



victimhood
free market capitalism

WWW.PRAGERU.COM

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- At the beginning of the video, Mr. Habeeb contends that, “The most famous fire in American history happened in Chicago on October 8, 1871. But it’s not the fire that is so remarkable. It’s what happened afterwards.” What is so remarkable about the response to the fire? Why do you think that people today are still so impacted by something that happened so long ago? Explain.
- Mr. Habeeb later describes the conditions after the fire and explains that, “In those days, there were no national or state agencies to help. Chicago was on its own. What was to be done? To most of Chicago citizens, the answer was obvious: Rebuild. Make the city better than ever. Yes, there were many victims of the fire, but there was no sense of victimhood. Even before the bricks stopped smoking, the people of Chicago went to work.” Why do you think that the pervasive attitude amongst the survivors was to rebuild the city and make it better? What do you think contributed to the people of Chicago not seeing themselves as victims, but rather seeing themselves as people who needed to get their heads down and get to work rebuilding- i.e. why was their perspective one of a collective that needed to pull themselves up rather than as entitled victims? Explain.
- Later in the video, Mr. Habeeb points out that the significance of the response to the Chicago fire is that, “...the government didn’t rebuild Chicago. Chicago rebuilt Chicago. And with astonishing speed and energy. A can-do spirit, devotion to community, and free market capitalism made it happen.” Why do you think that the distinction between the government helping people after a disaster versus people helping themselves after a disaster is such an important one? Explain. In what ways, specifically, can free market capitalism help to make a quick recovery happen after a disaster? Explain.
- Mr. Habeeb goes on to conclude that, “It’s impossible to look at this achievement without admiration and more than a bit of nostalgia: Could we summon that same spirit today?” What exactly is so admirable about the way Chicago rebuilt itself? How would you answer Mr. Habeeb’s question? Explain.
- Mr. Habeeb then answers the question asking if we could summon that same spirit today by stating, “Yes. We can. But only if we proudly retell stories like this one that remind us the greatness of America is not a product of government, but a product of self-government, empowered citizens pursuing their own best interests.” What do you think Mr. Habeeb means by ‘empowered citizens?’ Explain. Do you agree with Mr. Habeeb’s answer? Why or why not?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Rhino Steel and Bank of America

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “The Great Chicago Fire Led to Steel Buildings,” and ‘The building and rebuilding of Chicago,” then answer the questions that follow.

- How many days before the Great Chicago Fire did the Palmer House Hotel open? What percentage of the population was left homeless after the fire? How soon after the fire did residents start rebuilding? What materials was the rebuilt Palmer House Hotel made from? Who was William Le Baron Jenney, and what did he do? What did Home Insurance do in 1890? What is the current state of steel as a building material? What was the relationship of The Merchants Savings Loan and Trust Company to the city of Chicago? What were banking regulations like prior to the great fire? Why were many banks failing prior to the fire? Who was Cyrus Hall McCormick and what did he do? Who was Solomon Smith and what did he do? Where did Merchants Savings Loan and Trust Company open its bank after the fire? Why did Merchants Savings Loan and Trust Company agree to pay customer's accounts in full after the fire? How did Merchants Savings Loan and Trust Company help companies to rebuild the city better after the fire?
- Why do you think that Rhino Steel and Bank of America are so proud to tell their part of the story of the rebuilding of Chicago? Why do you think that so many people today expect government agencies, rather than private entities, to pick up the pieces and help communities after a tragic event? Why is it important and better for people to approach the aftermath of a tragedy with the attitude of individual resilience and helping fellow citizens right away, rather than the with the attitude of victimhood and waiting for ‘someone else’ to help? Explain.
- How do you think that people would react if a tragic event befell Chicago today? Do you think that the community of Chicago would have a different general response than the one after the great fire? Why or why not?



QUIZ

THE CHICAGO FIRE: AMERICA AT ITS BEST

1. The Chicago Fire started on the city's West Side, near the De Koven Street barn of Patrick and Catherine O'Leary, by a clumsy cow.
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. How much damage did the fire cause, in today's dollars?
 - a. \$3.8 million
 - b. \$200 million
 - c. \$3.8 billion
 - d. \$200 billion

3. Which federal agency came to Chicago's aid?
 - a. FEMA
 - b. HUD
 - c. USDA
 - d. None.

4. There were many victims of the fire, _____.
 - a. and they waited months for the government to rebuild their homes
 - b. and they left Chicago in droves
 - c. but there was no sense of victimhood
 - d. but they got large insurance payouts

5. After the fire, architects redesigned the city using a new product— _____.
 - a. wood
 - b. steel
 - c. glass
 - d. None of the above.



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

THE CHICAGO FIRE: AMERICA AT ITS BEST

1. The Chicago Fire started on the city's West Side, near the De Koven Street barn of Patrick and Catherine O'Leary, by a clumsy cow.

- a. True
- b. False

2. How much damage did the fire cause, in today's dollars?

- a. \$3.8 million
- b. \$200 million
- c. \$3.8 billion
- d. \$200 billion

3. Which federal agency came to Chicago's aid?

- a. FEMA
- b. HUD
- c. USDA
- d. None.

4. There were many victims of the fire, _____.

- a. and they waited months for the government to rebuild their homes
- b. and they left Chicago in droves
- c. but there was no sense of victimhood
- d. but they got large insurance payouts

5. After the fire, architects redesigned the city using a new product— _____.

- a. wood
- b. steel
- c. glass
- d. None of the above.

The Great Chicago Fire Led to Steel Buildings

October 6, 2015

How Chicago Rose from the Ashes to Build a Stronger, Safer City

Today steel buildings and skyscrapers define the silhouettes of great cities. In the 1870s, no one even dreamed of massive, multi-story monoliths soaring toward the clouds—until the Great Chicago Fire changed commercial construction practices forever.

The Chicago Conflagration

On Sunday, October 8, 1871, a fire began in or near the barn owned by Patrick and Catherine O’Leary. Contrary to popular myths about the O’Leary’s cow kicking over a lantern, no one knows the actual cause of the fire.

In 1893, Michael Ahern, the reporter who originated the legend of the O’Leary’s cow, admitted he fabricated the tale. However, it was not until 1997 that the Chicago City Council voted to exonerate the O’Leary’s and their famous bovine from triggering the conflagration. Sometimes the wheels of justice do grind slowly.

Whatever the initial cause of the Great Chicago Fire, the results were shattering.

Conditions converged to create the perfect firestorm:

- A 14-week drought with unusually hot temperatures left everything dry and ripe for a fire.
- Most of Chicago consisted of wood-framed structures. Lumber was plentiful and cheap. Sidewalks and even streets were made of wood. Zoning was non-existent. Factories, lumber mills, stores, and houses crowded together in the same blocks.
- The fire department was woefully inadequate for the task. Chicago’s population neared 300,000, yet only 216 firefighters served the city. Three of their 17 horse-drawn fire engines were unavailable during the Great Fire. To make matters worse, miscommunications resulted in a deadly delay getting firefighters to the real source of the fire.
- A strong wind from the southwest drove embers deep into the city. The conflagration burned so hot it created fire whirls—tornado-like vortexes scattering sparks and burning debris high into the air. Witnesses reported seeing sparks and ash everywhere, falling like snow.

People fled in panic, grabbing only what possessions they could carry. Rich and poor alike lost everything in the fire, yet those who escaped at all were blessed to survive.

Horace White, the editor-in-chief of the “Chicago Tribune,” wrote an eyewitness account four days after the fire. In it he said:

“Billows of fire were rolling over the business palaces of the city and swallowing up their contents. Walls were falling so fast that the quaking of the ground under our feet was scarcely noticed, so continuous was the reverberation. Sober men and women were hurrying through the streets from the burning quarter, some with bundles of clothes on their shoulders, others dragging trunks along the sidewalks by means of strings and ropes fastened to the handles, children

trudging by their sides or borne in their arms. Now and then a sick man or woman would be observed, half concealed in a mattress doubled up and borne by two men. Drove of horses were in the streets, moving by some sort of guidance to a place of safety. Vehicles of all descriptions were hurrying to and fro, some laden with trunks and bundles, others seeking similar loads and immediately finding them, the drivers making more money in one hour than they were used to see in a week or a month. Everybody in this quarter was hurrying toward the lake shore.”

City officials expected the Chicago River to create a firebreak. However, the fire leaped across the river, spreading the devastation. Shortly after crossing the river, Chicago’s waterworks ignited, burning to the ground. Water mains dried up. The fire burned unrestrained.

Rain began late in the evening of October 9. Early in the morning of October 10, the inferno finally sizzled to a halt.

In the Aftermath of the Blaze

Searching the smoldering debris, officials found 120 bodies. However, estimates put the actual death toll higher at 250 or more.

The fire consumed thousands of structures. The Palmer House hotel, opened only 13 days before the Great Chicago Fire, was just one of the thousands of buildings destroyed.

One-third of the population was homeless. Many lost both home and business. As happens in all catastrophes, the poor bore the greatest hardships.

Out of the Ashes

Resilient and determined, residents of the Windy City began rebuilding immediately. Within days of the fire, street side business opened in hastily erected sheds and shacks. The poor constructed crude shelters and homes with whatever lumber was available.

Donations of goods, lumber, and cash arrived from across the country and around the world. The Chicago Aid Society distributed donations to the desperate citizens of the scorched city.

In November, just a month after the fire, Chicagoans elected Joseph Madill, co-owner of the “Chicago Tribune,” as the new mayor. Madill campaigned with promises to institute stringent building and fire codes.

In 1872, the Chicago City Council directed all new construction must employ fire-resistant materials. The poor protested the new construction codes, as many wood-framed houses had been completed. Eventually, the city “grandfathered” those wood buildings already constructed.

A second fire engulfed Chicago in 1874, destroyed 60 acres and another 800 buildings. Insurance companies, battered by the millions spent for the Great Chicago Fire, balked. They demanded steps be taken to force the construction of fire-resistant buildings.

Efforts to Fireproof the City

When it appeared the Palmer House hotel would perish in the fire, John M. Van Osdel, the building’s architect, buried the blueprints for the hotel in the basement. Covered with a thick layer of sand and clay, Van Osdel’s blueprints survived the fire.

Van Osdel became convinced that terra cotta, made from sand and clay, would prove a more fire-resistant building material than wood. When rebuilt, terra cotta tiles covered the roof of the new Palmer House. Framed with iron and covered in brick, promoters billed the Palmer House as “The World’s Only Fire Proof Hotel.”

Meanwhile, the iron industry developed fire-resistant iron through a process that added terra cotta.

The World's First Skyscraper

Inarguably, the greatest advancement in construction materials was the invention of steel. Without the advent of steel, the birth of the skyscraper would have been impossible.

William Le Baron Jenney, an engineer, designed the first skyscraper using steel framing. Steel was lighter and stronger than iron, so it was ideal for multi-story construction.

Using iron and steel to create a cage-like, weight-bearing skeleton, Jenney fashioned the Home Insurance Building in Chicago. Construction on the revolutionary building began in 1884. The strength of the steel allowed the extensive use of large glass windows on all sides for a much brighter interior. Brick and terra cotta partitions separated the offices.

Ten stories tall and 138' in height, the Home Insurance Building was an architectural marvel.

Thrilled with the success of the system, Home Insurance added two more floors in 1890, bringing the now 12-story structure up to an astounding 180' in height.

Steel Buildings Today

Advances in steel technology continue. Today's steel is stronger— and more affordable and versatile— than ever before.

Doesn't your next building project deserve the fire-resistant benefits enjoyed by the world's towering commercial skyscrapers?

- by Bruce Brown,
CEO of RHINO
Steel Building Systems, Inc

The Great Chicago Fire

October 1871



Fast Facts about the Fire that Changed American Building Practices

Lasted
3
Days
October 8-10

Covered
3.3
Sq. Miles
including the
business district

Killed over
250
people
(estimated)

Destroyed
17,500
buildings
including homes



First Skyscraper

In the aftermath of the Great Chicago Fire, a search for fire-resistant building materials led to the first steel-framed structure, Chicago's Home Insurance Building, a 10-story skyscraper completed in 1885.

Left
100,000
homeless;
1/3 Chicago's
population

Caused
\$222
million
in damages

Burned
73
miles
of streets

Chicago had
216
firefighters
& 14 horsedrawn
fire engines

Jumped the
**Chicago
River**
to the city's
north side

Changed
**building
codes**
& construction
practices



4305 I-35 North – Denton, Texas 76207 www.rhinobldg.com
Ph: 940-383-9566 Fax: 940-484-6746 Toll Free: 1-888-320-7466
Copyright © 2015, RHINO Steel Building Systems, Inc., All Rights Reserved.

<https://about.bankofamerica.com/en-us/our-story/building-rebuilding-of-chicago.html#fbid=AQDlnzCOFys>

The building and rebuilding of Chicago

The Merchants Savings Loan and Trust Company—Bank of America's oldest heritage bank in Chicago—was instrumental in both the development of Chicago during its population boom and in the rebuilding of the city after the Great Fire.



Illustrated map of Chicago, 1892

In the ten years following 1850, Chicago's population boomed from 30,000 to 109,000. Even with the explosive rate of development that decade, the city couldn't grow fast enough to keep up with the expanding population. But it was growing faster than any U.S. city and Chicago was becoming a transportation and commercial powerhouse almost overnight. By 1857, the city needed a reliable bank to support its continued growth.

At that time, the city was home to 12 banks, 18 railroad lines, more than 1,500 businesses and a Board of Trade. In these early days, banking regulations were minimal and the

industry was largely unreliable. Banks were printing their own currency, often without the adequate gold and silver reserves to back them. Because of this, banks were failing and customers were paying the price.

A group of leaders saw this problem and decided to establish a trustworthy and reliable bank, the Merchants Savings Loan and Trust Company—Bank of America's oldest heritage bank in Chicago. Among its principal founders were William B. Ogden, the first mayor of Chicago; Isaac Arnold, the close friend and biographer of Abraham Lincoln; Cyrus Hall McCormick, the agricultural industrialist and inventor of the mechanical reaper; and Grant Goodrich, a founder of Northwestern University.

All went well for a time. Chicago continued to expand, passing St. Louis and Cincinnati as the major city for industry in the West. In 1860, the Illinois candidate Abraham Lincoln was nominated at the Republican National Convention in Chicago. The city became the most important hub in the American railroad system, which reached the Pacific in 1869. During the 1860s, industries prospered, especially those involving the transformation of raw materials from the West into products destined for the East.

In 1871, the Great Fire razed Chicago. Wooden houses, commercial and industrial buildings, and private mansions were all consumed in the blaze. The Merchants Savings Loan and Trust Company building was destroyed. But not before its president, Solomon Smith, and two clerks rushed in, opened the vault and rescued \$4 million in cash, checks, securities and bonds. With the assets hidden in their clothing, they made their way back to Smith's home.

Before they could return for the bank's books, the building was gone. In the aftermath of the fire, the bank opened for business in the basement of Solomon's home. In keeping with its reputation for reliability, the bank took the word of its customers for verification of their accounts. To deepen the confidence of the community and its customers, the Merchants Savings Loan and Trust Company alone decided to pay in full on all accounts. Other banks only offered to pay 25 cents on the dollar for lost accounts.

The years following the Great Fire are known as the Great Rebuilding—thousands of buildings had to be rebuilt, including those in Chicago's central business district. With new fire laws in place, buildings had to be constructed using fireproof materials like brick, stone, marble, terra cotta and, later, steel. Because businesses preferred plain-looking buildings, given that fancy ornaments cost more money, a new, streamlined style emerged in Chicago architecture that became known as the Chicago School of architecture. As a result, Chicago became the nation's architectural capital and was home to the first metal-framed skyscraper. These building materials were more expensive than wood, and with most of Chicago's banks failing after the fire, the Merchants Savings Loan and Trust Company played an important role in the Great Rebuilding.

Visit one of our Heritage Centers for an up close look at this and other stories from our bank's history.