhibits. American animals were given larger exhibits indicating that the Zoo valued them differently than they valued other animals. American animals were perceived to be symbols of this country and its lands. Elizabeth Hanson explained that large American mammals “evoked national pride.” As such, they needed to be located in an environment that resonated with people’s ideas about the West. The exhibit

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137 Hanson, 46.
138 Hanson, 46.
needed to conjure the appropriate image in the minds of Bronx Zoo visitors. While a Barbary sheep from Africa might have found itself in an indoor enclosure with a cement floor, a bighorn sheep would have been presented outdoors in a large exhibit with a rocky hill. For American mammals from the West, equally important to the animal itself was the idea that went along with the animal. Elizabeth Hanson explained that “American zoos originated in a context of increasingly widespread appreciation for the natural wonders of the American landscape.”

The Boone and Crockett Club’s (the precursor the NYZS) initial concern was rescuing the diminishing bison population. Bison were perceived as natural wonders of the American landscape and symbols of the country, and the Bronx Zoo was trying to place them in an exhibit appropriate to their status.

However, practical problems hindered the exhibition of the bison as they did other areas of the Zoo. The hopes of naturalistic exhibits for nonnative animals that were discussed in Landscape and Architecture had consequences. The Zoo planned to exhibit bison in a natural enclosure, which they hoped would encourage breeding and be an ideal exhibit for the animals and viewers alike. This was easier said than done, and the exhibition faced various pitfalls. For Opening Day, Zoo leaders had painstakingly picked out the first fifteen bison specimens. However, they were abruptly reminded, as Hanson articulated, that “natural settings are not equivalent.” Soon after the bison were released, they all died from intestinal

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139 There was also a practicality to this because a bighorn sheep could live outside year-round in New York, but an animal from a more tropical climate might not have been able to do this. Yet, little effort was made to accommodate these tropical animals in the same way that the zoo tried to meet the perceived needs of animals indigenous to the United States.
140 Hanson, 132.
141 Hanson, 135.
diseases from eating grasses that were foreign to them. This should have made it clear to Hornaday and others that grass is not just grass and that their hope to fit nonnative animals into landscaped exhibits was flawed. While they could not fully understand bacteria and microbial diseases at the time, these deaths still should have been a clear indication of the shortcomings of naturalistic exhibits. Yet deaths due to the grass in the exhibits—this problem afflicted other mammals as well—continued for five years. In 1904, much of the grass in the big game exhibits was removed. This means that stubbornness had allowed for large mammals to die for close to five years while the Zoo came to this conclusion. The Zoo leaders had seen the pattern emerge for years and not acted. To some extent, the choice was between keeping the animals alive and maintaining the larger park aesthetic. This is not to say that the leaders were purposely putting animals into cages that they knew to be lethal. Rather, perhaps they were ignoring the connections that should have been apparent.

Yet, despite these setbacks, the conservation project did progress. Part of this progression included a 1913 decision that the Zoo could not keep moose, caribou, and pronghorn antelopes and did not purchase any more, finally understanding that their were limits to the Bronx Zoo’s exhibits. The bison-breeding program was ultimately successful. As early as 1906, the Zoo donated to the United States Government "a herd of fifteen buffaloes" that were moved to a

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142 Hanson, 135; Horowitz, 444.
143 Horowitz, 444.
144 Horowitz, 444.
game reserve in Wichita.\footnote{Hornaday, \textit{Popular Official Guide}, 1907: 16-17.} By introducing bison bred in captivity into the wild, the Bronx Zoo achieved its most specifically articulated goal.

Among the varied exhibit presentations, ranging from open ranges to small cages, the commonalities are basic but important. All of these animals were important enough to put in a zoo. The Bronx Zoo believed that these animals were inherently worth seeing. The \textit{First Annual Report} explained the primary reason for a zoo; people wanted to see animals. It articulated that "If any one doubts the public desire to know more of the living creatures who inhabit the earth and its waters, let him mingle for an hour in the crowds that throng the Battery Park Aquarium or the Central Park Menageries."\footnote{William Hornaday, "The New York Zoological Society—Its plans and purposes," \textit{First Annual Report}, 1896: 13-14.} They also claimed that this interest crossed social barriers: "the zoological garden forms the chief centre of attraction, and the rallying point of all the various organizations and individuals who are in any way interested in the study or observation of animal life."\footnote{William Hornaday, "The New York Zoological Society—Its plans and purposes," \textit{First Annual Report}, 1896: 13-14.} The Bronx Zoo leaders believed that the desire to see animals was common and pervasive in society. A 1904 article in the \textit{New York Times} echoed their sentiments: "But apart from the scientific, educational, and humanizing power of animals in tameness or captivity, there is the undeniable fact that the great cities in all countries have collections of wild animals, which they find it worth while to make and maintain because the people want them."\footnote{“Value of the ‘Zoo,’” \textit{New York Times}, April 27, 1904, page 8.} Exhibition of animals occurred because people were interested in them.
The NYZS believed this and attempted to deliver a product that they thought would be universally beneficial and enjoyable.

An animal’s visibility within its enclosure was of the utmost importance, and this indicates that clear viewing of the animals was the most significant factor of their presentation. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the case of the dual beaver display. Some of them were moved from the outdoor enclosure to the indoor space so that visitors could more easily see them, emphasizing animal visibility. There was also a specific way in which people were thought to most benefit from viewing animals, and this involved proximity. Leaders valued the experience of coming in close contact with animals. Even if visitors did see the beavers in their pond, it would have been an obscured view. A cage in the Small Mammal House would provide a clearer and a more proximate viewing.

This emphasis on proximity can be best understood through Hornaday’s concept of an ideal exhibit versus other ones that began to flourish during this time. Starting in the late nineteenth century, German Karl Hagenbeck, a famous animal trader and zoo director, championed a bar-less exhibit aesthetic.\textsuperscript{149} He thought animals should be separated from viewers by distance only through the use of ditches, moats, or walls to create barriers. It was a very popular design scheme as it presented an exhibition alternative where bars did not separate humans and animals and began to catch on in Europe and other parts of the world starting in the late nineteenth century. In Hagenbeck’s vision, the only thing separating the humans from animals was space.

\textsuperscript{149} This style can still be seen today in zoos.
Hornaday found this mode of exhibition unacceptable. He thought that separating animals from viewers by “a distance of sixty or seventy feet” was a “great disadvantage” to the Bronx Zoo and specifically to its educational goals.¹⁵⁰ Hornaday believed people should be close to animals, as close as possible. Through this proximity, people would be able to observe animals and learn about their physical appearance and movements. Hornaday disliked bars, as he found them too obtrusive, but he understood their utility and preferred them to distance. However, where he could, he made sure wire mesh fences were used instead of bars, hoping to use the type of fencing that “comes nearest to being invisible.”¹⁵¹ He believed that this would enhance the viewing experience. The hope was to create the smallest barrier possible between the viewers and the animals. Bars, while a physical separation, could allow for close viewing through which people could clearly see animals and perhaps even feel a sense of connection to them.

There was an underlying value assigned to all of the animals in the Bronx Zoo; they would not have been in the Zoo if the leaders did not think they were worth seeing. People enjoyed viewing animals. Yet, they were contextualized in plural ways that echoed multiple conceptualizations of organizational threads regarding animals. There was value in seeing an animal in its natural habitat, which would heighten the visitor’s viewing and the authenticity of the landscape. Value was placed on animals as parts of larger taxonomic displays or as parts of a larger

¹⁵⁰ Hornaday as quoted in Bridges, 387. While it was certainly not the dominant aesthetic in the park, it found its place in the zoo. For example, the bison range had an overlook that was made in the same sort of vein as Hagenbeck's aesthetic.
collection. Animals could also become symbols. The multiple modes of animal exhibition added to an already complicated landscape. The animals were presented in different types of exhibits and in different organizational contexts. As with the beaver, even for one animal, there could be varied displays. These exhibitions occurred concurrently and without any clear acknowledgement of the plurality. The only obvious articulation of common emphasis from the Zoo leaders was regarding visibility and value of the animals. All of these animals were “zoo-worthy.” The Zoo leaders considered them worthy of display, placed them in the Zoo, and emphasized their visibility and proximity to visitors. The next chapter will explore what happened when “zoo-worthiness” extended beyond animals.
Chapter Four: The Human

September, 1906 remains the most famous month in the Bronx Zoo’s more than one hundred year history. Or rather, it remains its most infamous month. During this month the Bronx Zoo displayed Ota Benga, a man from the Congo region of Africa, like a zoo animal. He was popular, drawing large crowds, and his exhibition was only mildly tempered by outcry from various groups. Yet, in examining the unique instances of exhibition in the Zoo, like Ota Benga’s, the spectrum of what the leaders considered “zoo-worthy” is broadened. The exhibition of Ota Benga also serves as a snapshot into a moment in time when people were not valued equally, and the progressive scientific movements rationalized this valuation.

By exhibiting Ota Benga, capitalizing on cultural interests in the exotic and in Social Darwinism, the Bronx Zoo hybridized the man, presenting him as both human and animal, which added to the plurality of the Zoo. This chapter will first explain the social atmosphere that allowed for such an exhibition. Next, it will specify how Benga came to be in the Zoo. It will then explain the plural rationales for his presentation, how he was hybridized, and how he complicated the Zoo’s scope of exhibition.

As explained in the Introduction and The Animal, there was an interest at the turn of the century in “collecting the world,” and this collection extended to people from distant cultures as it did to animals. The cultural fascination with people from the “dark continent” was not new.152 Within this fascination, “pygmies,” a term used

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to describe many cultures of people of smaller physical stature, held a special place. Many scientists considered “pygmies” to be a “sub-race” among humans. Various traveling shows, most famously P.T Barnum’s circus, presented people from around the world. World’s Fairs did as well. People were not afraid to order humanity based on what they believed to be its development and in fact considered such ordering to an educational exercise. For example, the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, delineated a Social Darwinian system through its spatial layout as fairgoers were guided on a path, starting with what were believed to be the most primitive races evolutionarily and culturally (these things were believed to be reciprocally connected) leading up to American society.

This fascination had scientific corroboration. As previously mentioned, this was the era during which Darwinism cemented itself in a social context, explaining the perceived hierarchy of race through science. Popular belief dictated that looking at “primitive” societies was like looking back in time, at that from which more advanced humans had evolved. Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* postulated “that nature ran along a single path of evolution from the lowest of animals to the highest of men.” Among humans, “pygmies” were often considered the lowest point along this path, closest to animals. As Bernth Lindfors explained in *Africans on Stage*, many held “the belief that Africans were at least as close to the animal world as they were to the human world.” They were the missing links in evolution. As

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153 Blume, 193.
155 Kidd, 398.
156 Kidd, 407.
historian Robert Rydell explained, “Anthropologists...sought to educate the public about the applicability of Social Darwinism insights to educate the public about the social struggle at home and imperial expansion abroad.”

Many intelligent people of the period believed that what they were doing was perfectly fine; they were educating their culture about inferior ones and giving inferior peoples a chance to grow within their confining limits by exposing them to a society that they believed to be superior.

The understanding of Africans at this time was a coalescing of scientific thought and popular belief. Darwin’s *Origin of Species* had been published more than fifty years before Benga’s exhibition. By the time of his exhibition, beliefs regarding evolution were fairly normalized ways of understanding animal development. As they became widely believed, they could also be used to help rationalize the racial hierarchies that society had set in place. Now there was “science” to confirm beliefs about “uncivilized” societies and their inferiority to civilized, white, Western societies.

It was in this context that Samuel Verner, a missionary turned anthropologist and collector, was commissioned to go to the Congo to collect “pygmies” for the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, called the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Benga’s family and village had previously been murdered by the Force Publique because of their failure to meet their ivory quotas.

When Ota Benga and his companions

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160 Phillips Verner Bradford and Harvey Blume, *Ota: The Pygmy in the Zoo* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 104. Much of Ota Benga’s life in Africa is unknown, and the sources that do exist are suspect. The Bradford and Blume book is the most comprehensive and most researched account.
returned from their hunting trip to a decimated village, they were beaten and then sold into slavery to various other tribes. This is where Verner found Benga, paid for him with cloth and salt, and then took him to the United States. After the Fair, Dr. Verner took all of the people he had brought over back to the Congo. Benga went on the journey but came back to the United States with Verner. While the actual reason for Ota Benga’s decision to return is unclear, Bradford and Blume posited it was because Benga wanted to learn and become civilized. Another explanation is that Benga had no life to go back to in Africa. It does seem to be the case that he made the choice to return to the United States for himself.

While Verner (and Bradford and Blume) claimed that his relationship with Benga was more a friendship than anything else, it is clear that this was not the case. Rather, as theater scholar Jocelyn Buckner explained, Ota Benga was Verner’s “Golden Ticket...to anthropological fame.” When Verner returned to the United States, he was running low on funds and wanted to visit his family. He arranged to have Ota Benga stay at the Museum of Natural History in New York while he attended to his other business; Verner received 175 dollars a month from the Museum for the exhibition of Benga and artifacts from Africa. Benga was given a “white duck suit” which he wore while he wandered around the museum, often with

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However, it is problematic. It is not peer-reviewed, has no footnotes, and Bradford is a descendant of Verner. As such, much of the book focuses on Verner. The primary sources they do have are mostly Verner’s accounts, and he certainly had his own motivations when retelling the stories of his adventures in Africa.

161 Bradford and Blume, 106.
162 Bradford and Blume, 106.
163 Bradford and Blume, 149.
165 Jocelyn Buckner, 166.
166 Buckner, 166.
167 Bradford and Blume, 163.
a crowd following him.168 When Verner returned in late August, Ota Benga had been in the Museum less than a month. Verner arranged for Ota Benga, as well as some of the African animals that he had collected, to be moved to the Bronx Zoo, a move that had been suggested by the museum director as being a more suitable location.169 On August 27, 1906, Ota Benga was moved to the Bronx Zoo.170

When Ota Benga first arrived at the Zoo, he was given some freedom, allowed to walk about the grounds, and he went largely unnoticed.171 However, Hornaday, hoping to inflate the number of visitors during the beginning of fall, began coaxing him to spend more time in the Monkey House, and announced his exhibition on September 8.172 At this time, his main location became the Monkey House. Benga was given his own enclosure that opened up into a shared outdoor enclosure with monkeys and apes. A sign was hung in front of his cage. It read: “African Pygmy, ‘Ota Benga.’ Age, 23 years. Height, 4 feet, 11 inches. Weight, 103 pounds. Brought from the Kasai River, Congo Free State, South Central Africa, by Dr. Samuel P. Verner. Exhibited each afternoon during September.”173 He was sometimes exhibited with a chimpanzee that had accompanied him from Africa or with an orangutan from the Zoo who was very intelligent and with whom Ota Benga supposedly bonded.174 When he did wander about the grounds, he was closely watched by one or two keepers, and this wandering was continually decreased as he

168 Bradford and Blume, 164.
169 Bradford and Blume, 168.
170 Buckner, 166.
171 Buckner, 167.
172 Buckner, 167.
173 “Man and Monkey Show Disapproved by Clergy,” September 10, 1906, New York Times, page 1. The sign was removed after protests from African American clergy members, Bridges, 225.
drew larger crowds. He performed shows demonstrating his archery skills and was apparently fond of buying sodas at the Zoo’s restaurant.\textsuperscript{175} Accounts vary about his clothing. He probably spent most of his time in simple Western clothing—pants, a khaki jacket,\textsuperscript{176} and shoes,\textsuperscript{177} as this was how he was described in newspaper articles. Yet, in the few existing photographs of him, he is wearing some sort of African-inspired garb, probably just for the picture. There are also accounts of him in his duck suit.\textsuperscript{178}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{ota_benga.jpg}
\caption{Ota Benga at the Bronx Zoo.}
\end{figure}

Few pictures exist of Ota Benga, and none exist of him in the Monkey House. Of the ones that do exist, he is wearing some sort of a skirt, not the clothes that the \textit{New York Times} described him as wearing, indicating the clothes were just for the photos to add to Benga’s exoticism. (\textit{Zoological Society Bulletin}, No. 23, October, 1906: 301.)

The Zoo’s exhibition of Benga represents a coalescing of scientific beliefs and popular culture. Zoos, in many ways, appealed to the same audiences as World’s Fairs and traveling circuses. They were all exciting opportunities to see parts of the world that were different and exotic. Yet, while shows went for pizazz and excitement, the Bronx Zoo also hoped to educate its visitors; it was a part of its mission as an institution. Zoos simultaneously competed for crowds who had seen

\begin{footnotes}
\item[175] "Man and Monkey Show Disapproved by Clergy."
\item[177] "Man and Monkey Show Disapproved by Clergy."
\end{footnotes}
sensational exhibitions at fairs but were also considered to be places of order and learning, much like a museum. Given the cultural contexts, pressures, and the way in which the Bronx Zoo located itself as an institution of education and entertainment, it is not unimaginable to understand how a human could find himself exhibited in the Bronx Zoo. Though many groups of people had found themselves exhibited in fairs across the world and fewer in zoos, none had been so directly compared to an animal as Ota Benga.179 The Social Darwinian beliefs that dictated popular and scientific understandings asserted that all people were not equally “civilized” or capable, and evolution was a linear path leading up to a pinnacle of creation. As the path wound towards the pinnacle, Africans of shorter stature from the Congo were historically considered close to the intersection of human and animal. Still, most zoos had not been willing to take the leap that the Bronx Zoo had, to physically put a human being in a monkey house.

The Bronx Zoo also had precedent for the exhibition of ethnographic artifacts as there was an indigenous Alaska House and Totem Pole in the Zoo that had been in the Zoo since 1905. Yet, there is a big difference between a house and a person. Further, the Alaska House was presented with much more tact. It was set off by itself, much like many of the houses containing animals, and was meant to be appreciated for its uniqueness and its beauty.180 This was not how the Bronx Zoo contextualized Benga.

179 “Man and Monkey Show Disapproved by Clergy.”
The Zoo rationalized their exhibition of Ota Benga in three ways. First, they made money through his exhibition. Second, they claimed he was an ethnological exhibit, which was something visitors were interested in seeing. Third, they placed him in a Darwinian context. While these latter two reasons could be understood as dichotomous, they were probably unified in the minds of Zoo leaders. The line between animal and human was blurry in this historical context, and it led to Zoo leaders suggesting an interpretation of Ota Benga where he could be both human and animal, or perhaps neither.

There was a bottom line to Benga’s exhibition. September always led to diminished crowds at the Zoo as summer drew to a close. Benga reversed that. On one Sunday during his exhibition, more than 40,000 people flooded the Zoo to see Ota Benga.181 While the Zoo was free most days, including Sundays, this amount of traffic would have led to increased sales in the gift shops and restaurants. It also would have enlarged crowds on the few days a week when the Zoo did charge an admission fee. Ota Benga’s exhibition would have paid dividends for the Zoo.

Ota Benga was an authentic and exotic display that was popular in and of itself, but his exhibition also increased the stature of the Zoo in some ways. Zoos were judged on the quantity and the scope of exotic specimens in their collections. Some viewers would have interpreted Ota Benga, an “uncivilized savage,” as just barely above an animal and a crowning piece of the Bronx Zoo’s collection, the pinnacle of wildness. He enhanced the Zoo because he added to the breadth of the collection, which was very important. Beyond lengthening the spectrum of exhibition, he was a unique feature within a zoo. An exotic “pygmy” from the “wildest” continent of all was an exhibit that no other zoo could boast. It was unique to the Bronx Zoo.

Ota Benga also clearly fit into Darwinian ideas at the time. His presentation in the Monkey House cemented his position as a vehicle through which to understand evolution. When it could, the Bronx Zoo wanted to put animals in their perceived proper place. By placing Ota Benga within the Monkey House, the Zoo leaders were sending a clear message. This is where they thought he belonged. In their taxonomic ordering of the world, they placed him alongside monkeys and apes. Hornaday even promoted his interaction with apes in the House. In developing these bonds, people could relate Benga to animals. There also was close physical proximity in order to make easy physiological comparisons between the man and apes. However, Hornaday argued that, through Ota Benga’s exhibition, the Bronx

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182 Blume, 199.
Zoo was not equating the man with animals; Hornaday said that he was fully a human, if only a “sub-race.”

When the Zoo defended its exhibition of Ota Benga to the *New York Times*, they claimed it was an ethnological exhibit. This may have just been their response in their attempts to assuage their opponents, the most vocal of whom were a committee of African American clergymen who argued that Ota Benga’s exhibition was inhumane and degrading. This response, of Benga’s exhibition being an ethnological one, would have had more of a basis if he were not being exhibited in the Monkey House. Yet, it is possible that, in some way, Zoo leaders considered Ota Benga to be an ethnological exhibit. The Zoo leaders still could have considered him a human, just a very “primitive” one. By exhibiting him in the Monkey House, the Zoo leaders were drawing a connection between humanity and apes through what they saw as an intermediary link. Ota Benga was hybridized by the Zoo; he was presented as a man and a monkey. The attempt to scientifically place all manner of life in a Darwinian context made this hybridization possible. Benga was presented as a possible missing link between man and animal, supposedly representing the origins of humanity.

In presenting him, the Bronx Zoo capitalized on these dualities. They placed him with monkeys and apes to hopefully create what they saw as the linear progression of evolution. Yet, they also emphasized his “primitive” skills, like hammock making and archery, and explained that he liked soda in order to show his humanity. The placement in the Monkey House and concurrent promotion of

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Benga’s “human” attributes and skills presented Benga as both man and animal. When he was photographed he was in an African skirt to exoticize him, but on a normal day of exhibition, he was in Western clothing. Benga was presented as someone who could participate in some aspects of “civilized” society, like wearing Western clothing, but not all. For example, he was watched and looked after like an animal for his own “protection,” implying that he could not look after himself. He looked like a human and dressed like a human, but was different than the visitors. He was positioned as somewhere in between human and animal.

He also added to the Bronx Zoo’s breadth of collection, adding another facet to its plurality. The Zoo was no longer just a place for animals. It could also exhibit people. Not only did the Zoo hybridize Ota Benga, his presentation added complexity to the Zoo’s overall exhibition. The Zoo leaders were expanding what could be found in a zoo. It was not simply animals; it was anything that they perceived as “wild” and “exotic.” They wanted to present exhibits that were of interest to visitors and that helped contextualize the larger world.

It is also important to consider that many people were scandalized by the presentation of Ota Benga within the Bronx Zoo. A group of African American clergy led the outcry and eventually saw Benga’s release into their care. Their arguments had a decidedly paternal, pointed, and Christian slant: “It is too bad that there is not some society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [referencing Benga]. We send our missionaries to Africa to Christianize the people, and then we bring one here to brutalize it.”¹⁸⁵ These dissenting voices were loud, but it is unclear how numerous

¹⁸⁵ “Man and Monkey Show Disapproved by Clergy.”
they were. The point of view that Hornaday expressed through his exhibition of Ota Benga was not the only one of the time, though it was certainly a popular one. Yet, at the same time, no one argued that Ota Benga was intellectually equal to Americans, not even the African American clergymen. Rather, they believed he was capable of growth, an opportunity that had not been granted to him at the Zoo. Many people thought that Africans could be “civilized” and the debate was really over how; this was a major discussion at World’s Fairs.186

When Ota Benga finally left the Bronx Zoo, he was taken to the Colored Orphan Asylum in Brooklyn, a place where he could learn.187 His placement in an orphanage indicates the paternal way in which even his rescuers viewed him, but he was given his own room and allowed to exercise some autonomy within the orphanage. The group of African American clergy oversaw his placement at this institution. They hoped the orphanage could aid in Benga's development and growth. This arrangement did not work because, for one, he was a man among children. He was then moved to Lynchburg, Virginia where he lived with an African American female poet and attended the Virginia Theological Seminary.188 He traveled around a bit but ultimately returned to Lynchburg.189 It was here where, in 1916, Ota Benga committed suicide.190 Hornaday commented: “Evidently, he felt that he would rather die than work for a living.”191 Hornaday, the person who had

188 Buckner, 171.
189 Scott, 93.
190 Scott, 93.
presented this man as a monkey, could not muster even a modicum of sympathy for
the tragic life Ota Benga had led.

Hornaday once wrote that the exhibition of Ota Benga would form the Bronx
Zoo’s “most amusing passage.” Yet, this would not be the case. People who know
little else about the Zoo’s history know that, for a brief moment, it exhibited a
human like an animal. Ota Benga shows that what was worthy of a zoo exhibit was
broad and not standard. Like other aspects of zoo design, what could be exhibited
was not a fixed point. While certain animals were must-haves, like elephants, the
spectrum of what could be included ranged from tiny mice to humans. By
examining the far ends of the spectrum regarding zoo display, it is clear to see the
Bronx Zoo valued diversity and attached different values to humans from different
parts of the world. His exhibition also serves as a case study for the plural ways
people viewed Africans that stemmed from an interest in “exotic” people and
racism that had been cemented by science.

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192 Hornaday, as quoted in Bridges, 228.
Conclusion

Remembering the moment of watching the gorilla and the boy interact through the glass at the St. Louis Zoo, I wonder: how did all the people watching understand it? Before writing this thesis, I would have merely assumed all of us were interested and engaged. But, within this engagement, there must have been variation. I remember watching the gorilla and thinking how smart he was; how, even if we cannot comprehend it, he has his own way of understanding. Maybe my mother was interested in how this bond emphasized humans’ evolutionary proximity to our fellow apes. Perhaps the boy’s mom was fixated on the connection between her son and the gorilla, a connection that could take place over vast chasms of difference. The boy may have just been interested in playing with his friend. While many of us have had that “wow” moment in zoos, we also contextualized the wonder in different ways.

Much like the different contextualizations of the gorilla and the boy, how we understand the larger world around us is not collectively coherent. In a zoo, this plural relationship with the nonhuman world, everything we are not, is acutely apparent. Zoos are constructed spaces charged with the presentation of the environment, animals, and, in the case of the 1906 Bronx Zoo, a human, all in one space. While humans are always interacting with the world around them, zoos are places where humans are actively interacting, manipulating, and ordering the nonhuman to present it to a wider audience. In this way, zoos can serve as helpful lenses through which to understand what people emphasize and care about in the nonhuman world.

By examining the historical moment when the Bronx Zoo began its construction—developing the landscape, creating exhibitions, and presenting Ota Benga—we can
understand conceptions of the nonhuman within an era, connecting beliefs with Bronx Zoo constructions. This thesis has attempted to do this. By looking at the Bronx Zoo holistically, as one entity designed by one group, the New York Zoological Society, the complexity and plurality with which the NYZS viewed the natural world is starkly apparent. One does not need to consider multiple organizations from different parts of the world to see variation in how the nonhuman world is understood and valued. By simply looking at one institution the plurality is endlessly apparent. The analysis of the landscape, animals, and humans, the multiplicity within the categories, as well as the plurality of them as a whole, indicates that the Zoo’s founders considered the nonhuman in varied ways that were sometimes contradictory and that were driven by different ideas and beliefs. Yet, underlying this plurality was a value placed on natural elements.

Even within specific elements of the nonhuman, the historic Bronx Zoo presented plural visions. In landscape design, there was an overall adulation and manipulation of nature. Hornaday wanted to highlight the topography of the park and its preexisting elements. He focused on incorporating the curves of the hills, the rock crevices, and the standing trees into his plan for the Zoo. This vision is complicated in and of itself. Hornaday constructed the land, but he did not think of it in such terms. Rather, he wanted to consider his work to be an “adaptation” of the preexisting land. He did not view the plan as creating an artificial place so much as enhancing what was already there. Yet, this already complicated vision was layered with a contradictory design that other directional voices within the Zoo valued. As such, a different aesthetic was added to the Zoo, one that valued the Zoo as an opportunity to show man’s domination over the surrounding environment. Baird Court was the antithesis of everything Hornaday had hoped would be
the encompassing aesthetic of the Zoo. It was ornate, did not blend in with the surrounding environment, and was devoid of natural elements, like trees and dirt. Rather than give the visitors the feeling of a nice (sanitized) walk through the woods, Baird Court was like standing in the Court of Honor of a World's Fair, absorbing the possibilities of human construction. Even within the landscape design of the Zoo, there was difference and plurality, with dichotomous visions of how to locate a zoo its environment. Yet, the more dominant aesthetic, Hornaday’s naturalistic one, valued the nonhuman elements of the landscape. While the environment may have been constructed and altered, these changes were motivated by the underlying belief that a calm trip to the Bronx Zoo could be regenerative and relaxing for all classes of society.

Animals were also presented in plural ways that were manifestations of different value assignments and varied contexts. While this thesis did not cover all of the different types of presentations, it demonstrated the plurality that existed and its physical manifestations. Some animals were considered as parts of larger taxonomic displays. By placing different antelopes side-by-side, visitors could see their similarities and differences. In seeing these differences, people could understand the theory of evolution. Ordering animals by taxonomic order was thought to be the best way to educate viewers on natural selection and Darwin’s theory of evolution. The Beaver Pond emphasized a naturalistic exhibit display carried over from the aesthetics of the larger park. Here, visitors could see an animal in its “natural” habitat, increasing the authenticity of the Zoo experience. Value was placed on seeing a beaver in its “natural” state and in keeping the overall ambiance of

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193 For instance, I did not discuss anthropomorphism in the Zoo because it is well-covered and also because little of the physical presentation within the Zoo had to do with representing anthropomorphism. It is something that did not need to be physically displayed in order for it to occur (though the Zoo did promote it, especially within the Monkey House).
the Zoo consistent. The Small Mammal House emphasized quantity of animals over naturalness of display. The Zoo believed that its greatness partly hinged on having as many animals as possible. The Small Mammal House served as a sort of depository for the mammals that did not fit in any of the Zoo’s taxonomically themed areas. In contrast, the bison were displayed on a large range that attempted to recreate the Great Plains. They were valued as a symbol of the United States, a vestige of our uniqueness, the dwindling frontier, and their exhibit was meant to harken to the Great Plains.

The plurality of animal exhibition could easily be explained through understanding animals only as parts of larger displays or as specimens in a collection. Yet, there was a common value assigned to all the animals exhibited. For one, they were all in a zoo. While that might sound simplistic, it is powerful. All of these animals were worthy of exhibition. This fact is at the foundation of any zoo or menagerie; on some level, the opportunity to see these animals was believed to be a worthwhile experience. The emphasis on animal’s “zoo-worthiness” can be understood through the Bronx Zoo’s emphasis on the visibility of animals and their proximity to visitors. Again, this might sound simplistic. But, it was not enough to have an animal; people had to be able to see it. This was why the beavers were moved from the Beaver Pond to the Small Mammal House; while it was a nice idea to have them in their natural haunts, their ultimate value was in the visitors’ opportunities to view them closely. Thus, while plurality existed, perceived inherent value in viewing animals was an overarching commonality.

The exhibition of Ota Benga contributed to the overall plurality of the Zoo by broadening the scope of what was considered “zoo-worthy.” By exhibiting a person, the Bronx Zoo expanded its own scope of exhibition. The Zoo was no longer just for animals;
“primitive” people could find their way there as well. Thankfully, the Zoo only exhibited a human once and so the discussion of plurality in the human context cannot extend over various exhibitions. Yet, there were plural reasons for Benga’s exhibition and complicated understandings of him constructed through the display. Ota Benga was hybridized, presented as both human and animal. His presentation was rationalized as both an ethnological display and an evolutionary one. Benga was perceived as occupying a middle space between human and animal. He was considered to be a primitive man from a place that was more mythological than real to many of the Zoo’s visitors. His exhibition manifested humanity’s perceived connections to nature and animals, with Ota Benga brushing just as close to the animals as he did to humans, or so the Zoo leaders and many visitors believed.

Where does this leave the Zoo as a totality? The Zoo was a sum of all of these parts though it seems difficult and even unnecessary to say that these parts gelled together in any meaningful way. The cohesion was that they were all located in the same place, all part of one institution. Some animals were in tiny cages where they could be easily viewed, and some were located on larger, grassy fields. Some animals seemed to “fit” with the natural environment, like the beaver, and others, like the crocodiles, might have seemed out of place in an outdoor pool in New York City. The landscape of the park was not coherent; some buildings stuck out purposefully, and others were carefully nestled among the trees. Barring few exceptions, Zoo leaders did not seem to mind this plurality of presentation because it matched their plural understandings of the nonhuman world. Yet, in this plurality, there was common value in the nonhuman. Trees were valued, so cutting them
down was avoided. All of the animals were worth seeing and presentation style that focused on visibility emphasized this value.

Let us imagine a trip to the Bronx Zoo in the context of other plural institutions that are also heavily constructed places for entertainment in order to understand the importance of the Bronx Zoo as a plurally constructed space with value placed on all of its elements. When you go to Disneyland or any amusement park, the parks are split up into different areas. Within these different parts are constructed artificial spaces that focus on different moments in time (Frontierland), different places (Epcot), or completely made up places (Tomorrowland). A trip to the Zoo is analogous, but all of the parts are different representations of the world outside of humans—animals, the environment, and, for a brief moment, Ota Benga. Unlike Disneyland, the different parts are interspersed together. However, like Disneyland, they are artificial spaces that have been created by humans. Just as Disney sends a message with its Hall of Presidents, so too did the Bronx Zoo send a message about evolutionary theory with its Antelope House. The message sent through the Antelope House did not have to be nor was the same message that other exhibitions and landscapes presented. The different exhibitions represented different understandings of the nonhuman world and presented the animals in different contexts. Similarly, an amusement park is not expected to be cohesive. A trip to Epcot involves wandering through various artificial and incomplete exhibitions of different world cultures. The difference between zoos and Disneyland is what they are presenting and also how it is understood. We understand that Disneyland is an artificial space, representing the world in a sanitized way, contextualizing only what it wants to, and creating a plural space where many things disparate elements come together. We need to understand that this is what
zoos do too. They are constructed spaces that represent various ideologies concerning the nonhuman world. This construction is not limited to the exhibits within a zoo. It also includes the landscaping and architecture, all of which create the plural space. Zoos are an artificial conflation of various parts of the nonhuman world that reveal what we think is important and through what lens we find it important.

The more basic similarity between zoos and Disneyland: both are generally considered to be enjoyable experiences. Just as people like riding rollercoasters and being amused by animatronic presidents, zoos also presents something of value, something people want to see and are even willing to pay to see. The leaders of the Bronx Zoo found value in what they exhibited. If they had not valued aspects of the nature—from trees, to mice, to elephants, and, even misguided, Ota Benga—they would not have bothered to present them. People enjoy seeing animals, walking through a shaded park, and getting a glimpse of the great diversity within the world. Zoos provide their visitors with this experience. Hanson and others have used hybridity to describe zoos. While I understand its utility in some senses, I also reject it as a collective way of understanding what is within a zoo. The unity in the construction of a zoo is that humans consider all of the elements valuable enough to display within a zoo. Yet, plurality is a better word to get at what a zoo actually is. Just like an amusement park creates many different artificialities, so too does a zoo, and they are not cohesive nor do they need to be. Yet, they are all present, and they articulate different understandings of animals and landscape elements.

In my most recent trip to Grandma’s Zoo, brimming with newly acquired Bronx Zoo history, I was surprised to find myself considering the ways in which the Zoo had not changed, how the Bronx Zoo of the past was surprisingly similar to the one that remained
today. Rather than be overwhelmed by the differences between the historical Bronx Zoo I studied and the present-day Zoo I walked through, I was struck by a sense of sameness. Sure, the Zoo is modern; I didn't feel like I was stepping back in time, but I also did not feel as though I was walking through a newly reimagined zoo concept, just an updated version of the same type of institution that had existed since the turn of the century.

My trip included a stop at the Mouse House, a rhyming synonym for the Small Mammal House. It also included a stop in the Monkey House, which was still serving the same function it had since its construction. I delighted at the sea lions swimming in their pool in the center of Baird Court (now called Astor Court and on the Historic Registry). I went to the Seabird Aviary, perhaps similar to what the Aquatic Birds’ House would have been. The bison were in a different place but still occupied a big range. There were rhinos in a concrete indoor enclosure. There was a track set up for camel rides (which the Zoo offered in the past as well), and free range peacocks were being chased by children; these were things that I did not think a modern, supposedly responsible, zoo would do.

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194 I did go during the winter, so few animals were outside, which probably added the feeling of the zoo being old. The big spacious outdoor exhibits, were, for the most part, not being used. Yet, winter is a part of New York City so this is a reality for many animals and visitors during the winter months.
195 The Zoo since announced that they were closing the Monkey House.
There were also differences. Jungle World is an indoor and spacious exhibit with rainforest animals from around the world in an innovatively designed, winding space. The exhibit plays with perspective, using glass dividers between exhibits to open up the space from the visitors’ point of view. It uses glass, a modernization of Hornaday’s bars, the Hagenbeck method of separation, which would have greatly disappointed Hornaday, and sometimes just relies on the fact the animals stay far away from the visitors on their own.

The rhinos were located in the Elephant House in what was a larger but aesthetically and pragmatically similar exhibit to the one in which past rhinos would have been housed. (Photo by author.)

The Monkey House was a popular exhibit with a surprisingly familiar feeling, a hallway lined with monkeys in small enclosures on either side. (Photo by author.)
accord. The other areas that would have highlighted the difference and development were closed for the season. One of these was the Wild Asia Monorail where visitors ride a tram over spacious exhibits. The focus on conservation education was present. Signs asked me if I would help save the elephants; there were plenty of places to donate money and instructions on how to live a greener lifestyle dotted the grounds.

The technology and knowledge behind zoo exhibition has increased, but the overall aesthetic elements are similar to what they were in 1912. All in all, the Bronx Zoo is still not entirely cohesive, nor could a zoo as we understand it ever be. The very nature of a zoo assumes plurality. There are animals from all over the world in one place. They are displayed with plants that can grow in the area but that are not necessarily appropriate for the animal. Many animals are displayed inside in completely artificial spaces. In this sense, the feeling of the Bronx Zoo has not changed nor have the basic modes of exhibition.

Yet, in looking at the zoos of the past, we can begin to understand the climate and social discourse that drove zoo development. In some ways, it has changed very little. Beyond the basic institutional aesthetics and exhibitions, the drive behind zoos is
congruent to the motivations of historic zoos. The animals are there for our enjoyment, and we still enjoy them. We get to see animals from around the world that most of us will never see in our lives. We smile when we see a baby monkey clinging to its mother’s back. We are engaged when we see an elephant use its trunk. Conservation is still a stated goal. While modern zoos might indicate that conservation is a point of separation between them and historical zoos, the Bronx Zoo was founded with the intention of saving bison and effectively did so.

While we still treasure the experience of seeing animals, we also still value them differently. There are animals that we enjoy seeing, like monkeys and big cats, which are placed in prominent locations and spacious enclosures within zoos. Value is also assigned through conservation efforts. Even within the organized system that ranks animals’ vulnerabilities that exists today, we still value the conservation of some animals more than we value the conservation of other animals, much like the Zoo of the past valued bison. For example, everyone knows the plight of the Giant panda, but very few know the plight of the American burying beetle because one is cute and fuzzy, and the other is a bug. We still assign value to animals in a similarly complicated way as we did in the past and still commonly consider animals to be worth seeing. If we understand this, maybe it can help us move forward in a different way. The popularly held belief is that zoos across the country underwent a renaissance of sorts in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, all of the ideas espoused

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196 It's fairly easy to argue that zoo conservation today is more effective and perhaps more necessary than in the past. One of the biggest realizations that increased this was understanding that you could not simply send search parties to the far reaches of the world to bring back the animals that were desired for your zoo (Hanson 166).

197 A critically endangered North American beetle that was once found in 35 states in the country and that is now found in less than 10.
then, including better exhibits, more education, and conservation, were the same ideas that
the NYZS hoped to achieve in 1896.

At the very least, understanding the historical zoo can give us some clarity and
demystify our relationship to the natural world. By looking back in time, we can apply
hindsight and objectivity. We can then take this knowledge and help it foment our
understandings of the plural and complicated values that we place on the nonhuman today.
Zoos still are created landscapes that present animals in order to educate or entertain
viewers. It is easy for us to understand that the Bronx Zoo of the past was a creation by
humans for humans. It is an idea that some of us, myself included, have a harder time
applying to present day zoos. We want to think of zoos as places that help animals, that
preserve them, that educate people so they can stop littering, use less water in the shower,
and be motivated to do something more than merely using reusable shopping bags. We
need to understand that all of these considerations are the products of values we assign to
animals. It is what we do; we assign value to items in the world around us. Yet, within zoos
of the past or present, that valuation is positive; we like zoos; we like seeing animals. Zoos
and the people who advocate for them should be honest about this. Zoos are important
because we like them, and we enjoy seeing animals. In being frank about this valuation,
perhaps we can analyze the role of zoos in our society more thoughtfully. Are we content
with being a society that enjoys animals and displays them for our pleasure? Is there a way
we can move past this in a way that would be more effective in achieving wildlife
conservation goals that various institutions have articulated?

Shining a light on the Bronx Zoo’s development presents a surprisingly vivid
reflection of modern zoos. If we are willing to understand present zoos as similar to
historic zoos, then this historic analysis can offer clarity and insight into the richness of zoos as constructed spaces. The plurality within zoos, in the depth and breadth of exhibition choices, represents a society that has not critically assessed how we collectively consider and value the natural world because when it does have the opportunity to create an exhibition to represent the nonhuman, the results cover a wide spectrum. Perhaps a clear articulation of these pluralities and constructions in the past can lead to an understanding of the equally complex contemporary view of the natural world today. Once these complexities and pluralities are understood, we can more seriously talk about them and try to move to a more cohesive understanding of the nonhuman world. Then again, maybe we are ok with plurality.
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