

## **Washington (George) Park**

5531 S. King Dr. Chicago, IL 60615

### **Short Introduction:**

Washington (George) Park stretches from 51st to 60th streets (north to south) and Cottage Grove Avenue to Martin Luther King Jr. Drive (east to west). It is a historic South Side park, designed by Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, two of the most prominent architects of the United States. This park houses the DuSable Museum of African American History, Dyett High School, an 1871 Fire Relic, a Washington Monument, a Refectory, and a large sculpture designed by Lorado Taft “Fountain of Time.” The park also offers spaces for recreation, including gyms, nature areas (Harvest Garden and Arboretum), playgrounds for various sports, afterschool programs, and even a game room.

### **Local History/Background for Teachers’ Prep:**

- Timeline:

In 1869, the Illinois State Department passed three bills to create park and boulevard systems in Chicago, based on Paul Cornell and Frederick Law Olmstead’s advocacy for park and boulevard systems in Chicago. In 1871, Olmstead and his partner Calvert Vaux completed the grand plans for Washington Park. The original plans were burned in the 1871 Fire. The plans, nonetheless, were implemented and the park was constructed in the 1880s by another landscape architect, Horace William Shaler Cleveland (also known as H.W.S. Cleveland). Before 1881, Washington Park was known as the “Western Division” connected to the “Eastern Division” (Jackson Park), through the Midway Plaisance. In 1881, the names of both parks were officially changed to honor the first and seventh presidents of the United States, respectively. In 1910, Daniel H. Burnham’s firm built a building on the park property. Since 1971, this building has housed the DuSable Museum of African American History. In 1922, Lorado Z. Taft, a sculptor and writer, created the Fountain of Time sculpture on Cottage Grove Avenue and 59th Street. He was inspired by the “Paradox of Time” poem by Henry Austin Dobson. During the 1930s, the Park District added two swimming pools to meet a growing need in the African American community, which in the 1990s were converted into a major aquatic center. The Walter H. Dyett High School for the Arts was built on property transferred from the park to the Board of Education in 1991. In 2004, the National Register of Historic Places added Washington Park to its list. In 2016, the park was saved by the city losing out on the Olympic bid and as the location to house the Obama Presidential Center (Jackson Park won the Obama Center).

- Who Designed It?

Washington Park is a culmination of many great architects and landscape designers of the 20th century. **Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903)**, a landscape architect and journalist among his other titles, was the Chief Architect of Central Park in New York and was the Head of Landscape for the World's Columbian Exposition. He's responsible for the combination of art and nature in both Washington and Jackson Park. He worked on many of these projects with his partner, **Calvert Vaux (1824-1895)**. Vaux was a British landscape architect and once the Secretary of the U.S. Sanitary Commission. This duo was behind the Central Park in New York, the New York State Reservation at Niagara Falls, and many more public and private landscapes. It was the Olmsted and Vaux plan for Washington Park that was implemented by **Horace William Shaler Cleveland (1814-1900)**, another prominent landscape architect of the nation. Cleveland was inspired by Ralph Waldo Emerson's simple design style and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's idea of social responsibility. The Roundhouse in the park, which is now used by the DuSable Museum, was built by **Daniel H. Burnham (1846-1912)**, a highly influential architect known for his work in the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and his contribution to the development of skyscrapers.

- A Public Activism Space

Washington Park is not just a recreational space, but it has also been used since its beginning years for activist gatherings. Two prominent groups—Bug Club aka Washington Park Forum and Negro Bug Club aka Negro Forum—used the park as a meeting space. The Bug Club started meeting in the year of the Pullman Strike in 1894. It consisted of white radicals and Marxists, while the Negro Bug Club consisted of evangelical preachers and Communists, among others. The Bug Club's meeting spot is now specified in the park—named *The Forum*—with a flag pole and seats serving as their official meeting spot.

### **Videos (Pre-Field Trip Prep):**

Virtual Field Trip - DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center  
[https://www.dusablemuseum.org/aiovg\\_videos/freedom\\_and\\_resistance/](https://www.dusablemuseum.org/aiovg_videos/freedom_and_resistance/)

**Images:**



“Lagoon” (1900) Images sourced from the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site”



“Women work over a mud oven in Washington Park during a civil defense emergency feeding exercise on Nov. 6, 1954. From left are: Mrs. Georgiana Ketchum, Mrs. Howard Campbell, Mrs. John J. Tierney and Mrs. James A. Sullivan.”

Image sourced from *The Chicago Tribune*.

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2015/06/18/vintage-washington-park/>

### **Walking Tour Script:**

Note: This park is large and includes multiple road crossings. It is likely that you will not be able to visit all the spots mentioned on this list.

The best place to start the tour is at the Aquatic Center/Refectory. It has parking for cars and a bus stop.

- **[From parking/bus stop to first location]:**
  - Washington (George) Park stretches from 51st to 60th streets (north to south) and Cottage Grove Avenue to Martin Luther King Jr. Drive (east to west). It is a historic South Side park, designed by Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, two of the most prominent architects of the United States. This park houses the DuSable Museum of African American

History, Dyett High School, an 1871 Fire Relic, a Washington Monument, a Refectory, and a large sculpture designed by Lorado Taft “Fountain of Time.” The park also offers spaces for recreation, including gyms, nature areas (Harvest Garden and Arboretum), playgrounds for various sports, afterschool programs, and even a game room.

- **Washington Park Refectory**
  - This refectory is designed classically and has two floors, “Park Level” and “Tower Level.”
  - This is a place for community events.
- **Aquatic Center**
  - Adjacent to the Refectory is the Aquatic Center.
  - During the 1930s, the Park District added two swimming pools to meet a growing need in the African American community, which in the 1990s were converted into a major aquatic center.
- **[from here to next location or the pond]:**
  - In 1869, the Illinois State Department passed three bills to create park and boulevard systems in Chicago, based on Paul Cornell and Frederick Law Olmstead’s advocacy for park and boulevard systems in Chicago. In 1871, Olmstead and his partner Calvert Vaux completed the grand plans for Washington Park. The original plans were burned in the 1871 Fire. The plans, nonetheless, were implemented and the park was constructed in the 1880s by another landscape architect, Horace William Shaler Cleveland (also known as H.W.S. Cleveland). Before 1881, Washington Park was known as the “Western Division” connected to the “Eastern Division” (Jackson Park), through the Midway Plaisance. In 1881, the names of both parks were officially changed to honor the first and seventh presidents of the United States, respectively.
  - The Walter H. Dyett High School for the Arts was built on property transferred from the park to the Board of Education in 1991. In 2004, the National Register of Historic Places added Washington Park to its list.
  - In 2016, the park was saved by the city losing out on the Olympic bid and as the location to house the Obama Presidential Center (Jackson Park won the Obama Center).
- **Fountain of Time (separate field trip lesson for this):**
  - In 1922, Lorado Z. Taft, a sculptor and writer, created the Fountain of Time sculpture on Cottage Grove Avenue and 59th Street. He was inspired by the “Paradox of Time” poem by Henry Austin Dobson.
- **The DuSable Museum of African American History (1921); previously the administration building:**
  - The DuSable was founded in 1961 by Dr. Margaret Taylor Burroughs and Charles Burroughs, in their home. Then, it was called the Ebony Museum

of Negro History and Art, and the purpose was to “educate the public about Black history, culture, and art.”

- Since 1971, this building has housed the DuSable Museum of African American History.
- The Roundhouse in the park, which is now used by the DuSable Museum, was built by **Daniel H. Burnham (1846-1912)**, a highly influential architect known for his work in the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 and his contribution to the development of skyscrapers.
- **Gotthold Ephraim Lessing Monument**
  - **Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781)** was a German writer, philosopher, playwright, and art critic. He had immigrated from Germany to the U.S. at the age of 12. For the first half of his life, he made a fortune from a notions store, a wholesale dry goods company, and real estate investments. In the second half of his life, he gave away his fortune.
  - His plays and writings advocated for religious tolerance. Hence, we see him holding a pen and a book/journal.
  - This statue of him was installed here in 1930 with funds from Henry L. Frank, a prominent philanthropist.
  - This statue was created by **Albin Polasek (1879-1965)**, who was a significant sculptor of the time and himself an immigrant from what is now the Czech Republic. Polasek taught at the Art Institute for 3 decades.
- **[from here to next stop]:**
  - Washington Park is a culmination of many great architects and landscape designers of the 20th century. **Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903)**, a landscape architect and journalist among his other titles, was the Chief Architect of Central Park in New York and was the Head of Landscape for the World’s Columbian Exposition. He’s responsible for the combination of art and nature in both Washington and Jackson Park. He worked on many of these projects with his partner, **Calvert Vaux (1824-1895)**. Vaux was a British landscape architect and once the Secretary of the U.S. Sanitary Commission. This duo was behind Central Park in New York, the New York State Reservation at Niagara Falls, and many more public and private landscapes.
  - It was the Olmsted and Vaux plan for Washington Park that was implemented by **Horace William Shaler Cleveland (1814-1900)**, another prominent landscape architect of the nation. Cleveland was inspired by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s simple design style and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s idea of social responsibility.
- **Washington Monument**
  - This statue represents President George Washington (1732-1799) during the Revolutionary War. He was a General and the Commander in Chief.

- The original of this sculpture was created by Daniel Chester French and Edward C. Potter, both highly significant sculptors. It was gifted to the French government and installed in 1900 in Paris.
- In 1902, Chicagoans wanted a replica of this statue to be installed here, hence this bronze figure on a granite base was placed in George Washington Park.
- Benjamin F. Ferguson, Clarence Buckingham, Charles Hutchinson, Edward Butler, and Daniel Chester French all donated to create this sculpture.
- This sculpture was put up in 1904.
- [To end of the tour]:
  - Washington Park is not just a recreational space, but it has also been used since its beginning years for activist gatherings. Two prominent groups—Bug Club aka Washington Park Forum and Negro Bug Club aka Negro Forum—used the park as a meeting space. The Bug Club started meeting in the year of the Pullman Strike in 1894. It consisted of white radicals and Marxists, while the Negro Bug Club consisted of evangelical preachers and Communists, among others. The Bug Club’s meeting spot is now specified in the park—named *The Forum*—with a flag pole and seats serving as their official meeting spot.

### Questions for Discussion:

- Why do we name places after people?
- If you could name a park after someone, who would it be?
- How can these public spaces be utilized best?

### Suggested Activities:

- A visit to the DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center  
Entrance is free for Illinois K-12 public school students. The museum has exhibitions about Harold Washington, The 1919 Race Riot, and Dr. Margaret T. Burroughs’ art and influence. Book your tickets here:  
[https://www.etix.com/ticket/e/1022012/admission-chicago-dusable-museum-of-african-american-history?\\_ga=2.162696053.85856182.1709238307-161647958.1709238307](https://www.etix.com/ticket/e/1022012/admission-chicago-dusable-museum-of-african-american-history?_ga=2.162696053.85856182.1709238307-161647958.1709238307)
- Playtime by the Pond  
The park has a lot of free space that can be used for a variety of different games and activities, especially by the pond. Students can play a game of soccer, flag football, or baseball here.

## **Further Resources:**

Britannica: Frederick Law Olmsted

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Calvert-Vaux>

Hudson River Valley: Calvert Vaux: Architect and Planner by William Alex

[https://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/documents/401021/1049258/hvrr\\_7pt2\\_alex.pdf/904df2a0-a4af-44bd-a036-095509b7c5a9](https://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/documents/401021/1049258/hvrr_7pt2_alex.pdf/904df2a0-a4af-44bd-a036-095509b7c5a9)

Hyde Park Herald: Hyde Park Stories - Lessing Statue

[https://www.hpherald.com/evening\\_digest/hyde-park-stories-lessing-statue/article\\_77dbb866-1aa2-11ed-8994-93a40f9d8b79.html](https://www.hpherald.com/evening_digest/hyde-park-stories-lessing-statue/article_77dbb866-1aa2-11ed-8994-93a40f9d8b79.html)