

HISTORIC MICHIGAN BOULEVARD DISTRICT: POST-WORLD WAR II ERA CONTEXT STUDY

MICHIGAN AVENUE, FROM 11TH STREET TO RANDOLPH STREET



[Grant Park and Michigan Avenue, Circa 1960]

PREPARED BY: HERITAGE CONSULTING GROUP



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HISTORIC MICHIGAN BOULEVARD DISTRICT: POST-WORLD WAR II CONTEXT STATEMENT

**MICHIGAN AVENUE, FROM 11TH STREET TO RANDOLPH STREET
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1930-1972**

INTRODUCTION

On January 5, 2000, the City of Chicago designated the Historic Michigan Boulevard District as a Chicago Landmark. This District includes all of the properties fronting the west side of Michigan Avenue from 11th Street to Randolph Street as well as four adjacent buildings that contribute to the district's character. As described in the 2000 designation report, "The Michigan Avenue 'streetwall' along Grant Park is one of the most enduring images of Chicago . . . The wall of buildings also crystalizes much of what is emblematic of the city: an incomparable natural setting along Lake Michigan, bordered by great parks and internationally renowned architecture." The 2000 designation report appropriately recognized the historic development of the District between 1880 and 1930 as the majority of the District's buildings were built in that period.

While South Michigan Avenue faced the economic ebbs and flows from the Depression years forward, the stature of the avenue allowed it to remain a premier address in the city for offices, clubs and hotels. After the Depression and World War II construction and historic development in the District resumed, and with the passage of time it is now possible to examine and assess development and history of the District from 1930 to 1972. While the 1930s preceded World War II, the widely recognized term post-World War II era is used here to describe the period from 1930 to 1972. This context statement is an expansion of the District's period of significance; it uses the same boundaries identified by the original Historic Michigan Boulevard District.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MODERN EVOLUTION OF MICHIGAN AVENUE

The Historic Michigan Boulevard District is typically characterized by a series of turn-of-the-century Beaux-Arts buildings forming a continuous streetwall and making a ‘front yard’ for Chicago’s lakeshore. Following a hiatus in building during the Depression and World War II, mid-century era Chicago left its mark on the District and neighboring Grant Park. Building in the 1950s and 60s was fueled by improvements in infrastructure including the expansion of Lake Shore Drive and the growing interstate network. These developments went hand-in-hand with new and renovated hotel and office buildings along south Michigan Avenue and helped usher in the age of Modern and International style architecture in Chicago.

THE DEPRESSION AND WWII ERA (1930-1955)

Following national trends, the period from the Depression to World War II was a quiet one for the district. There was slight real estate activity with no new construction or major alterations. Until the mid-1950s, the only building activity was the construction of two-story “taxpayer” buildings¹, filling stations and surface parking lots clustered at the south end of the district as the remaining pre-Fire mansions were demolished.



**Michigan Avenue, Grant Park, and Band Shell, Looking North, 1938
(Kaufmann & Fabry, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Panoramic Photographs Collection)**

One notable public investment in the 1930s was the construction of a temporary band shell at 9th Street and Columbus Drive. Although temporary, this was the first formal venue to be located in Grant Park since the Lakefront Park Ballpark at Michigan Avenue and Madison Street from 1879 to 1884. This band shell began a tradition of public concerts in Grant Park. And although temporary, it hosted massive crowds for decades and defined the space as a public destination, positively impacting Michigan Avenue’s real estate values.

The absence of substantial development continued through World War II as economic activity – particularly commercial real estate development – took a back seat to the war effort. With Chicago being a center of recruiting in the Midwest, the war did impact the district. The U.S. Army purchased the Stevens Hotel (now Chicago Hilton and Towers, 720 S. Michigan) for barracks and classrooms for the Army Air Force, while the ballrooms were used by the USO. Grant Park was then used for drills and training.



Women’s Army Corps personnel march in Grant Park, 1943
(<http://monovisions.com/grant-park-in-chicago/>)

As the war wound down, real estate activity began to return to Michigan Avenue. In January, 1944, the U.S. Government sold the Stevens Hotel for \$4.91 million to Conrad Hilton. A year later, a lengthy modernization program began at the hotel. What became known as the Conrad Hilton Hotel would become a keystone to Hilton Corporation. In this same period, Roosevelt College (now University), with financial backing from Marshall Field, the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) and the Rosenwald Foundation, bought the Auditorium Building (430 S. Michigan), transforming the offices into classrooms and the hotel rooms into dormitories.³

¹ A “taxpayer” building refers to a small one- or two-story structures built to cover the owner’s annual property tax assessed for owning a parcel of land. They are usually constructed with the hope that the land can soon be redeveloped into a larger building capable of generating more revenue, or simply to hold a parcel of land along a new road or especially a streetcar line while waiting for value to appreciate.

² The original band shell was intended to be temporary but was used until it fell into disrepair in the 1970s. The Petrillo Music Shell, a semi-permanent structure, was constructed as a replacement in 1978.

³ “Hall of Yesterdays,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12/6/1964



Grant Park and Michigan Avenue, Circa 1950
(<http://monovisions.com/grant-park-in-chicago/>)

One of the biggest changes to the street itself came with the construction of the Grant Park underground garage north of Monroe Street (now the Millennium Park Garage) in the 1950s. The street's ornamental light fixtures were replaced; the 'peristyle' and landscaping at the northern end of Grant Park were removed or altered; pedestrian entrance canopies (of a modern design) were built on the sidewalks; and vehicular garage entrances were cut into the medians and curb lanes.

The intention to expand Lake Shore Drive was well known in the mid-1950s. In response to Lake Shore Drive's growing importance and heightened use, many of the buildings along Michigan Avenue began erecting rooftop signs that were visible from the new roadway. Rooftop signs began appearing on the top of such buildings as the Congress Hotel, the Michigan Boulevard Building, the Railway Exchange ('Santa Fe,' now 'Motorola'), the Musical College Building ('Torco'), Montgomery Ward ('Almer Coe Optical'), and Karpen-Standard Oil Building ('Standard'). Most of these signs were erected in the 1950s and into the 60s.



Rooftop Signs on Michigan Avenue, Circa 1960 (chicagodesignslinger.blogspot.com)

THE MODERN ERA (1955-1972)

While some American inner cities slid into urban decay, Chicago held its own. The city's will to survive and drive to build was reinforced when Richard J. Daley was elected mayor in 1955. His enthusiasm for huge projects and Chicago's receipt of federal funds fueled the rapid redevelopment of the city in the 1950s and 60s.⁴ In addition, zoning codes were liberalized in 1957, opening the door to the torrent of downtown development that characterized the next three decades. By the early 1960s, Chicago was on the brink of an urban renaissance.

Significant public resources went into improvement of the city's infrastructure, and policies that encouraged development were initiated to upgrade Chicago's transportation infrastructure. These initiatives had two chief effects on the South Michigan Avenue District. 1) The expansion and development of roadways allowed for South Michigan Avenue and Grant Park to be more easily accessible, making it a very desirable downtown locale. 2) The southern strip of Michigan Avenue was already heavily populated with older buildings. As a result, there are only a limited number of new buildings built during this era, but many buildings underwent internal and external renovations as to not fall behind the quickly progressing city.



Grant Park and Michigan Avenue, Circa 1960
The 1958 Borg-Warner Building is visible at the left
(chicagodesignslinger.blogspot.com)

Public Infrastructure

The improvements to and investment in local infrastructure were closely tied to, and even fueled, development. New highway networks not only created means of connecting downtown to the suburbs, but also allowed automotive travelers an easy means of getting to Chicago. For many driving to Chicago coming from the south via the Skyway and the Dan Ryan Expressway, entering the city from the south via Lake Shore Drive appointed South Michigan Avenue and Grant Park as Chicago's front yard.

⁴ Miles L. Berger, *They Built Chicago: Entrepreneurs Who Shaped A Great City's Architecture*, (Chicago: Book Bonus, Inc., 1992) p. 200.

The majority of the expressways in Chicago and nation wide came to fruition because of Eisenhower's Federal Aid Highway Act, signed in 1956. Locally, the President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, Dan Ryan, Jr., worked to bring an expansive highway system to metropolitan Chicago intended to connect to the growing Interstate network. Ryan created a large-scale bond issue program to kick-start the planning and construction of expressways in Cook County as early as 1955. Under Ryan's watch, the Calumet Skyway (now Chicago Skyway) was constructed in 1958 which joined with the then new I-294 Tri-State Tollway to the Indiana Toll Road, connecting Illinois to the eastern turnpikes. The Kennedy Expressway was fully opened in November 1960, the Dan Ryan in December 1962, and the final phase of the Stevenson was finished in November 1966. The Dan Ryan created an essential link between the Skyway, Stevenson, Kennedy, I-294 Tollway, and Lake Shore Drive.⁵

According to a 1958 *Tribune* article written at the opening of the new tri-state tollway, they found that, while rush hour was inevitably a challenge, over all Lake Shore Drive proved to be the best way to get from the Loop to the Illinois Tollway. The article went on to add, "... and Lake Shore is better than the Congress expressway alternative for the round-the-clock comparison. Between the tollway and Chicago's other new expressway, the Calumet Skyway, we found that the preferred route is also via Lake Shore drive."⁶

Fueled by the planned and on-going construction of interstates and new arterial thoroughfares, Daley created the Chicago Department of Development and Planning in 1956. Soon thereafter the completion of the Prudential Building on North Michigan Avenue ended the paralysis in downtown construction that had begun in the Depression years. Daley's public building program was enormous, and he moved it swiftly forward. One element in that program that had an impact on



**McCormick Place, Circa 1960
(Chicago Tribune)**

the District was the construction of the first McCormick Place convention center in 1960. The construction of McCormick Place was an initiative driven by both the city and state, and required \$41.8 million in state-issued bonds.⁷ McCormick Place not only served the city to attract revenue but also as a landmark at Chicago's southern gateway; located where Lake Shore Drive linked to the Skyway and the Dan Ryan Expressway, and the 23rd Street viaduct (since demolished). Early in 1967, the first McCormick Place burned down. A new building was built on the same site, using the existing foundations, and opened in 1971.

⁵ Hal Foust, "25,000 Cars a Day to Use Road," *Chicago Tribune*, December 8, 1961.

⁶ Hal Foust, "Here Are Best Routes to New Tollway Gate," *Chicago Tribune*, August 11, 1958.

⁷ Miles L. Berger, *They Built Chicago: Entrepreneurs Who Shaped A Great City's Architecture*, (Chicago: Book Bonus, Inc., 1992) p. 200; "History," McCormick Place Chicago, <http://www.mccormickplace.com/about-us/history.php>.

Private Development

Daley's initiatives were well received by those looking to establish new buildings and leave a mark on the Chicago skyline, but for South Michigan Avenue this shift meant limited infill construction while simultaneously putting older buildings at risk. In 1966 when Strobeck, Reiss, & Co. purchased the Blum Building (today part of Columbia College) at 624 S. Michigan Avenue, Charles Strobeck said "The older buildings have got to be modernized. Unless the owners modernize the older buildings Chicago will be entering a phase, much like that in New York City, where it will become more economical to tear down the building."⁸

Luckily for the turn-of-the-century buildings on Michigan Avenue, many received renovations of varying degrees which saved these buildings from the wrecking ball. In 1957 many considered Orchestra Hall (220 S. Michigan) to be obsolete and therefore was at risk for demolition. However, the trustees chose to perform some necessary upgrades including installing elevators, altering the dimensions of the stage and converting the building's mechanical systems.⁹ In 1976 the Auditorium Building (430 S. Michigan) was designated as a Chicago Landmark in an effort to help preserve it; the theater had been moth-balled and left to deteriorate since the 1940s while the upper floors were converted into classrooms and education facilities for Roosevelt University.¹⁰ The Monroe Building (104 S. Michigan) acquired five new tenants in 1961, including the German Consulate and Statistical Tabulation Corp.'s national headquarters; presumably upgrades were made to the then fifty-year-old building to make it more desirable for its occupants.¹¹

Beyond interior alterations, a few properties received exterior face-lifts in the Historic Michigan Boulevard District. The four-story, brick American Radiator Building (816 S. Michigan) was remodeled in 1957, when a new front was constructed for the Underwood Typewriter Company. In 1958, the terra cotta façade of the Arcade Building (618 S. Michigan) was removed and replaced with a modern curtain wall by the architectural firm McClurg, Shoemaker & McClurg for IBM.

In addition to renovations, a handful of new buildings were constructed in Historic Michigan Boulevard District during this era. In the 1950s developers of motels focused on locations south of Loop, taking advantage of its lower land values, its proximity to Lake Shore Drive and the new "southern gateway"



Avenue Motel by the Aristocrat Inns of America, demolished
(<http://motelpostcards.blogspot.com/>)

⁸ "Old Office Building a Challenge to Agent," *Chicago Tribune*, 11/20/1966.

⁹ Seymour Raven, "All Signs Point to the Retention of Orchestra Hall," *Chicago Tribune*, 5/17/1957.

¹⁰ "Hall of Yesterdays," *Chicago Tribune*, 10/6/1964.

¹¹ "Real Estate news," *Chicago Tribune*, 5/5/1961.

for automobile traffic entering the city, and the ease of automobile access to the fringes of the central business area. At the end of the 1950s, Martin Becht and Eugene Hueytown of Aristocrat Inns of America commissioned the architectural firm A. Epstein and Sons to design several motels including the Essex Inn (800 S. Michigan). The other motels were also located on Michigan Avenue near Grant Park: the Ascot Inn (today a Best Western) at 1100 S. Michigan Avenue (outside the District) and the Avenue Motel at Roosevelt Road and Michigan Avenue (now demolished). Other hotel developments include the six-story building at the northwest corner of Michigan Avenue and Harrison, which was originally designed as a stand-alone hotel in 1958 by Tamburas & Theodore. The property was later purchased by the Congress Hotel (520 S. Michigan Ave.) and was incorporated into that building.

In addition to the Essex Inn, corporate offices were built in the District in the modern era, including the Borg-Warner Building (200 S. Michigan) and the Johnson Publishing Building (820 S. Michigan). This construction of office buildings on the southern end of the Michigan Boulevard District continued a trend established in the early-twentieth century. In 1904 the Railway Exchange Building (224 S. Michigan) paved the way for office buildings. Shortly after the Municipal Courts Building (1906; 116 S. Michigan), the Harvester Building (1907; 600 S. Michigan), McCormick Building (1908-12; 332 S. Michigan), and more went up along south Michigan Avenue. Though there were limited parcels available to construct new office buildings on the southern end of the Avenue in the mid-twentieth century, the area remained attractive due to its proximity to the Loop; the opportunity for employees to enjoy Grant Park and the lakefront; and ease of access via public transportation and automobile from the new southern gateway to the city.¹² By the end of the modern era the Historic Michigan Boulevard District was clearly on an upward trajectory providing lodging for visitors, a center for the arts, and a hub for business, all easily accessible via car and public transit.



Michigan Avenue, Looking North from Jackson Blvd., Circa 1960 (Epstein, “Throwback Thursday, Borg-Warner Building)

¹² David Ibata, “Wylie F. L. Tuttle: A decision maker and ‘his own man’,” *Chicago Tribune*, 8/5/1984.



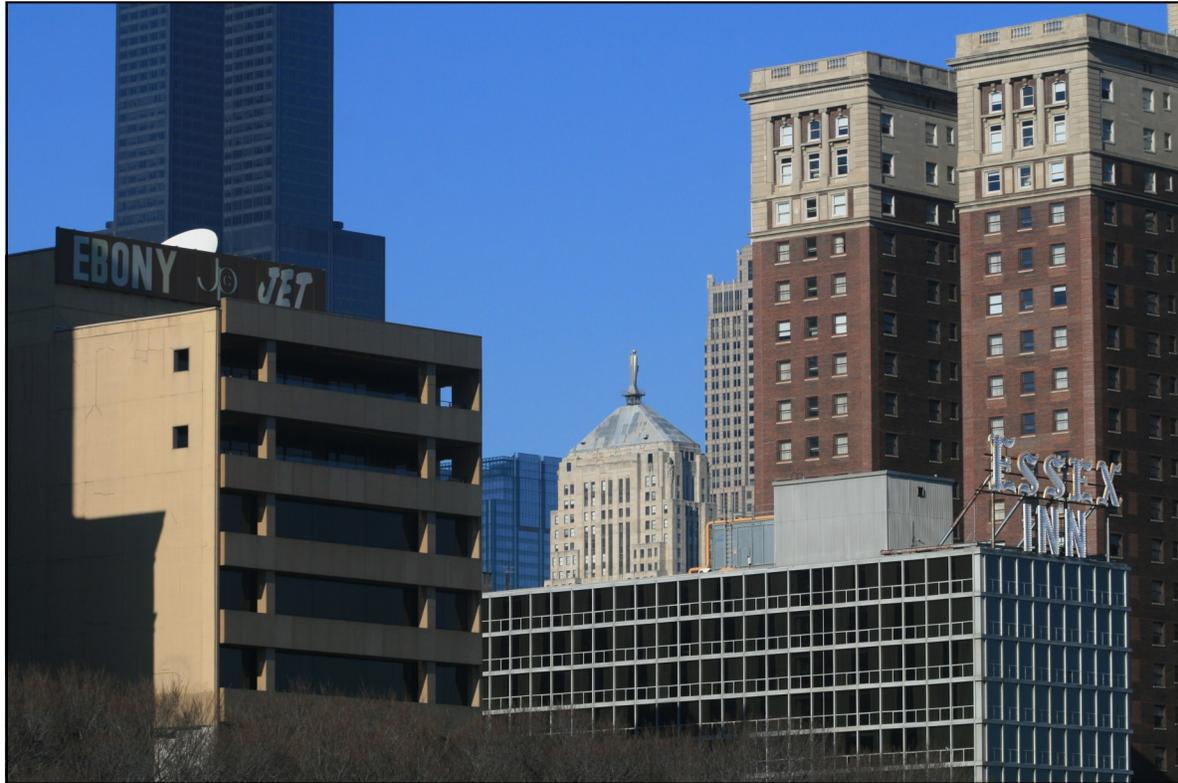
1.



2.



3.



4.

Clockwise from the upper left: 1. Essex Inn (800 S. Michigan Ave.) completed in 1961 and designed by A. Epstein and Sons; 2. Borg-Warner Building (200 S. Michigan Ave.) completed in 1958 and designed by A. Epstein and Sons in association with William Lescaze; 3. Johnson Publishing Company Building (820 S. Michigan Ave.) completed in 1972 and designed by John W. Moutoussamy, of Dubin, Dubin, Black & Moutoussamy; 4. Rooftop signs on the Johnson Publishing Company Building and Essex Inn. (Heritage Consulting, December 2015)

CHAPTER TWO: ASSOCIATED BUILDINGS

ESSEX INN (800 S. MICHIGAN AVE.)

Date: 1961

Architect: A. Epstein and Sons

In the early twentieth century, traveling was a luxury and hotel accommodations were no different. Chicago's hotels were opulent; this era produced establishments like the Drake, Blackstone, and Palmer House. These hotels were oriented toward a train-traveling public that stayed close to the city's central train stations. However, during the Depression and World War



Essex Inn, Circa 1961
(Epstein, "Throwback Thursday, Essex Inn")

II, there was little time or funds for travel and hotels. In the post-World War II era cities and hotels changed to cater to the automobile; the interstate system was developed, and motor-hotels were on the rise. The Essex Inn was built during a peak in hotel and motel construction in Chicago,¹³ where auto-centric motor hotels and motels were preferred. No hotels were built in downtown Chicago between the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 up to 1958, when the Executive House was built at 71 East Wacker Drive. In contrast, "motels" were popping up around the edges of Chicago, as well as in and around the Loop.

The Essex is one among three hotels designed by A. Epstein and Sons for Martin Gecht and Eugene Heytow of the Aristocrat Inns of America. All three were located within blocks of each other along Michigan Avenue. Among the three – Ascot, Avenue, and Essex – the Essex was the largest investment. The Avenue Inn (demolished) was the first to open in March of 1960 at Roosevelt Road and Michigan Avenue. The 100 room hotel cost \$2 million, or about \$16 million today. The Ascot Inn, at 1100 S. Michigan Avenue and outside the District, opened shortly after the Essex.¹⁴

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¹³ James M. Gavin, "City's Hotels Wage Battle for Business," *Chicago Tribune*, April 22, 1962.

¹⁴ James M. Gavin, "Downtown Invasion Continues," *Chicago Tribune*, September 18, 1960.

Gecht and Heytow firmly embraced both the place of motels in South Michigan Avenue's development and the need for more: "What makes a motel a success? Location, they said; that's why the motels are going up on Michigan [A]venue."¹⁵ Gecht and Heytow's motels targeted the influx of people coming to Chicago for conventions, and the waves of motor-travelers that followed the development of the Interstate. The success of their previous venue, Avenue Inn, two blocks south, encouraged the development of the Ascot and the Essex.

The Essex exemplifies the International Style of architecture that came to fruition in this era. While architecture styles mid-twentieth century remain not well articulated and terms as "modern" and "international" are used often without clear points of reference, the International Style is defined by box-shaped buildings that have a strong vertical articulation, revealed skeletal frames, smooth wall surfaces, and an absence of ornamentation. Materials and composition are largely used to define style. Often expressed with a curtain wall system, Epstein's design for the Essex is a superior expression of the style. To attract motorists, a large illuminated sign with the hotel's name is located on top of the tower.

The location, development, and marketing of the Essex Inn are interwoven with the introduction of the Interstate highway network and the creation of new convention sites in and around Chicago. These changes to infrastructure and the addition of conference centers were a long time in the making which gave motel developers like the Aristocratic Inns of America an opportunity to capitalize on the forthcoming increase of visitors.

A. Epstein and Sons

The architecture firm of A. Epstein and Sons was founded by Abraham Epstein in 1921. Abraham Epstein emigrated from Kiev in 1905. He studied civil engineering at the University of Illinois and graduated in 1911. Epstein typically designed industrial buildings – most notably, Epstein was responsible for many warehouse buildings in Chicago's Central Manufacturing District (CMD). These buildings were typically multi-story, masonry structures with Classical Revival or Art Deco ornamentation in terra cotta or limestone.¹⁶

After serving in World War II, Abraham's sons, Raymond and Sidney, joined the firm and Abraham added "and Sons" to the name. In the 1950s, A. Epstein and Sons continued to broaden their work into high-rises, factories, medical centers and expanding the firm domestically and internationally. In the late fifties and early sixties, A. Epstein & Sons worked alongside Mies van der Rohe on the Federal Center (1974). Simultaneously, Epstein completed four motel buildings, the Avenue Inn (1960), the Essex Inn (1961), the Ascot Inn (1961), and the McCormick Inn (1973). Epstein's work from this era is highly evocative of Miesian architectural principles, utilizing rectangular forms with precision and pattern as established from the structural frame. Other local buildings from this era include 300 S. Wacker (1972) and the Crain Communications Building (1984). The firm founded by Epstein remains in existence.

¹⁵ James M. Gavin, "Downtown Invasion Continues," *Chicago Tribune*, September 18, 1960.

¹⁶ City of Chicago, "Landmark Designation Report: Spiegel Administration Building," November 2010. p. 26.

BORG –WARNER BUILDING (200 S. MICHIGAN AVE.)

Date: 1958

Architects: A. Epstein and Sons; William Lescaze

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the skyline of Chicago was transformed with corporate headquarters designed in the International Style, which reestablished Chicago as the leading center of American commercial architecture during this period. Chicago’s flourishing Miesian architectural culture of the period—labeled the “Second Chicago School of Architecture” by architectural historians such as Carl Condit—was dominated by architects who had studied under Ludwig Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) or worked in his office and then spread his principles through subsequent work at large architectural firms with



**Borg-Warner Building, Circa 1960
(Epstein, “Throwback Thursday, Borg Warner Building”)**

national and international clientele. While most of these International Style corporate office towers were located in the Loop, an important example in the District is the Borg-Warner Building at 200 S. Michigan Avenue. The Borg-Warner Building, the largest structure in the District from the post-World War II era, was designed by A. Epstein and Sons with William Lescaze as consulting architect.

The Borg-Warner company traces its origins to 1918, when after 14 years in Moline, Illinois, Charles W. Borg and Marshall Beck moved their automobile clutch manufacturing business to Chicago. In 1928, Borg & Beck merged with three other Midwestern auto parts makers—Warner Gear of Muncie, Indiana; Mechanics Universal Joint of Rockford, Illinois; and Marvel Carburetor of Flint, Michigan—to form Borg-Warner, headquartered at 310 S. Michigan Avenue in

Chicago. This new company expanded quickly. Annual sales rose from about \$50 million in 1929 to over \$600 million by the late 1950s.¹⁷ Corresponding with its growth, Borg-Warner commissioned A. Epstein and Sons to build their corporate headquarters at 200 S. Michigan Avenue. Borg-Warner left Chicago for suburban Detroit in 2005, and since then the building has been known as 200 South Michigan.¹⁸

The Borg-Warner Building is a 22-story, 350,000 square foot office high-rise that exemplifies the International Style of architecture, which is largely characterized by flat roofs and smooth wall surfaces, achieved through the use of materials such as concrete, steel and glass.

The International Style became associated with tall steel-and-glass skyscrapers in the post-World War II era thanks largely to the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and his followers. Mies, who had headed the Bauhaus (a German school that espoused modern design), came to Chicago from Germany in 1938 to head the School of Architecture at IIT. Mies' twin apartment buildings at 860-880 North Lake Shore Drive (1948-51, a designated Chicago Landmark) established the visual look of International Style skyscrapers. Rectangular massing, "cellular" elevations expressed in steel and glass, and recessed, glass-enclosed lobbies surrounded by freestanding structural columns characterized both 860-880 and other International Style skyscrapers, including the Borg Warner Building and the Essex Inn in the District.



Borg-Warner Building, Circa 1960
(Epstein, "Throwback Thursday, Borg Warner Building")

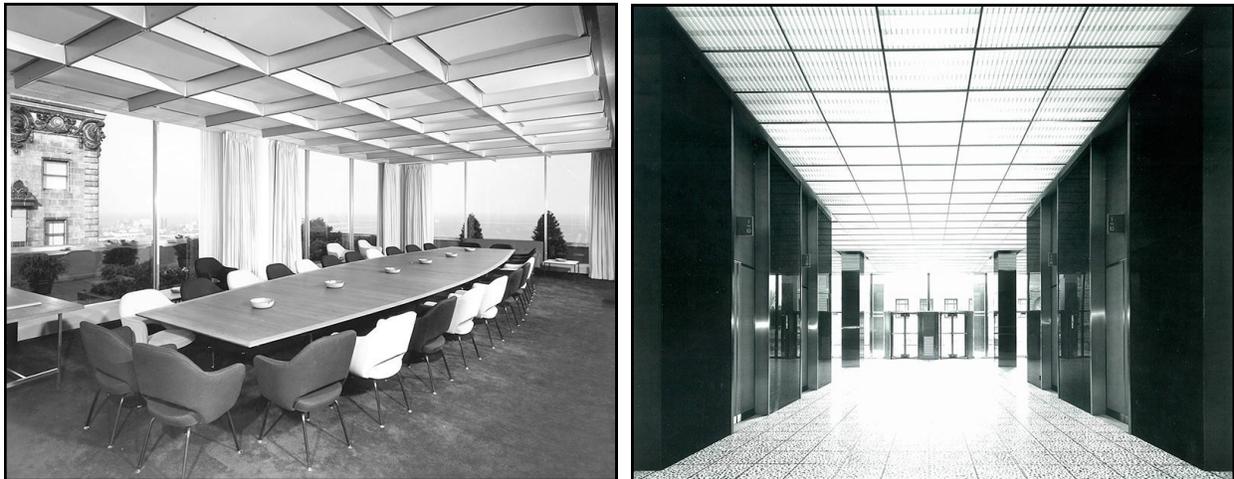
¹⁷ Borg Warner, "History," <https://www.borgwarner.com/en/Company/History/default.aspx>

¹⁸ "Another Familiar Name Being Eased from Michigan Avenue," <http://www.chicagoarchitecture.org/2015/08/21/another-familiar-name-being-removed-from-michigan-avenue/>

The flexibility of the International Style meant that it could be used for both office and hotel buildings. The Borg-Warner Building was also one of the first buildings in Chicago to employ true curtainwall construction and also the first on Michigan Avenue to break away from traditional façade elements. Epstein used blue porcelain enamel spandrel panels and mirrored glass instead.¹⁹

William Lescaze

Epstein brought in modernist architect William Lescaze as a consulting architect for the Borg-Warner Building. Lescaze was born in Onex, Sweden in 1896. He studied architecture in Switzerland before immigrating to the United States in 1920. He briefly worked in Cleveland, Ohio before establishing a practice in New York City. In 1929, Philadelphia architect George Howe invited Lescaze to form a partnership, which was named Howe & Lescaze. Within a few weeks of joining forces, the duo began work on a large project for downtown Philadelphia. The resulting structure, completed in 1932, was the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society (PSFS) Building, which is today generally considered the nation's first International Style skyscraper, and the first International Style building of wide significance in the United States.



From left to right: 1. Rooftop conference room of the Borg-Warner Building, circa 1960; 2. Elevator Lobby of the Borg-Warner Building, circa 1960. (Epstein, “Throwback Thursday, Borg Warner Building”)

¹⁹ Ernest Fuller, “Choose a Color Plan –for a New Skyscraper,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 1958.

JOHNSON PUBLISHING COMPANY BUILDING (820 S. MICHIGAN AVE.)

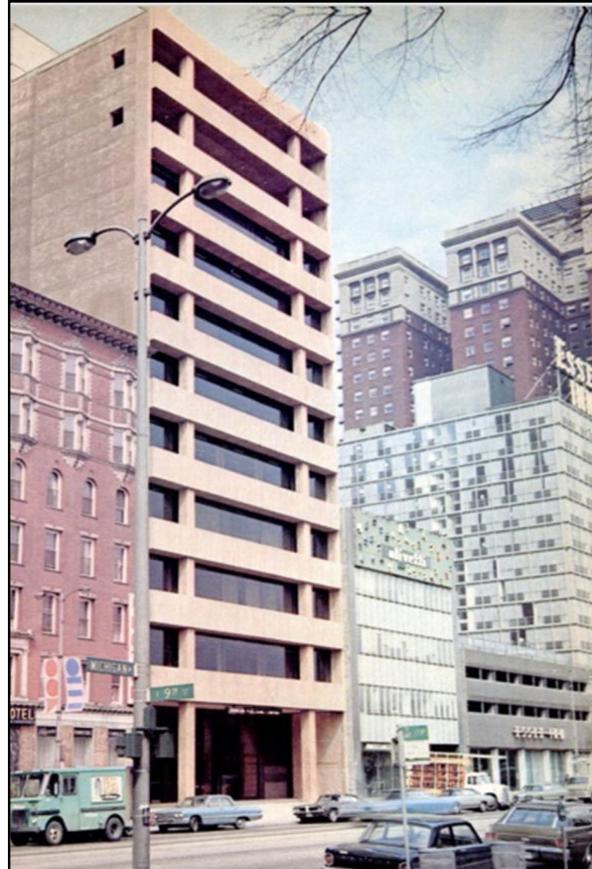
Date: 1972

Architect: John W. Moutoussamy, of Dubin, Dubin, Black & Moutoussamy

The Johnson Publishing Company is the largest African-American-owned media firm in the United States and a significant Chicago company. It was founded in November 1942 by John H. Johnson. It is the home of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, as well as Fashion Fair Cosmetics, Ebony Fashion Fair, and the Johnson Publishing Company Book Division. Linda Johnson Rice, daughter of founder John H. Johnson served as President of the company.²⁰ Today the Johnson Publishing Company is headquartered at 200 S. Michigan Ave.²¹

In 1972, at the opening of the 820 S. Michigan Avenue tower, John H. Johnson spoke before many influential Chicago figures, including Mayor Richard J. Daley. Johnson ruminated on the new building, stating, "This new building reflects our faith in the strength and vitality of that long line of Black men and women who have contributed so much to this country and this community. Most importantly, this new building is a poem in marble and glass which symbolizes our unshakable faith that the struggles of our forefathers were not in vain and that we shall indeed overcome in this land in our times."²²

The Johnson Publishing Company Building was completed in 1972 and designed by architect John W. Moutoussamy. Located at 820 S. Michigan Avenue, the building is an eleven-story high-rise and when built it featured strong horizontal lines of walnut Travertine cladding at each floor line, and two narrow columns a bay in from either end of the building. Today, the building has been reclad in concrete which altered the once modernist appearance into a more brutalist façade.²³



Johnson Publishing Company Building, 1972
(*Jet*, "New JPC Building Dedicated," 6/1/1972)

²⁰ "Johnson Publishing Company, Inc. History" *International Directory of Company Histories*, Vol.72. St. James Press, 2005.

²¹ The current Chairman is John H. Johnson's daughter, Linda Johnson-Rice and the CEO is Desiree Rogers, former White House Social Secretary for President Obama.

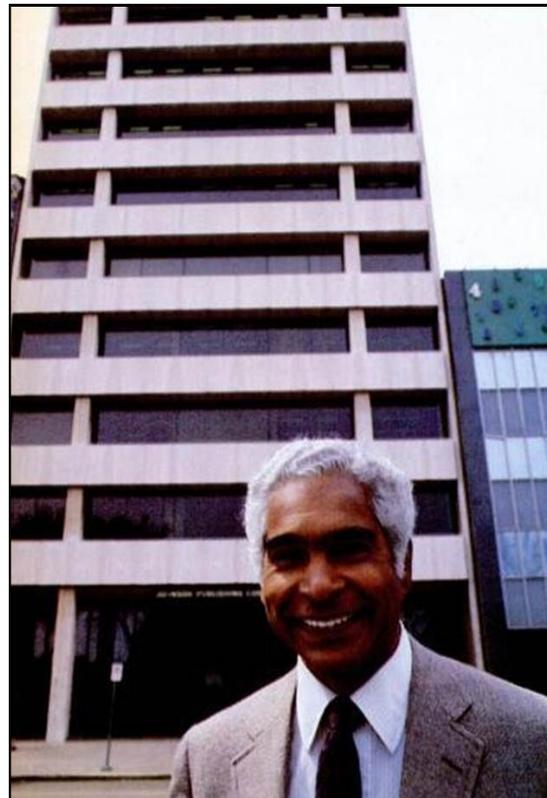
²² "New JPC Building Dedicated" *Jet*, 6/1/1972, p. 10-18, 51-54.

²³ Emporis.com, "Johnson Publishing Company Building, Chicago, Illinois."

Architect John W. Moutoussamy

The building was designed by John W. Moutoussamy an African American architect who made a significant contribution to Chicago's architecture during the modern movement. He received a B.S. in Architecture from the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in 1948 where he studied under Mies Van Der Rohe.²⁴ He was honored by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1978 when the Jury of Fellows advanced him to Fellowship within the AIA for his "contributions to the advancement of the profession of architecture."²⁵

Moutoussamy was an architect with a modern vision, as exemplified in his design for the Johnson Publishing Company Building. From the mid-century onward, it was difficult for African-American architects to secure lucrative commissions. Moutoussamy's client John H. Johnson observed that African American architects "end up with a low volume of work and unadventurous clients, and they miss out on opportunities to do pioneering work, attract attention, and bask in the same lime-light as their majority peers."²⁶ Johnson commissioned Moutoussamy to design a modernist headquarters in a high profile location on South Michigan Avenue to bring attention to the extensive talent of African-American architects that too often went unnoticed. When Moutoussamy became a partner in 1965, Dubin, Dubin, Black & Moutoussamy became the first major racially-integrated architectural practice in Chicago and one of the first such firms in the country.²⁷ The firm's project work included high-rise office and residential (rental and condominium) buildings, colleges and college dormitories, including the 1977 Truman College building at 1145 W. Wilson Avenue.²⁸ Other projects included housing for the elderly, mass transit stations in Chicago and the District of Columbia, and suburban residential housing.



Johnson Publishing Company Building and Moutoussamy, 1983 (*Ebony*, "Black Architects: Shapers of Urban American, July 1983)

²⁴ Obituary, "Architect John W. Moutoussamy," *Chicago Tribune*, 5/9/1995.

²⁵ Robert M. Lawrence to John W. Moutoussamy, 2/27/1978

²⁶ Kiisk, Linda, "20 on 20/20 Vision: Perspectives on Diversity and Design" AIA Diversity Committee and Boston Society of Architects, 2003, p. 52.

²⁷ "Life Story for Martin David Dubin," 7/6/2013. <http://www.goldmanfuneralgroup.com/book-of-memories/1628412/Dubin-Martin-David/obituary.php>

²⁸ Alice Sinkevitch, *AIA Guide to Chicago*, (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2004). p. 230.

Moutoussamy also designed a collection of other modernist buildings and complexes around Chicago, including the 37-story, modernist apartment building Regents Park at 50th and Lake Shore Drive (1972); the Quadrangle House condo building at the south end of Jackson Park at 6700 S. South Shore Drive, a 28-story, modernist high rise (1968), and the Theodore K. Lawless Gardens at 35th and Rhodes, a lower-middle class housing development which was honored by the Chicago chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1970. He also designed the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority headquarters, a five-story, Miesian-inspired design at 57th and Stony Island Avenue (1980).³¹

³¹ <http://www.wbez.org/bey/2010/04/cool-building-wednesday-ebony-jet-building/20844>

CHAPTER THREE: DESIGNATION REQUIREMENTS

According to the 2000 landmark designation report for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District, “Michigan Avenue has always placed a special role in the architectural, cultural, economic, and social evolution of Chicago.” With hindsight, it is evident that this important role did not stop in 1930 but continued through the post-World War II era. The buildings in the Historic Michigan Boulevard District associated with the post-World War II era may be considered for landmark designation if they meet two or more of the following criteria as well as the separate integrity criterion in the Landmarks Ordinance.

CRITERIA 1

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

CRITERIA 4

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

CRITERIA 5

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

In addition, the following requirements must be met:

- The building must be built during the post-World War II era, or between 1930 and 1972, and be located within the boundaries of the Historic Michigan Boulevard District.
- The architectural style of the building must reflect the influence of the Modern Movement in architecture.
- The building must have been built as an entirely new structure and not be a new façade or remodeling of an earlier building.
- The height, massing and orientation of the building must contribute to the Michigan Avenue street wall which is a character-defining feature of the Michigan Boulevard District.
- The building must reflect the historic context of the Historic Michigan Boulevard District in the post-World War II era.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CITY OF CHICAGO

Rahm Emanuel, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development

David Reifman, Commissioner

Patricia A. Scudiero, Managing Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Zoning and Land Use

Eleanor Esser Gorski, Deputy Commissioner, Planning, Design and Historic Preservation

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