Performing authentic savagery: National myth-making and indigenous survival at American World's Fairs, 1893-1904

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Performing Authentic Savagery:

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

by Hannah Sullivan Facknitz

May 2018

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of History, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION
This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at National Conference on Undergraduate Research on 7 April 2018.
In honor of all indigenous persons whose stories are told herein and all those untold or obscured, for without your living histories, this work would not be possible.

“Under the crust of that portion of Earth called the United States of America—‘from California . . . to the Gulf Stream waters’—are interred the bones, villages, fields, and sacred objects of American Indians. They cry out for their stories to be heard through their descendants who carry the memories of how the country was founded and how it came to be as it is today.”

-Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
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Preface

I write this in late March on a snow day that trapped me inside and more or less forced me to finish these last few line items for my thesis. I guess I ought to thank the snow in my acknowledgements for locking me in a room with my computer as the very worst of senior year fatigue sets in. My senior year trajectory is a little different, though. The 2017-18 school year is, in fact, my third “senior” year in college. During the first (2012-13), I decided to delay graduation in order to pursue two minors and an honors capstone project. The second (2013-14) ended prematurely when I was diagnosed with a chronic, life-threatening illness. Now, after three years in recovery I spent bed and housebound, devastated over dropping out of James Madison University only eight weeks from graduating, I have finally returned to complete my bachelor’s degree.

Foremost in my mind when I stepped back on campus was my incomplete thesis. The project started in 2013 as an ill-formed, overly ambitious attempt to study the entire history of American Indian performative tradition from 1887 (Dawes Allotment Act) to 1934 (Indian Reorganization Act). Then, I narrowed my focus (only slightly) to just Wild West Shows of the era, of which there were many. Before I could realize I was going to be researching this thesis for the rest of my life if I stuck to my topic, I found out I had a disease known as lupus nephritis where my immune system had malfunctioned and started attacking my kidneys. Later I would learn the disease had also damaged my heart, lungs, and nervous system. In order to avoid kidney failure and dialysis, I started aggressive treatment immediately. Being stubborn, I decided to attempt my final semester, but within a few weeks it was obvious I needed to withdraw.

At the time (Spring 2014), it was not clear whether I would return. Outcomes for people
with my disease vary widely, but for most who develop organ involvement as I have, the trajectory is bleak. If I am honest, I forgot about my honors project during the following years and focused on surviving. For two years, my life revolved around day-to-day endurance, but last year about this time, a treatment changed everything. I was able to walk without an aid for the first time since I left school. I could bathe, clothe, and feed myself. I will not be trite and say it gave me my life back, since there is no going back with a chronic, incurable condition, but it changed enough that I could dream of my future again. My first thoughts were of JMU.

The intervening time was not wasted, even if I never thought of my project. My diagnosis came with a new identity: disabled. I had lost my able-bodied privilege almost overnight, and now large parts of the world were inaccessible to me. In experiencing my own marginalization, I started to be able to conceptualize oppression in other contexts. I will never say that being disabled allowed me to know what racism feels like. I cannot say I know with certainty the lived experiences of immigrants, people of color, indigenous peoples, transgender, queer, or other minorities with whom I do not identify. What I do understand now that I struggled to articulate before is what oppression does in order to perpetuate the power or privilege of a group. Prior to my diagnosis, I was someone looking down on these structures from the top—the small sprout above the soil. Now, I can see them from below ground. From here, it is clear the roots of the oppression of disabled bodies is merged with the nearby root system of racism and white supremacy, and it with other surrounding institutions like imperialism, patriarchy, and capitalism.

What I have always known, though, is history—the act of studying, writing, reading, or living it—is vital to uprooting those systems. History is more than context, nor is it fixed. As I hope the following chapters start to reveal, when Walter Benjamin wrote “History is written by
the victors,” he meant dominant culture dictates the stories we tell ourselves that make up our identity. Benjamin’s original critique is now a flippant justification for exclusion. The powerful toss the saying around to bolster their ideological systems. What is least threatening to the status quo often decides who is included in histories. If Rosa Parks were just a tired maid who did not feel like standing to give a white man her seat, as national myth has told us, then that story neatly buries the months of preparation and activism and the horde of people behind Parks. If the Americans with Disabilities Act solved all the problems of being disabled in America, there is nothing left to be done to achieve equality. (There is.) If indigenous people “vanished” after the closing of the frontier and Wounded Knee, then the 128 years of Native activism since is without context or meaning or justification.

Popular retellings, even professional histories, neglect indigenous stories. I do not believe this is always intentional. We are all enmeshed in these systems in ways it is difficult to ever fully see, so historians have struggled to break free from the rhetoric of objectification and obfuscation surrounding indigenous peoples in settler societies. Some are successful. Others are not. Few people can adequately conceptualize what being an American Indian or First Nations looks like in recent history, ignored as they are in popular culture and society (aside from a few unproductive tropes). Academic programs struggle to integrate indigenous studies into curriculum, and often when indigenous peoples are included, it is a form of tokenism. In American studies, indigeneity is often a tertiary field within a subfield, just as disabled or queer studies are.

Professors I love and admire have pointed out there is no future in academe studying indigenous peoples. They are likely right, especially if the field stays as it is. While I am still possessed with the optimism of youth, however, I dream of helping forge that future. I dream of
a discipline that integrates subfields into the broader narrative—a discipline that understands its role in creating just societies. History can be a social justice field. History is only fixed if we buy into the dominant culture variety, which, as my research works to illuminate, is so heavily redacted, the black pen has covered much of the archival record. But historical research is not about expounding the evils of the great “isms” (sexism, racism, imperialism, etc)—that’s what prefaces are for. Instead, the work is in presenting as closely as possible what was and letting it be. Our interpretation as historians comes as individuals and not as a collective whose work is in exposition.

Exposition is powerful, though, and gives marginalized peoples tools to fight oppression. For Indigenous North Americans, accurate retellings have helped dismantle the reverence of Manifest Destiny and American expansionism (although there is still work to do). Indigenous Mesoamericans and American Indians have recovered languages long unspoken archived in Jesuit or Franciscan dictionaries. Others have successfully argued their sovereignty or defended ancestral land and water rights. For indigenous peoples, these stories do not exist objectively outside themselves. They are integral to who they are as individuals and communities, and in failing to integrate the indigenous narrative into our broader consciousness, we continue to malign their existence and potential. Justice starts with their story.

In order to limit the scope of this work, I have chosen to examine the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898 in Omaha, and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 in St. Louis. The World’s Columbian Exposition explored in chapter two is one of the most important moments in nineteenth century American history and featured the first use of live subjects in anthropological display. One also encounters some of the most important anthropologists, entertainers, reformers, and indigenous
persons of the era, including Frederick Ward Putnam, Buffalo Bill, Richard Pratt, and Chauncey Yellow Robe. Chapter three’s Omaha fair, though less famous, is a crucial moment for indigenous performance and endurance. Often overlooked in scholarship studying world’s fairs, the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition featured a large Indian Congress that, despite its academic, anthropological intentions, was held on indigenous terms. The fair in 1904 at St. Louis featured the largest anthropological village ever at a world’s fair (not to be confused with the US government’s Philippine Village) and is the focus of chapter four. W. J. McGee gathered indigenous people from across the globe to argue his concept of social evolution and demonstrate the white obligation to enlighten the savage.

At each fair, indigenous people acted as individuals and collectively to achieve their own goals. Employing modes of “survivance” (resistance in the form of survival), indigenous people engaged in a range of actions that constitute agency. Some actively and obviously resisted the dominant paradigm with strikes, speeches, and political engagement. Others demonstrated their agency in purchasing dominant culture technologies like glasses, prams, or clothing which then “ruined” the authenticity of exhibits. Most important, however, is the simple fact of indigenous existence. Dominant culture insisted on the impending vanishing of American Indians and other indigenous peoples living in contact with superior white society. With their ability to adapt and survive, their continued presence undermined this central tenant of white superiority where all inferior societies would disappear or be absorbed into the civilized world. The continued existence of Indians shook the foundations of white supremacy.

To tell these stories in the context of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era world’s fairs, I have chosen to examine three dominant culture contexts. The first is nineteenth century

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1 Gerald Vizenor best defines survivance as “an active sense of presence over historical absence…Native survivance
anthropology and ethnology. In the United States at the time, the field was still working to gain legitimacy in academic and public circles and used world’s fairs to spread their Social Darwinist theories. Using live displays, first pioneered at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, anthropologists called on North America’s first peoples to perform their indigeneity not as it existed in reality, but as these scientists constructed it. Here developed a central tension of what scholars call the Museum Age of anthropology where performance and authenticity became paradoxically entangled. The second context I explore is the world of turn of the century entertainment. I examine indigenous performance in both Wild West Shows adjacent to the world’s fairs and the entertainment zones known as the Midway Plaisance in 1893 and 1898 and the Pike in 1904. Here emerged a new performative tradition for indigenous peoples, especially the Lakota on the Great Plains, which would shape cultural endurance and survival. The final dominant culture group I explore are the reformers, or those who worked in educating American Indians and Canadian First Nations in white ways. Their presence at world’s fairs of the era worked to counter the stereotype of the savage, uncivilized Indian portrayed in both entertainment and ethnographic contexts, and demonstrated the work of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other educators in offering benevolent white civilization to indigenous peoples.

The interactions between these three groups developed a complex web of controversies, rivalries, alliances, and contradictions. Even within each group, there was a great diversity of ideologies, further complicating the often terse or downright hostile encounters between organizers of world’s fairs. As the infighting grew and the public messages of each group became more confused, indigenous people displayed in concessions, model villages, mock Indian schools, and elsewhere, used the mayhem to assert their own messages and agendas, both consciously and unconsciously. Their stories are often obscured in the historical record, as most
archival sources generate from a dominant culture perspective. Few direct, recorded indigenous perspectives exist today, so much of what I have included is filtered through a white lens. Because of my geographic location and language, the oral traditions as yet unrecorded are out of my reach as a researcher. Ideally, this work would include them, but I have done my best to seek out the indigenous voice wherever possible and to tell their stories in their own words or actions. I must also acknowledge that I am yet another white filter on the indigenous perspective. I am related to the very first Dutch colonizers of New York and reside on land taken in violent colonial conquest in the seventeenth century. I benefit daily from a colonial legacy and ongoing imperialism. I must believe, though, that integrity, goodwill, and a consistent, honest desire to learn from indigenous people can overcome these things, at least in part, if not in whole. In writing this thesis, I hope to contribute to the vital conversation about the role of Manifest Destiny, settler colonialism, and white supremacist violence in the founding and building of America. During the pivotal years between 1893 and 1904, indigenous people, understood at the time as vanquished, played an integral role in American history, and their stories deserve recognition and celebration as we continue to understand our history.

Hannah S. Facknitz
James Madison University
April 2018
Acknowledgements

There are many to whom I owe thanks for this project and the intellectual guidance that made it possible. First and foremost, I must thank my thesis advisor Dr. Raymond Hyser. Early in the process when I turned in a draft introduction ten pages over his twenty-page suggested limit, I realized Dr. Hyser was not trying to fit my thesis into his preconceived structure or departmental rubric. His chief goal was to guide me in creating the best project I possibly could. It was my best he wanted and nothing less. The freedom he granted me to pursue each lead without agonizing over word counts or page limits helped me avoid compromising the complex legacy of these indigenous stories. I must also thank him for his incredible kindness and compassion as my illness intervened and derailed my project years ago. His willingness to pick up the threads with me made this endeavor and the completion of my degree possible.

To my readers, Dr. Timothy Fitzgerald, Dr. Steven Reich, and Dr. Christopher Versen: Thank you for your rigorous attention. In the same vein as Dr. Hyser, you were willing to know me as a scholar and person and worked to help me do my personal best. Thank you for believing in my ability to push farther and work harder as both my readers and my teachers.

I would also like to acknowledge a number of professors crucial to my intellectual and personal development at James Madison. These include in the History Department, my academic advisor Dr. Kevin Hardwick, Dr. Alison Sandman, Dr. H. Gelfand, Dr. David Owusu-Ansah, Dr. Kevin Borg, and my department head Dr. Gabrielle Lanier. In political science: Dr. Melinda Adams and in English, Professor Erica Cavanagh who so patiently taught me the skills to express myself. Dr. Michael Galgano deserves a special thanks as my former department head, constant ally, and long-time friend. I owe a great debt to the Honors College, the College of Arts and
Letters and its dean, Dr. J. Chris Arndt, and the History Department as a whole. I often tell people that I could never have received a better education than that which I earned here at JMU, even if I went to the most prestigious of universities. You have prepared me for a bright future.

To Juliana, Parker, and Julia: thank you for seeing and celebrating me as my authentic self. Of course, I must also thank my parents, Mark Facknitz and Susan Facknitz, as well as my sister Alice and brother Paul. Your love has always been infinite. I hope I make you proud.

Finally, I would like to thank the indigenous people who populate the following pages. Any success I may receive from this work is the result of their actions that ensured the creative and vibrant survival of indigenous people in North America. I have only partially uncovered a vast history of North America’s first peoples and much remains obscured, but those stories belong to the people who lived them or the living who inherit their legacy. I cannot claim them as my own. Thank you for allowing me to share these fragments of your incredible lives, and may I do your stories justice.
Introduction
Studying and Displaying Savagery in the Nineteenth Century

“Indian Nature is human nature bound in red.”
-Inscription over the entrance to the model Indian school
St. Louis, 1904

From their origin, world’s fairs were about the domination and imposition of culture. Beginning in London at the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition and the most recent held in Astana, Kazakhstan in 2017, these fairs remain a cultural gathering point—a place for countries to define and redefine themselves. At first these fairs revolved around industrialism, shifting to imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century, before broaching environmental, military, and even nuclear cultural topics as the century passed. Caught within this cycle of national and international story telling were countless minorities like the Pygmy of modern-day Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Ainu of northern Japan, African Americans, Indigenous Americans, and many others. Often treated as objects by contemporaries and modern historians alike, displayed people lived and breathed and moved as active agents of their own lives. While the systems that surrounded them were exploitative, discriminatory, and oppressive, they worked both consciously and unconsciously to subvert those systems and define their own identities as individuals and as ethnicities. One of the more illustrative examples of fairs as a vehicle for such actions is found in the native peoples of North America who, while victims of violence and cultural annihilation, were active participants in their own destiny, constructing, subverting, and appropriating the ideologies of dominant culture to their own ends. Recent historical inquiry has

focused on the atrocities committed in the name of settler colonization and the enduring effects of that violence. While vital to understanding American origins, in so emphasizing oppression, history has lost sight of the agency of these indigenous performers, just as contemporary anthropologists, entertainers, and reformers, in emphasizing their relegation to a vanished or vanishing past, overlooked the meaningfulness of their present physical existence.\(^3\)

The close of the nineteenth century was a time of synthesis, ingenuity, and growth in America. The first automobiles sped by, unregulated and unchecked, drivers using the car’s physical limits as a speed limit. Women agitated for suffrage and equal rights. Industrial capitalists’ accounts swelled alarmingly, while poor people’s pockets were riddled with holes where not just money escaped, but their rights, pickpocketed by merciless working conditions and the schemes of infamous robber barons. Reconstruction finally over, the country’s great mission was to build the future, not mend the past as so many believed they had been doing for over a decade. Progress was the buzzword of the day, but as inter-class conflict escalated, bursting forth in several notable skirmishes of the 1870s and 1880s, defining and demonstrating that enigmatic term was increasingly difficult. The financial Panic of 1873 as well as political revolutions sweeping through Europe deepened upper class anxieties as to the stability of their status. Then, in the final years of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, came a new age of American overseas imperialism. America won its “splendid little war” with Spain, acquiring a handful of Caribbean islands, a few Pacific atolls, and the Philippines as the country created an overseas empire. While the country’s origins were an imperial project, Americans now saw themselves as a true empire, engaging the world on equal footing with the great British and French colonial powers. As a new avenue for capitalist desires, imperialism needed a

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cheerleader, a spokesperson to convince the vast populace of America that a global empire was a true American enterprise, integral to its survival in this new era and a natural progression of Manifest Destiny. 4

To find such a vehicle for their hegemonic desires, the wealthy, white, Anglo-Saxon Americans 5 turned to a relatively new European model: the world’s fair. The first event to earn the moniker world’s fair was held in 1851 in Earl’s Court, London. Known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition, named for the glass structure at the fair’s heart, it showcased Britain’s technological and economic might—imperial exhibits would come later—for the rest of the world. The fair invited nations from across the globe to build their own pavilions and showcase their own might, to which America contributed two of the most successful exhibits: Cyrus McCormick’s wheat reaper and Samuel Colt’s revolvers, made famous in America’s frontier Indian Wars. The Crystal Palace Exhibition was the envy of Americans who dreamed of bringing such an event to the United States. Then President Franklin Pierce dreamed an American fair would “reunite a divided nation.” In the intervening years, the calamity of the Civil War put any such ambitions on hold, but in 1876, after five years of meticulous planning, the Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition opened its gates to the public. During that time, world’s fairs had flourished in Europe, and as a newly reunited America thrived in the wake of rapid industrialization, social problems emerged that needed managing. 6

Newly wealthy industrialists of the burgeoning Gilded Age turned these fairs into

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5 Hereafter, for brevity and ease of reading, I will refer to this dominant culture of white, upper and growing middle class, Anglo-Saxon Americans as either the “dominant culture” or “whites.” If context demands, however, I will specify my meaning.

6 Rydell, Findling, and Pelle, 16-19.
“conspicuous displays of wealth” intended to deflect growing concerns of income inequality. John L. Campbell first put forth the idea of a Philadelphia centennial celebration in a lecture before a Smithsonian Institution audience. As the idea gained steam, with planning beginning in 1871, Philadelphia’s city governance and social elite faced rising working class dissent to the changing status quo. The dominant culture needed a scapegoat, a group on which to deflect all the anxieties of a new American age. This group needed to be obviously different and easily recognizable. For many years, the ire of the dominant society lay on what were seen as undesirable European immigrants, primarily from Eastern Europe, Italy, and Ireland. And while the stigma did not entirely pass from these groups, the intensity with which dominant culture isolated and demonized their new scapegoat went far beyond what faced non-Anglo European immigrants. With a burgeoning scientific field lying in wait to perform a social service, fair organizers turned to anthropology to define this new social demon: racial minorities.\(^7\)

America’s first world’s fair was the ideal venue to debut these solidifying hypotheses in the eyes of scientists, the government, and social elites alike. Under the direction of the Smithsonian’s Joseph Henry, the fair used indigenous North Americans as “savage counterpoints” to a burgeoning white civilization centered on industrial capitalism. In fact, American Indians were some of the only racial minorities represented, with black women excluded from suffrage protests and exhibits, and African American progress seen as unimportant to justifying the new white ethos. While other countries constructed pavilions, the black population of America fought and largely failed to gain physical space to demonstrate their progress since emancipation. Indigenous Americans, however, were front and center, but in displays the dominant culture manufactured. No Indian-owned exhibit operated on official fair

\(^7\) Rydell, Findling, and Pelle, 19; Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 4.
premises. Henry’s display of artifacts and cultural objects worked to help white Americans define themselves in exclusionary terms. What made one American—the white, wealthy, Anglo-Saxon variety—was expressed in what one was not. Here began the great cultural project of the melting pot. While not yet at its height, the melting pot asked new white immigrants—referred to as “white ethnics”—to surrender their cultural selves to the Anglo-Saxon ideal, which “enforced a model of dominance and assimilation” that worked to elevate the conformists and sabotage those who refused the dominant culture paradigm. Books like the 1854 *Types of Mankind* and emerging academic disciplines worked to categorize people in racial categories, and once accomplished, worked diligently to shore up the divisions between them, all as part of the centuries long project of Manifest Destiny. As the nineteenth century waned, however, the future of this project, integral to American progress and identity as Frederick Jackson Turner demonstrated, came into question.

Americans, especially the wealthiest among them, were coming to believe the future success and progress of the country lay in foreign trade. The country was already rich in industrial and agricultural prowess, but the new age could only be successful “under the guidance of the superior Anglo-Saxon race.” The presumed fact of racial superiority was useful in that it united disparate classes and European ethnicities, currently on the brink of war with one another, against the racial “other,” purchasing unity at the expense of racial minorities. While

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8 For more on the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition’s American Indian displays see Robert A. Trennert, Jr.’s “A Grand Failure: The Centennial Indian Exhibition of 1876,” *Prologue* 6, no. 2 (June 1974), 118-129. Many of these artifacts were captured following the military defeats of western tribal groups by the United States military, as well as when groups were continually pressured to assimilate, discarding their cultural icons, sometimes forcibly, sometimes voluntarily. Artifacts were also purchased, stolen, and simply fabricated for the exhibition all to present a coherent, constructed idea of Indigenous America. Even here, one sees the beginnings of Darwinian ideas of progress and civilization, where Indians’ value was primarily in illuminating savagery and barbarianism, demonstrating just how far white civilization had progressed beyond them.

this narrative left dominant society totally unprepared for the staggering defeat of General Custer at Little Big Horn in 1876, it did provide a “rationalization for the extreme violence” America used and would continue to use in their continental, imperial project to colonize the West. Rationalizing this violence was key to nationalist myth making, which struggled to accommodate the history of “a nation born from genocide of Native peoples and built on slave labor.” Such truths “undermined the values of liberty and equality the nation claimed to hold dear” as well as challenged European America’s right to occupy the continent, and, “thus, threatened the legitimacy of the nation itself.” Defining racial categories and the hierarchies between those categories was crucial to assuaging white guilt over the conquest of the West and legitimizing any future imperial or national projects.¹⁰

While the Centennial Exhibition was highly localized in Philadelphia, gate receipts totaled more than ten million visitors at a time when the entire population of the United States hovered around 46 million. The fair attracted visitors from all over the country and the world. Its message spread rapidly, eventually embedding itself to such a degree that America and its empire continue to struggle with and dispute its legacy a century and a half later. At the time, however, America’s imperial ambitions still looked westward, its goal to pacify the vast North American continent still a dream, as the Battle of Little Big Horn demonstrated a month after the exhibit opened. Relatively speaking, the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition was a small blip on the radar compared to subsequent fairs for American Indians and other indigenous peoples. The fair featured no living exhibits or ethnographic villages and much of the racial, imperial message focused exclusively on the savage inferiority of Plains Indians, with a few cases devoted to the education of the Wyandots, presaging later education exhibits in subsequent fairs. Perhaps the

most evocative display was a “grotesque” set of papier-mâché “braves” wearing red face paint and large headdresses, meant to evoke war regalia. The figures included likenesses of Tall Bull, a Cheyenne warrior killed in 1869, and Red Cloud who was depicted with a raised tomahawk and a collection of scalps. The figures were part of the Department of the Interior’s display—the department responsible for the management and pacification of Indians. Most of the displays were anecdotal in nature, conveyed through limited, static means.11

By contrast, the world’s fairs of most interest to this study, namely the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898, and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 are significant in their use of live, indigenous peoples gathered in ethnographic camps to demonstrate their “true” state of being. Much of this was highly constructed and controlled by scientific anthropologists, entertainment entrepreneurs, or reformers—individuals focused on the project of “civilizing” America’s indigenous people, including the federal government. This study will examine these three groups, as well as North American indigenous peoples and how each asserted its vision of the Indian future, as was the goal of world’s fairs in America up until, as historian Robert Rydell asserts, 1916: to define and construct the future American utopia.12

I. Victorian Anthropology: The Evolutionary Order of Society

Anthropology as an academic discipline has its roots in the nineteenth century, but cultures have long tried to order and understand their world with various proto-sciences,

12 Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, Table of Contents.
including forms of ethnology and anthropology. Ancient Greeks like Herodotus and the Sophists, the great Tunisian thinker Ibn Khaldun, and European Renaissance writers tried to understand the human world they inhabited using systems to quantify and measure human culture. Jesuits and Franciscans in the American Spanish Empire meticulously recorded the customs and culture of the indigenous peoples they encountered. Friars exerted an “intensive effort” to catalog customs and languages of the indigenous peoples they were “attempting to indoctrinate” to Catholicism. They recognized that cultural understanding, especially linguistic, was integral to proselytizing in Indian groups. Today Jesuit and Franciscan records from early colonization on both American continents are some of the most valued sources of the period, used by indigenous and dominant societies alike.  

Recognizable thinkers of the Enlightenment like David Hume, Adam Smith, and Thomas Hobbes fall broadly into the category of social thinkers concerned with how humans ordered themselves in relation to one another. Even Jean Jacques Rousseau described “savages”—referring to the indigenous peoples of the Americas—as an “utopian ideal,” while writing in the eighteenth century. Even in proto-anthropology, or what Franz Boas referred to as “speculative anthropology,” thinkers were working to understand and delineate the “other,” the most recognizable of whom were so-called primitive indigenous peoples.

By the nineteenth century, there was a well-developed compendium of thought in ethnography, but the creation of the discipline came to center itself on evolutionary—later Darwinian—structures. Anthropologists like Henry Maine (1822-88) and Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-82), founding writers of the newly defined discipline, believed in a standard, universal

progression of humanity from savagery to civilization. Morgan wrote, amongst many other works, *Ancient Society* (1877), an ethnographic study based on the Iroquois that classified seven distinct stages of humanity from lower savagery to civilization. This idea of civilization he defined broadly as white, Christian society, understood as direct descendants and inheritors of the great Greek and Roman civilizations. Morgan argued one could delineate the stage of different groups, especially the civilized ones, based on the technology they used or invented. This understanding would be of use to anthropologists organizing their exhibits at world’s fairs, themselves displays of the technological utopian ideal. *Ancient Society* also analyzed various methods of governance, artistic expressions, and writing systems. Taking the “aggregation of achievements” in a certain period by a certain group, Morgan argued one could understand and evaluate the worth of a society as a whole. American Indians in 1492 were seen at the lowest state of savagery, and although “possessed of inferior mental endowments” had risen to the rank of lower barbarism in the centuries since (but only with benevolent white influence).\(^{15}\)

*Ancient Society* went on to influence famous thinkers like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, eventually giving way to a “preoccupation” with kinship relations for several decades—Morgan’s major field of study—that defined studies of myth and religion, as well as technological achievement.\(^ {16}\) A sliding scale of culture would evolve and warp through the next fifty years as anthropologists fought to force various exceptions to this schema into a theoretical framework. This meant by the last decade of the nineteenth century, the evolutionary theory of civilization was on the verge of collapse, made barely coherent with scientists’

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\(^{16}\) The presumed link between civilization and Christianity had long been established, however, with the work of Jesuits and Franciscans in the Spanish Empire in the sixteenth century where “Christianity and civility became hopelessly entangled.” (See J. H. Elliott’s *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 71). With paganism came connotations of being subhuman, which only became more entrenched over the intervening centuries, leading to the often unapologetic annihilation of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.
The problem with almost all of the anthropological or ethnological writing of this time was its lack of empirical data. For all of their claims of scientific accuracy, researchers were hesitant to actually experience the cultures they wrote about. Historical anthropologist T. H. Erikson relates a famous apocryphal anecdote where James Frazer (1854-1941), student of the British ethnographer Edward Tyler (1832-1917), when asked if he had “become personally acquainted with any of those savages he wrote so much about,” replied emphatically “‘Heaven forbid!’” Such was the treatment of indigenous peoples within the field in the Victorian Era. Indigenous peoples, and American Indians especially within American Anthropology, functioned largely as agents of illumination. Their use to the science was in their ability to demonstrate the outstanding progress of Euro-American civilization when compared to their state of savagery or barbarianism. It was “only when their relation to our own civilization” was the focus of study that indigenous societies began to matter.18

Anthropologist George W. Stocking, Jr. asserts that anthropology through “most of its history has been primarily a discourse of the culturally or racially despised,” with philanthropic funding as its core driving force. The funding often determined the subject matter, not necessarily through direct interference, but in the sense whichever anthropologist or, later, universities were publishing views that most closely aligned with the philanthropists’ got funding. Those views often reinforced the evolutionary imperative so popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This, in turn, led to the “commodity economy of evolutionary anthropology” where cultural objects and anthropological theories were available

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17 Erikson, 15.
18 Erikson, 16; Boas, 514.
for purchase for use in justifying white, capitalist, imperial might.¹⁹

The implications of a capitalist system inserting itself into a burgeoning science are enormous. Objectivity became suspect, at best, and nonexistent in much of the research that reached broader audiences. Anthropology became a place where industrial capitalists and their allies in government could create these messages of white supremacy and cultural hegemony. The shiny, new, rich, technologically adept civilization emerging at the turn of the century was approaching the absolute pinnacle of human evolution according to anthropology, an idea world’s fairs and their financial backers heartily endorsed and expounded.²⁰

At the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition, self-educated anthropologist W.J. McGee, expanding on his predecessors at previous American world’s fairs, concocted his living anthropological exhibit based on four stages: savagery, barbarianism, civilization, and enlightenment. But just as this Darwinian model seemed to have overcome its inadequacies and contradictions in this grand exhibit, Franz Boas, colleague of McGee, gave a paper that changed the course of anthropology. In the innocently named work “The History of Anthropology,” Boas burned down the temple-pyramid of evolutionary anthropology. Undermining the basic premise of unilineal evolution of societies, debunking anthropometric and psychometric studies, and revealing McGee and his colleagues as ethnocentric racists intent on “validating preexisting popular prejudices and preconceptions,” Boas remade his discipline at its core. His cultural relativist approach argued that it would be “scientifically misleading” to study or judge societies based on the development of western civilizations. Instead, Boas and his “historical particularism” said that societies develop within their own contexts and conditions, and each had

²⁰ Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 1-8.
its own “unique history that could not be reduced to a category in a universalist scheme of development.”

By no means a post-racist savior, Franz Boas pushed for the politicization of the science, arguing anthropologists should act on behalf of indigenous societies to fight for their preservation against progressive American influence. He believed, like most anthropologists, that North American indigenous societies were vanishing, and intensive cultural study was needed in order to preserve these cultures, not for the survival of the indigenous people, but for their value to future scientists. While this was intensely paternalistic, like much of dominant culture in regard to indigenous peoples, Boas was an expert on the American Indians of the northern Plains and southern Canada. He had spent years in the field with indigenous people, which distinguished him from his colleagues who “relied on written sources…of varying accuracy,” not empirical research, to justify the theory of unilineal evolution. His approach marked a critical juncture in the discipline. Like McGee, Boas was a student of the “museum age” in anthropology and was a self-trained (by modern standards) anthropologist. He was also a proponent of world’s fairs as the “universit[ies] of the future” and helped his teacher, Frederick Ward Putnam of the Smithsonian’s Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), organize Department M at the 1893 World Columbian Exposition, but his work on publicizing social evolutionary theory was part of what led him to dispute its validity. Though imperfect, it was Boas’s vision of multiplicity, convergence, divergence, and diversity that prevailed and continues to influence the science today.

At Chicago, Omaha, and St. Louis, however, anthropologists used North American

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21 Parezo and Fowler, 331; Erikson, 18.
indigenous peoples to display the evolutionary model of civilization. Consistently depicted as living examples of the progress of beautiful, white civilization advanced in the central ideology of world’s fairs in various technological, architectural, and political displays, anthropological perspectives allowed for little nuance of interpretation of Indigenous America. Here was backwardness in absolute, pure form, but each exposition presented evidence of the highly constructed nature of the displays, and this very construction often contradicted the claims of anthropologists of the untainted and scientific validity of their message. In the organization and presentation of these peoples, anthropologists would contradict each other, as well as butt up against the visions of entertainment entrepreneurs and reformers, both intent on presenting opposing visions of Indianness at this critical moment of transition for the nation, but more importantly, for American Indians and other natives of the North American continent.

II. The Noble Savage and Entertainment Perceptions of the West

The post-Civil War era saw an explosion of entertainment that helped Americans “imagine their history,” interweaving complex themes of Indian pacification, frontier heroics, and remnants of white conquest guilt. Dime novels—cheap, mass-produced books that discussed topics from cowboys, Indian battles, and other exploits of frontier pioneers—were massively popular. Bestselling author Ned Buntline, penned a serial story “Buffalo Bill, the King of the Border Men” immortalizing William F. Cody, who would go on to appear in 1,700 dime novels by various authors. The story, along with Cody’s work in an eastern circuit of plays about his exploits as an Indian scout in the Civil War and Indian Wars, propelled Cody into stardom.23

In 1883, William F. Cody, nicknamed “Buffalo Bill” for his efficient buffalo hunting

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skills under contract for western railroads, held the “Old Glory Blow Out” in Nebraska. A precursor to the rodeo, the Blow Out included feats of various skills valued in the West, like shows of horsemanship and marksmanship. These skills, along with demonstrations and tableaus by indigenous peoples, would become a hallmark of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, a travelling show that toured throughout the United States and Europe for more than thirty years. While not the only Wild West show at the time, Cody’s was the most influential and enduring. Today one can see a live remake of this nineteenth century relic at Disneyland Paris.24

Concurrent with Cody and the smaller shows were the entertainment zones at world’s fairs. Known in Chicago and Omaha as the Midway Plaisance and St. Louis as The Pike, these areas featured attractions and exhibits from around the world, ranging from the macabre to humbug to supposedly authentic, often depicting cultural representations of various peoples. Attractions included belly dancers from Egypt, burlesque dancers, a Japanese teahouse, and various Native peoples on display, like the Inuit, Hopi, and Kwakwaka’wakw of British Columbia, as well as international indigenous peoples. Even Boers from South Africa made frequent appearances as Midway attractions. Often various Wild West shows were informally included in these areas. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West enjoyed its most successful season when they set up adjacent to the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago.25

Wild West shows and world’s fairs entertainment zones were areas with intense involvement in the “production and dissemination of stereotypes and images of the ‘Imaginary Indian’,” but this image was not always in harmony with other ideas about North American indigenous peoples at the time. As anthropology presented a complicated picture of a vanishing

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25 Parezo and Fowler, 224-265; Blackstone, 26-7.
race, entertainers countered with a fiercely present and often violent image of American Indians. Entertainers routinely claimed to be authentic, often using fictitious military titles and fabricated exploits, but they were primarily concerned with capitalizing on the dominant culture’s fascination with Indigenous America. Thus, the image that emerged from entertainers was distinct from other representations of Natives at the time. Here, most clearly, one can see the myth of the noble savage appear in the American consciousness. Entrepreneurs wanted to display the most exotic peoples possible, and as such, focused their efforts on constructing an image, rather than appropriating a fully formed, truthful representation. What emerged was a broadly homogenous image of Indianness that reflected the culture of Plains Indians imbued with contradicting depictions of violence and benevolent stoicism.26

This was no accident. Credit for this construction is owed in large part to the Buffalo Bill Wild West, but not necessarily to the man himself. Historical anthropologist Linda S. McNenly argues that Wild West shows (and this work extends to living exhibits and attractions at world’s fairs) functioned as “contact zones,” defined as “(post)colonial spaces of interaction by multiple participants with various agendas involving unequal power relationships, but with the possibility of agency by the marginal groups.” What happened in these contact zones is termed transculturation, a process by which marginal groups selectively incorporate aspects of the dominant culture for their own use. These contact zones and the process of transculturation are critical to understanding Native agency, especially when realizing acts or expressions of agency do not always mean active resistance to dominant structures. Indigenous peoples performing in turn of the century entertainment, while treated as such, were not objects. The power relations were unequal, and this interpretation does not preclude violence, oppression, or annihilation, but

instead allows for the possibility of individual and corporate action within these systems that do not necessarily resemble active resistance. The schema also recognizes that indigenous persons had their own motivations for participating in various live exhibitions, but those intentions are “embedded in a complex web of (unequal power) relationships.” The bulk of this study will examine how North American indigenous peoples lived and breathed within the overarching framework of dominant culture expressed in anthropology, entertainment, and reform/reeducation cultures and how their actions helped perpetuate or challenge the conflicting stereotypes of Indians at the turn of the century.  

Entertainment distinguished itself from these other dominant groups for a number of reasons. Chief among these was its work to actively construct the most consumable image of American Indians. Wild West shows helped this image coalesce around the Plains Indian phenotype, and eventually this portrayal became the preconceived idea in most Americans’ minds of a typical Indian and their cultural ways. Purporting themselves as “realistic portrayal[s] of western life,” as well as indigenous life, shows and attractions blurred the line between

"Westward the Course of Empire" 1898. Enquirer Job Printing Co., Cincinnati, OH.

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27 McNenly, 10-11, 14.
spectacle and educational. From Cody’s first hiring of Sitting Bull in 1885 to his deep ties to the Lakota reservations in South Dakota, American Indians, especially Plains Indians became essential to his and other travelling shows in the genre of “educational entertainment.”

Just as truth proved elusive for anthropologists, however, Wild West shows and world’s fairs entertainment zones were “based on discourses of…the frontier, heroic individualism, and progress.” Buffalo Bill Cody was a living embodiment of these ideals. Even modern writers believe there was little need to exaggerate Cody’s accomplishments on the frontier. Contemporaneously, Cody was a living legend. He became a stand-in for the inevitability of white progress across the western frontier. In the press poster above, the Biblical nature of Cody, representing white civilization at the center of the lithograph, and his followers’ advance across the continent is obvious. Just as Moses was predestined to lead the Hebrews through the wilderness to the Promised Land, so was Cody ordained as symbolic leader of the (largely complete) imperial march westward. Needless to say, William F. Cody had an inflated sense of self, but his understanding of himself reflected how white America saw its role in civilizing their vast continent.

If Cody’s show opened to him an opportunity for explosive fame, so too did it offer Indian performers a certain level of notoriety. Indigenous Americans like Geronimo, Sitting Bull, and Luther Standing Bear, all leaders within their tribal groups, used the Indian entertainment industry for profit and publicity. A group of Inuits, including Nancy Columbia, traveled throughout the United States for several decades appearing at various expositions and entertainment events. Several Mohawk and Kwakwə́kəwakw families, including the famous

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28 McNenly, 26, 37.
29 McNenly, 26; Rennert, 4, Foldout A.
Williams-Kelly family and Princess White Deer, achieved success as entertainers, with the Deer family eventually forming its own Deer Family Wild West Show that toured Europe and South Africa. Other Indians, especially the Lakota from the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservations, developed full-fledged careers from the entertainment industry. The show Indian became so prevalent in Lakota culture they developed a term—“oskate wicasa”—to describe those who chose such a career, for it was just that: a legitimate occupational choice.\(^\text{30}\)

Indigenous Americans joined entertainment ventures for various reasons, including opportunities to make money, travel, escape deteriorating or stagnant reservation conditions, and preserve their ways of life. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)—an office under the Department of the Interior responsible for the management of Indian assets, reservations, and peoples in the contiguous United States—was increasingly restricting Indians’ ability to leave the reservation, earn an income, share resources communally, or practice traditional cultural activities. The BIA and other reformers contended traveling with such entertainment installations inhibited the “civilizing process,” but grudgingly conceded recruitment licenses to a number of traveling shows and exhibits. The Office of Indian Affairs and its successor the BIA restricted, often arbitrarily, which Indians were allowed to leave with entertainment entrepreneurs, but those Indians chose this as a “bona fide occupation choice” with “self-conscious intention” and were not unwittingly lured from home to face absolute exploitation. Here was an opportunity to earn money, maintain contact with tradition (even if that tradition was not entirely one’s own), “facilitate social cohesion” (whole families traveled together with the Wild West Shows and especially the world’s fair exhibits), and continue social norms like communal resource sharing.

Even women could be paid performers as “Indian Princesses” or in performing every day tasks that so fascinated white America, and selling traditional handicrafts.\(^{31}\)

Reformers notoriously clashed with entertainment entrepreneurs. The BIA saw employing Indians in such attractions as contrary to assimilation policy. In part, reservation officials and other reformers in the government and education worried about the exploitation of indigenous peoples in these shows, which was not without merit. In 1890, five performers died on the Buffalo Bill Wild West tour of Europe because of illness, with other allegations of mistreatment sprinkled in the archival record. The BIA attempted to mitigate this show Indian model from continuing, ultimately failed to end the burgeoning tradition. Reformers argued this career path exposed Indians to alcohol and gambling, separated the Indian from the civilizing influence of benevolent government programs, and reintroduced Indians to traditional life-ways. Eventually this conflict would be juxtaposed in world’s fairs, with contradictory exhibits from both groups, as well as anthropology, steps apart.\(^{32}\)


To discuss Indian education in the context of reservation and boarding schools is to recall one of the most harrowing periods of colonization and annihilation. The atrocities indigenous North Americans faced since contact were great, but for the first time Euro-Americans began a concerted, organized effort to abduct children from their culture, homes, and families and indoctrinate them into the dominant world. Through the 1960s, indigenous families in the United

\(^{31}\) McNenly, 39, 53-7, 60-5.
\(^{32}\) McNenly, 44-6.
States were legally compelled to send their children to distant schools. Some were relatively close, like the Chilocco Indian School discussed later in this study, but others like the (in)famous Carlisle Indian School were one thousand miles distant from Indian Territory. Even at these more local institutions, students were protected from the “‘contaminating’ influence of parents, friends, and family.” These schools had a unified objective, as Richard Pratt, founder of Carlisle School, best articulated: “Kill the Indian in him [the student], save the man.” It never occurred to the “Carlisle kidnapers [sic]” that they were perpetuating the indigenous systems of abduction so abhorred during the frontier wars.

Today, more than two hundred graves of children, some as young as four, from three-dozen tribes remain outside the closed school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Haskell Indian School in Kansas, one of the largest in the nineteenth century, boasts a cemetery of hundreds of students ranging from six to seventeen years old who died of infectious disease, suicide, starvation, and abuse. Conditions at these schools were deplorable. Children faced exposure and malnutrition, making them especially susceptible to diseases like tuberculosis, which spread rapidly in such a vulnerable population. These children, however, did not just die of disease or starvation. They were often beaten and disciplined for any breach in the curriculum of assimilation. Upon arrival, children were told to “divest” themselves of all notions of their culture. Administrators and teachers confiscated their clothes and other cultural objects, cut their hair, forbade the use of indigenous languages or cultural practices or any display of Indian identity. Any infraction could warrant the use of disciplinary tactics like withholding food and water, beatings, electric shocks,

33 Modern day Oklahoma where, in the nineteenth century, a significant Indian population resided on reservations.
mandatory labor, or forced kneeling, even withholding rations from families on the reservation of recalcitrant students.\(^{35}\)

The first government dispensation for educating Indian children came in 1877 in the humble sum of $20,000, which grew by 1900, however, to a $3 million allocation. By then 21,568 students were enrolled in government schools, including both reservation day schools and off-reservation boarding schools. This does not include the many other students enrolled in private or religious institutions. In this crucial period, reformers preferred boarding schools like Chilocco, Haskell, and Carlisle, or the two-dozen others that opened between 1879 and 1892, for several crucial reasons. Essential was the desire to isolate children from their cultural inheritance as Indians. Day schools permitted regular contact with relatives of older generations that maintained the cultural traditions assimilationists wished to annihilate. At boarding schools, reformers could deny vacations, withhold information or correspondence relating to the child’s family, such as deaths in the family, as well as control any cultural contacts with relatives or even other students. The schools were intended to function as a vacuum in which only what was “best” for the Indian students could exist.\(^{36}\)

Reformers sought the complete dissolution of tribes, seeing these corporate identities and practices as the primary barrier to civilizing Indians in North America. In 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Allotment Act that broke up reservation land, “allotting” parcels of land to heads of households and individuals in order to “terminate communal ownership, push Indians into

\(^{35}\) Colin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History* 3\(^{rd}\) ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 384-90; Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indians Education: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2004), 70-72, 74, 76, 84; Debo, *A History*..., 240; Clergy ran many schools which forced students to convert to Christianity, thus many of the punishments were viewed in terms of penance for sins committed. Government schools, however, abused their students just as harshly (as seen at Haskell Institute) but lacked religious affiliations. Both required personal and collective conversion to white civilization.

\(^{36}\) Calloway, 383-9.
mainstream society, and offer for sale ‘surplus’ land” to white buyers. Reformers believed the Dawes Act would “liberate” Indians from their barbaric and backward ways of communal resource sharing, and in the civilized act of owning land “instill individual ambition” that was integral to Anglo-American identity. Allottees who “abandoned their tribal ways” and joined civilized society as agriculturalists would also be granted American citizenship under the Dawes Act. The leftover land not taken in allotments was to be sold and the money held in trust by the government until Indians demonstrated themselves capable of using the money in a civilized manner (estimated at 25 years time). The system faced extreme abuse for its 47 year tenure, resulting in the loss of 62% of tribal lands by 1934 and the Indian Reorganization Act that ended allotment and returned the land left to the tribes. Supposedly intended to bestow “the benefits of civilizations,” allotment broke up tribal life (a stated goal) and “perpetuated the states of [Indians] as a permanent underclass”—a result that ran counter to the country’s paternal intentions.37

The Dawes Act became the impetus and justification for much of the reservation and boarding school systems. At the 1887 Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian—a group of white philanthropists concerned with bringing Indians out of the “darkness” of barbarity and into enlightened civilization and had originally proposed the dissolution of tribes in 1884—C. C. Painter argued the Dawes Act created an “emergency.” This emergency required the Friends of the Indian to deploy “a preparation and education which [the Indian] could never receive under the old policy of…legalized pauperism and inevitable idleness and debauchery.” As the Dawes Act caused the “reservation walls” to crumble, the Indian “and his children will become a race of wanderers and beggars, unless they are met, as they escape from a hopeless

37 Calloway, 378-381; Reyhnor and Eder, 82.
bondage, with influences wise enough and large enough to teach them the nobility of manhood and the uses of freedom.” As this benevolent influence, reformers proposed to teach Indians mostly how to become household servants, laborers, or farmers.\textsuperscript{38}

Reformers, especially the Bureau of Indian Affairs responsible for the government schools, put forth exhibitions at the Chicago, Omaha, and St. Louis Expositions in order to show the broader American public, who had little knowledge (or often interest) of the educational system in place for Indians, how the government after the final military conquest of Indians in 1890, were continuing the civilizing project in Indigenous America. These displays, however, were as contradictory as the entertainment areas and anthropological displays, and these contradictions often opened spaces for expressions of indigenous agency, even within a system as harrowing as Indian schools. Reformers’ exhibits, like the anthropological villages, featured living students demonstrating the various handicrafts and skills of civilization they acquired at school, but these displays coexisted with overt expressions of tribal identity. A stay at a world’s fair brought students into direct contact with cultural displays of other Indians, which, while highly constructed by either entertainers or anthropologists, retained a semblance of authenticity, especially for children ritually stripped of their cultural identity.\textsuperscript{39}

Carlisle Indian Industrial School founder Richard Pratt objected to government participation in world’s fairs as such displays resembled the ethnological exhibits of anthropologists who were “the most insidious and active enemies” of reformers and


\textsuperscript{39} Robert A. Trennert, “Selling Indian Education at World’s Fairs and Expositions, 1893-1904,” \textit{American Indian Quarterly} 11, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 203-30; Parezo and Fowler, 135-163.
assimilation. Anthropologists wished to preserve the indigenous cultures and their racial distinctiveness reformers were trying to annihilate in their students. The juxtaposition of the two competing images of the condition of indigenous societies at the turn of the century created a complicated contrast. Anthropology showed a vanishing society, unable to withstand the onslaught of white violence and assimilating influence. Instead, reformers wanted their influence to be seen as benevolent and just, helping the barbaric Indian move into and survive the promised progress of the twentieth century, as well as demonstrate the usefulness of Indians to whites at a time when Indians were still seen in 1893 at the Chicago Columbian Exposition as violent enemies of America and Manifest Destiny.

Entertainment zones and their adjacent Wild West Shows further complicated the image of the Indian at world’s fairs. Here was an enduring image of the savage Indian, where the wars of the West were fought over and over, assembling the national myth of justified conquest of a savage frontier. Both reformers and anthropologists objected to these depictions, but while abhorring each other, all three took on significant attributes of the others. Anthropological exhibits resembled Wild West Shows—most notably in Omaha in 1898 where the anthropology village was widely regarded as a Wild West Show complete with mock battles. The Indian school exhibit organized by Samuel McCowan for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition stood atop a hill surrounded by W.J. McGee’s anthropological villages and featured indigenous artisans and performers inside the school building from among McGee’s participants. At the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the entertainment zones fell under the purview of anthropologists Frederick W. Putnam in Chicago

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40 Quoted in Trennert, 205.
and McGee in St. Louis, who assumed control over all indigenous peoples on display (except the Philippine Reservation in 1904 St. Louis, which was strictly a government exhibit).  

With this complicated and incoherent depiction set before visitors, organizers opened up the possibility for a chaos of interpretations, which Indigenous Americans themselves then influenced. Lacking a coherent message and permitting direct contact between visitors and the “objects” (here living, breathing human beings) of display, organizers allowed Indians an opportunity within the oppressive context to insert their own narrative into the dominant culture’s. Even if the ideas they conveyed to fair-goers resembled the organizers’ propaganda, the moments between visitor and indigenous performer gave space in an exploitative system for the exercise of agency in multiple forms.

Equally significant was, like Wild West Shows, the exhibits at fairs and their proximity to each other, which gave way to intercultural contact among participants. In an era where a well-funded and well-organized reformers’ movement to annihilate what survived of indigenous culture following Wounded Knee and physical conquest had succeeded in separating tens of thousands of children from their families, friends, and cultural traditions, these mass gatherings provided opportunities to learn and share with other indigenous peoples. North American Indians synthesized cultural traditions, rebuilt life ways and religious traditions, and eventually helped stimulate the Pan-Indian Movement of the twentieth century. The contacts, actions, and opportunities of Indigenous Americans at these world’s fairs were integral to the cultural endurance of their traditions into the twentieth century. Here one finds the great irony of world’s fairs where agents of dominant culture attempted to write the future of America, invoking the

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demigods of technology and Anglo-American civilization. While attempting to dictate the future of the Indian, the competition between anthropologists, entertainers, and reformers not only opened the metaphorical door, but created the physical space in which indigenous peoples would define their own ideas of progress and survival in the new twentieth century.
Chapter Two
Making the Myth of America: The World’s Columbian Exposition

“Maybe if I could see the great world of the Wasichu [whites], I could understand how to bring the sacred hoop together and make the tree to bloom again at the center of it.”

-Nicholas Black Elk

The 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition (WCE) opened in Chicago in the midst of a financial panic that spurred a decades-long recovery effort. The explosion of class violence at the 1886 Haymarket Affair still rang in Chicago’s ears. Elites across the country were concerned with growing malcontent in working classes and scrambled for any way to mollify the masses and reinvigorate a stalled economy. As Henry Adams observed, the world of 1893 was “getting awful rickety.” Having faced stiff competition from St. Louis and New York for the right to host the fair, Chicago elites wanted to reinvent the image of the city, and with it, the future of the nation. Organizers built their exposition as a “manifestation of all that was good in American life” and a platform for their “utopian vision” based in evolutionary theories of civilization. Utopia, they believed, was the inevitable result of social evolution. The fair would be the first time many visitors would encounter Darwinian racial theories, and anthropologists like Frederick Ward Putnam intended to capitalize on the opportunity. And integral to this synthesis of utopia and social evolution was the message of a society that needed “racial purification before the dream of perfection could be realized.” Organizers desired sponge-like minds to absorb and then live out the “dream scenario” performed in the WCE, with stratified racial categories defining

the physical space people of color and indigenous people were invited to inhabit.44

Central to the fair’s theme was its namesake, Christopher Columbus. Organizers wished to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s arrival on San Salvador Island and the metaphorical arrival of civilization to a savage continent.45 America prior to Columbus “was a place outside time and space…waiting to be settled, civilized, and exploited” which gave the WCE its dual purpose of the WCE: to show the American continent as it was and as it could be. Technological achievement and its historical progression dominated the physical space of the fair. As Henry Adams relates, Americans “had grown up in the habit of thinking a steam engine or a dynamo as natural as the sun, and expected to understand one as little as the other” but the Columbian Exposition asked them to educate themselves in these technologies.

Education ran rampant at Chicago…Men who knew nothing whatever—who had never run a steam-engine, the simplest of forces—who had never put their hands on a lever—…had not the shadow of a notion what amount of force was meant by a watt or an ampère or an erg…had no choice but to sit down on the steps and brood as they had never brooded on the benches of Harvard College…aghast at what they had said and done in all these years, and still more ashamed of the childlike ignorance and babbling futility of the society that let them say and do it.46

Adams was not the only one the fair overwhelmed. Chauncey Yellow Robe with Carlisle Indian School noted that when he first arrived at the WCE “there was so much I could not understand, it made me tired to look, and I did not see much.” After an extended stay looking after the Carlisle exhibit, Yellow Robe reported he was “beginning to see and learn and understand” echoing

45 The fair opened in May 1893, technically a year after the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s “discovery” of the Americas, although the official dedication did take place on October 21, 1892, to commemorate the day Columbus landed in the Caribbean.
Adams’ own insights.\(^4^7\)

In the midst of this “jumble of material spilling from building to building” was a moment of cultural reckoning for Chicago and the West, as well as the whole American project. The American intellectual class now looked at this burgeoning new society resplendent in its technological majesty and wondered as to their place in the whole. Ethnologists wanted to define that place with their evolutionary ideas. While even their exhibits (especially juxtaposed with competing representations of “authentic” savagery elsewhere in the WCE) suffered from “the confusion and disorder characterizing fair display,” Frederic Ward Putnam, Franz Boas, and other ethnologists believed “the great object lesson” of the WCE would not be complete without the “unsuspecting” indigenous peoples who fell before the “wave of humanity” (i.e. Europeans) that conquered the continent after Columbus’s arrival. In order to see the future, one must also see the past displayed side by side. For Adams, “Chicago was the first expression

of American thought as unity,” and it relied on the perceived racial backwardness and vanishing of Indigenous America. With American liberty and the image of Christopher Columbus emblazoned across the WCE, America would lead the rest of the world into a century of progress, with racial “others” bringing up the rear, in awe of the new utopian vision.48

As part of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), a department of the government-funded Smithsonian Institution, ichthyologist and museum administrator G. Brown Goode came at organizers’ behest to classify each exhibit in accordance with its level of civilization. Goode himself dreamed of “an illustrated encyclopedia of civilization” in the WCE—that “it is to be so generous in its scope that in its pictorial and literary remains will be preserved the best record of human culture” at the end of the nineteenth century. To be successful, Goode’s classification argued for a more historical approach as opposed to previous European exhibits that focused on the progress of industrialization. At the WCE progress could be best illustrated in the history of the American continent since the arrival of Europeans in 1492. In each category, visitors ought to be able to see, according to Goode, the natural progression from primitivism to the magnificence of 1890s America. The WCE was an exhibition of ideas, not simple objects (or people treated as objects). The “great object lesson” would educate Americans as to the “road already traveled” to create the hegemonic society surrounding them.49

Investors like George Pullman, Cyrus McCormick, and Gustavus Swift (and many others) were less concerned with return on investment than with the success of the WCE’s

cultural goals—mainly advancing the “creed of American progress” as cultural elites defined it. The central figure of the exposition Columbus evoked associations with Roman imperialism and Christian redemption. He was a man who “brought enlightenment to a hopelessly backward continent” to set the stage for the future utopia of America. Indians within this framework at best existed as convenient foil characters to the white settler, or at worst, “savage obstacles” to the inevitable march of progress across the Americas. Anxious to establish and enforce the basic ordering of society, WCE investors and organizers rode the rising “tides of nativism and nationalism” in the United States to institute their ordering of society that gave visitors, or “Pilgrims” as one historian calls them, “order and coherence to their increasingly chaotic social world.”

In order to justify the WCE as an educational event, rather than as entertainment, Potter Palmer, head of the managing WCE corporation, called on Francis J. Bellamy, editor of Youth’s Companion. For the October 21, 1892, dedication of the fair, set aside as a holiday for schoolchildren, the Federal Bureau of Education had students gather to celebrate Christopher Columbus and the WCE as one, reciting Bellamy’s new draft of the Pledge of Allegiance. Here children learned the “interplay of progress and human will,” whereby social evolution towards the promise of utopia and away from backward, primitive ways, was through “rightly informed” effort. The fair looked to be the informer. The Bureau of Indian Affairs directed Indian schools to begin celebrating Columbus Day on October 21, 1892, with a school-determined program of activities. According to organizers like Bellamy, Palmer, and even G. Brown Goode, the WCE had the “vast potential for creating the good citizenship necessary for advancing civilization.” By recruiting children, Bellamy, Palmer, and other WCE elites felt they ensured the future promise

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For inspiration, organizers in several parts of the fair, including the Midway Plaisance and the anthropology department, turned to the success of the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Major investors wanted to outdo the image of technological and colonial superiority France conveyed to the international community in their world’s fair. Experts took displays of
American technology, most powerfully expressed in the original Ferris Wheel first constructed at the WCE, and juxtaposed them with displays of primitive peoples, deepening the intellectual impact of their hegemonic message. Burnham & Root, the firm responsible for the design and construction of WCE buildings, organized the fair around a “Court of Honor” on a central lagoon, with the Agricultural, Electrical, Government, Horticulture, and Transportation Buildings making up the core. The Anthropology Building, model Indian school, and living ethnological exhibits were at the southwest edge of the fair, taking up the west side of the South Pond, just across the rail line from the livestock exhibit, deliberately displaced from the center.52

The Midway Plaisance, jutting from the northwest end of Jackson Park, had a similar organizational scheme. Under Putnam’s Department M, the Midway was supposed to be an extension of the anthropology exhibit and follow similar evolutionary themes. Organizers quickly discovered, however, Putnam was “ill-suited” to the task. Instead show entrepreneur Sol Bloom oversaw what Putnam referred to as an “Indian circus.” The existence of the Midway at all was a concession organizers made to avoid the unofficial entertainment zone that sprang up alongside the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia a decade and a half earlier. If under the direct control of the WCE corporation, the organizing elites could control the content and intent of individual exhibits and the Midway as a whole. To give a veneer of legitimacy, the Midway remained technically under the control of Department M and Frederick W. Putnam, but in effect, it was “more sensationalistic than educational.” The entertainment here came from what a correspondent for Carlisle’s The Indian Helper called “tribes of the earth,” reinforcing the binary

52 Rydell, Findling, and Pelle, 32; Please see map on page 41. Visit <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4104c.ct002834> for high resolution image.
visions of traditional versus modern, savage versus civilized, natural versus industrial.\textsuperscript{53}

To display Indian education and its achievements in creating “United States citizens out of American savages,” Commissioner Thomas J. Morgan\textsuperscript{54} asked Congress to fund a BIA model Indian school. Morgan received a $25,000 appropriation, far short of what he initially requested, to construct, staff, and fill a working display of Indian education with live students and teachers alongside static displays of students’ work and achievements. Richard Pratt of the Carlisle Indian School was Morgan’s first choice to direct the exhibit, but due to ideological disputes over the legitimacy of ethnography (whose exhibits would be displayed adjacent to the school as a deliberate juxtaposition) and the efficacy of reservation schools over boarding schools, Pratt declined the post. In fact, Pratt so vehemently disagreed with Morgan he capitalized on the BIA’s budget constraints and construction delays to inserted 300 of his own students into the dedication parade of the WCE. They were the only Indians to take part in the ceremonies. To deepen the ideological divide, Pratt went so far as to set up his own model school in the Liberal Arts Building run by his student Chauncey Yellow Robe separate from the BIA’s on the South Pond. The BIA exhibit received mixed reviews overall, with some guidebooks leaving the display out entirely. Nonetheless, their presence is meaningful in that both Pratt and the BIA further entrenched the ideology of civilizing as forsaking all cultural ties for Indians. The lives Indian students lived were in reality much more complex. For all Indigenous American participants, the official story of display and their real experiences existed on a complex

\textsuperscript{53} Rosalyn R. LaPier and David R. M. Beck, \textit{City Indian: Native American Activism in Chicago, 1893-1934} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 20-21; Rydell, Findling, and Pelle, 35; “Midway Plaisance Parade on Illinois Day at the World’s Fair,” \textit{The Indian Helper} 8, no. 50, 1 Sept 1893.

\textsuperscript{54} Prior to the opening of the World’s Columbian Exposition, Thomas J. Morgan was replaced as commissioner by Daniel Browning. Morgan, however, did most, if not all, of the bureaucratic maneuvering and organization for the BIA’s WCE exhibit.
spectrum bound up in questions of authenticity and, more importantly, the future.55

I. The Midway Plaisance & Show Indians

Where the architectural grandeur of the White City represented “coherence and order,” the Midway was a place of “pure chaos and savagery” where fairgoers went to live out the darker fantasies of an imperial society. Putnam and Franz Boas first envisioned this “Street of All Nations” to act as an encyclopedia of humanity organized in order of level of civilization, echoing G. Brown Goode’s classification system for the fair as a whole. Putnam ceded direct supervision to Sol Bloom, an “impresario,” and his carnival ideas dominated, but Bloom’s Midway accomplished “similar ideological work” to Putnam’s original vision. In keeping the Midway as nominally part of Putnam and Boas’ Department M, too, the entertainment section of the WCE took on an “aura of scientific respectability” which validated prevailing ideas about racial hierarchies and whites’ position atop the ladder.56

Organized in what Bloom and Putnam considered chronological order, from least to most civilized, the Midway

56 Huhndorf, 42-43; Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 62.
started with displays of Dahomey from Africa, Laplanders from the far north of Finland, and a café chantant where various daily performances took place. As one strolled down the mile-long entertainment zone, one progressed through an ethnographer’s vision of evolution. Ending with the Irish Industries building (the Irish being just below the highest rung of enlightened civilization), the Midway gave way to the magnificent White City, the heart of the WCE.\textsuperscript{57} The contrast was obvious and intentional. Here, dominant culture drew “explicit contrasts” between itself and the varying arrays of savagery displayed as curiosities for the American audience.\textsuperscript{58} As Historian Robert Rydell puts it,

\begin{quote}
On the Midway, presented as being under the control of the well-meaning professor from Harvard [Frederick W. Putnam], the world became a bauble with which Americans might amuse themselves and a standard against which they might measure their achievements. Alternating between specimens and toys in the eyes of observers, the nonwhite people living in villages along the Midway not only were seen through the lens of America’s material and presumed racial progress leading to future utopia, but were neatly categorized into the niches of a racial hierarchy.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

And while the racial implications of the Midway Plaisance were stark with long-lasting resonance in American social order, and the fact of objectification in these contexts is indisputable, such an approach suggests the utter domination of the peoples displayed here. With that assumption comes the perhaps unintended belief that indigenous peoples, especially Indians in this context, were entirely enslaved to the will of Bloom, Putnam, and entertainment entrepreneurs of the WCE. The day-to-day existence of North American indigenous peoples on the Midway, however, was quite different. In so emphasizing oppression, history has lost sight of the agency of these indigenous performers, just as contemporary anthropologists, in emphasizing their relegation to a vanished past, overlooked the meaningfulness of their present physical

\textsuperscript{57} Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 60.  
\textsuperscript{58} Huhndorf, 42.  
\textsuperscript{59} Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair}, 64.
existence. This reading has implications throughout world’s fairs, but for now, it is worth examining indigenous actions on the Midway and the adjacent Buffalo Bill Wild West (which functioned as part of the Midway Plaisance) to further understand its meaning.60

Nate Salsbury, William Cody’s business partner, leased fourteen acres abutting the fair at the intersection of South Stony Island Avenue and East 63rd Street. After two successful tours of Europe, the second including Ghost Dance prisoners of war, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West came to Chicago for its most profitable season. With gate receipts totalling at least two million, Cody and his “Show Indians” left an indelible mark on the WCE. While in hindsight, much of Cody’s vision of America is based on racial untruths and nationalist myth, the man himself had a complicated legacy for Indigenous Americans. Both Black Elk and Luther Standing Bear in autobiographical accounts speak of Cody as a man concerned with the welfare of the Indians in his employ, as well as the national Indian condition. Perhaps this can be disregarded as good business sense—keeping Indian culture alive and well certainly profited his business—but if there is one thing biographers agree upon, it is that William Cody lacked financial know-how.61 Buffalo Bill’s Wild West certainly had many inherently exploitative parts, but the man himself also brought one hundred Lakota from Pine Ridge, Standing Rock, and Rosebud reservations with his own money to witness the WCE opening ceremonies.62

Permitted to watch from the top balcony of the administrative building, this party of Lakota “inadvertently became a focus” for many of the attendees. As the ceremonies came to

60 Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 60; Huhndorf, 42; Paige Raibmon, “Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka’wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbian and at the World’s Fair,” The Canadian Historical Review 81 (2 June 2000): 190.
61 By the end of his life, William F. Cody was bankrupt, having run several iterations of his show and multiple partners into the ground. His sense of grandeur seemed to be his undoing, which informed his investments that sucked up much of his Wild West profits.
their crescendo and attention turned to the balcony in question, the group appeared as the
“machinery began to roar, the whistles blow and the magnificent chorus intone ‘My Country ‘Tis
of Thee’” offering the opportunity for fairgoers to confirm their preconceived ideas (as well as the
WCE’s central message) about progress and indigeneity. Amy Leslie, correspondent for the
Chicago News whose accounts of the fair were later republished as a single volume, wrote of the
moment in just such a fashion. To her, the Lakota appeared “resplendent…and representative
[of] American savagery” as convenient “remembrances of a lost, primitive glory.” These
indigenous people of “fallen majesty” left the ceremonies “waving congratulation to cultured
achievement and submissive admiration to the world.” Here, even as an accident, if Leslie is to
be believed, Indians served as a useful foil to the technological achievement of America. While
these Lakota may have been exploited in this moment for their perceived savagery, the fact is
American Indians invited to the WCE enjoyed themselves just as other white fairgoers did. They
traversed the Midway, rode the carousel and Ferris Wheel, attended lectures and other events,
and browsed exhibit halls. While millions of white Americans visited the WCE in 1893, the four
hundred or so Indians invited as part of official exhibits or attractions, or as part of the Wild
West, also experienced the fair in rich and complex ways with as varied reactions as other
groups.63

Following the 1893 season, the term “Show Indian” appeared with greater frequency,
indicating a shift in the understanding of the oskate wicasa, “proffering them a kind of
professional status.” Traveling with shows or performing at exhibitions became a legitimate
occupation for Indigenous Americans including the Kwakwaka’wakw, Lakota, Inuit, and others.
Performance became a cultural gathering point where diverse groups from within and without

63 Amy Leslie, Amy Leslie at the Fair (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Co., 1893), 13; Moses, Wild West Shows, 135, 139-41.
the main tribal group met to exchange and create cultural practices. Cody permitted the practice of banned dances like the Omaha Grass Dance, which may have “faded from memory if not for their preservation in Cody’s camps and shows.” This trend would have later ramifications, especially at the Trans-Mississippi and International Exhibition in Omaha in 1898, as well as in the long-lasting powwow tradition, which Historian Josh Clough argues has direct roots in the synthesis happening amongst Indians at shows and expositions just like Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and the WCE. The best example of the shift to recognition as legitimate professionals is in 1893, William Cody signed one contract with the Pine Ridge Indian Agent for seventy-five Lakota to travel with his show. In 1894, he signed one hundred contracts with one hundred Indians. Only four years after the Massacre at Wounded Knee, to have the BIA relinquish such control over their lives was a significant moment for the Lakota and indicative of the overall BIA “grudging recognition that they were professionals and should be treated as such.”

A typical performance in the 1893 season for Buffalo Bill’s group included several acts in an arena as well as a more informal Indian encampment for ticket-holders to peruse before and after the show. The Chicago show included an opening “Grand Review” where the “Rough Riders of the world” paraded through the arena, including armed men from Russia, England, France, Germany, and the United States. The famous Annie Oakley followed, with a competition demonstrating equestrian prowess between “a Cowboy, a Cossack, a Mexican, an Arab, and an Indian” after. Then came the bread and butter of Buffalo Bill’s show: reenactments. The first of the short-lived Pony Express made the program because of William Cody’s own involvement, but others featured appeared because of their place in American folklore. Buffalo Bill and his

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band of “Scouts and Cowboys” repulsed an Indian attack on a “prairie emigrant train.” More feats of strength and skill followed in what Cody believed were “frontier” skills, closely bound up in his (and his show’s) representation of masculinity. Marksmen and equestrians of several ethnicities performed as true and accurate examples of their kind in the arena. An exhaustive military display then preceded the reenactment of the “Capture of the Deadwood Mail Coach by the Indians” and Buffalo Bill’s subsequent “rescue” maneuvers. The show’s crescendo began in Buffalo Bill’s own solo demonstration of his marksmanship, then a “buffalo hunt” with live buffalo (by then, a near-extinct relic of westward expansion), climaxing in the reenactment of the Battle of Little Big Horn “Showing with Historical Accuracy [sic] the scene of CUSTER’S LAST CHARGE.” The infamous performance, however, featured Buffalo Bill arriving moments too late to rescue Custer from Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull. While William Cody was present at the Battle of Little Big Horn, his role was miniscule compared to his inflated retelling. The program, however, made repeated claims of absolute authenticity, claiming to display various cultures “through the means of actual and realistic scenes of life.” The Indian encampment was unique. Show-goers toured an Indian village complete with tipis and actors (primarily women). Like the various attractions, scientific or otherwise, springing up around the globe modeled on the French Jardin d’Acclimation featuring the Asante, the Indian village tried to establish an image of indigeneity more complex than “ferocity and savagery.” The village gave performers and spectators alike an opportunity for a more intimate performative experience, which spectators often conflated with truth. The indigenous people performing were often Lakota due to Cody’s contacts in the BIA, but other tribal groups formed the more than one hundred Indian performers for the 1893 Chicago show.65

65 William Schneider, “Race and Empire: The Rise of Popular Ethnography in the Late Nineteenth Century,”
With such cultural contacts occurring in the Wild West shows of the era, it makes plausible the existence of these contacts within other parts of the fair. While direct indigenous accounts of their experiences are scarce, it is an interesting possibility. On the Midway, Indigenous Americans coexisted with groups from around the world. At later fairs, known friendships emerged from these exhibits, and life in the traveling shows of the era demonstrates clear cultural synthesis and survival. It is not difficult to imagine such experiences on the Midway of the WCE. Archival resources show that Show Indians, as well as other exhibited peoples, enjoyed the Midway as much as whites. Even such enjoyment is an exercise of agency indicative of the complex emotional lives of each indigenous person who visited the WCE. Following the Ghost Dance in South Dakota which promised the coming of an indigenous savior, and as Black Elk describes, the closing of the sacred hoop and “the holy tree all full of leaves and blooming” once again, much of indigenous America experienced not only backlash from the BIA, but also a form of collective trauma whose memory lives on in the modern world. Modern sentiment and scholarship, however, has treated Wounded Knee and other incidents of one-sided violence in the West as indicative of the whole of indigenous experience. And while it is important to never bely the American disgrace of Wounded Knee or the violence, some would argue genocide, of North American dominant culture’s treatment of indigenous peoples, their experience is far richer than this interpretation would allow. It objectifies them in ways similar to the objectification of display at the WCE. In exhibition, in a way distinct from Wild West Shows, indigenous subjects became culturally static in an inorganic manner. Spielers extolled them as legitimate representations of their “kind,” Indians on the Midway (and throughout the fair) were reduced into subjective and stereotype-enforcing categories. In attempting to define

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authenticity, dominant culture created metaphysical boundaries around indigenous life. This dehumanization and degradation formed a core objection from American Indians who voiced their opinions formally and informally.\(^6\)

*The Cherokee Advocate* published a small piece a month before the dedication ceremonies for the WCE deriding US Attorney General William Miller’s decision that Indian Territory was not entitled to self-representation at the fair. According to Miller, Indian Territory and the Five Civilized Tribes therein had “no political status under the acts of Congress” comparable to fully admitted states or other territories who set up their own exhibits and buildings in Jackson Park. These exhibits were often seen as economic opportunities for states to boost investments in critical industries, which Indian Territory possessed as much as any other part of the United States. At the WCE, “Indians can be on exhibition like a lot of wild beasts as Columbus had the kindness to put them on his return to Spain,” but could not officially represent themselves. While seemingly an absolute decision, and no record exists of an Indian owned and operated exhibit on official fair grounds, Indigenous Americans found creative and strategic means of self-representation.\(^7\)

Chief Simon Pokagon of the Potawatomi, a tribe who the United States forced from the very land on which Chicago and the WCE stood, expressed his dismay at the treatment and depiction of American Indians. Pokagon was highly educated, yet continued to value traditional ways of life, which posed a significant ideological challenge to the messages of the fair. He had a “solid footing in the past” but also represented the “future of Indians” in his education, a strategic adoption of dominant culture. Chief Pokagon believed his people especially, but Indians


\(^7\) *The Cherokee Advocate*, 21 Sept. 1892.
as a whole as well, needed to “adapt to modern society and utilize its institutions in order to survive and thrive into the future”—a sentiment later indigenous individuals and tribal groups echoed in their own ways. In writing “The Red Man’s Rebuve,” later republished as “The Red Man’s Greeting,” Pokagon wanted to denounce the marginalization of Indians, both in terms of social messaging and the physical space of the WCE. Indians ought to be allowed to “participate as other nations were, with representatives and exhibits of their own.” Published by friend C.H. Engle, these birch-bark pamphlets were distributed on the Midway as a form of protest literature that garnered a great deal of attention.

This “Rebuve” evoked strong biblical imagery, but with a unique Indian perspective. Pokagon seems to refer to the Tche-ban-yoo-booz (the Great Spirit) and the Christian God as the same being, representing an existing adaptation of dominant culture to indigenous meanings. In invoking the name of God and Jesus, Pokagon creates a strong bridge between two cultures, which, according to the WCE, were incapable of coexisting. The “primitive” had to pass away for civilization to take its place. But here, in the simple, intentional mixing of the Great Spirit and the Christian deity, he reveals to his audience the versatility of indigenous custom across time. Christianity it seems was one of only a few good things “the pale-faced race that has usurped our lands and homes” ever gave indigenous people. He identified Indians as a massive, extended society across both American continents, combining Spanish and British imperial crimes as part of the broader American past. The slaves “forced across the sea” to serve in Spain, as well as the “multitudes…dragged into the mines to dig for gold” for their “turkey-like” conquerors gobbling for gold formed the beginning thrust of his exposé of crimes against

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68 Birch trees hold special significance for the Potawatomi people for the bark’s usefulness. Used to construct dwellings, mats, and even shroud the dead, the printing of Pokagon’s “Rebuve” on birch bark was a means of linking the traditional (the birch) with the modern/industrial (printing press), emphasizing the false binary between the two that dominated the interpretation of indigenous experience at the time.

69 LaPier and Beck, 25-6.
indigenous society. Chief Pokagon, however, was a Potawatomi whose ancestral homelands lie in Chicago, many thousands of miles from the Spanish mines of New Spain and Peru. Surging to the forefront as Pokagon layed bare the centuries of crimes against the Americas’ indigenous were the tender roots of a new Pan-Indian self-determination.  

“The Red Man’s Rebuke” focused then on the removal of Indians from ancestral homelands, the cultivation and overuse of tobacco (which Pokagon argues led to a degradation of society), and the introduction of alcohol to indigenous society, which continues to affect Indian life today. Chief Pokagon argued part of the negative image assigned to Indians is the rotten fruit born of white introduction of alcohol, placing the blame for the degradation of a “kind, outspoken, and forgiving” people on dominant society. Alcohol is not the entire explanation for the white perception of Indians as “treacherous, vindictive, and cruel.” The broken promises and violence of colonizers also induced Indians to the “war path.” As westward expansion and Manifest Destiny so celebrated at the WCE pushed across the continent, leaving broken treaties, displaced persons, and violence in its wake, “these acts of base ingratitude were communicated from tribe to tribe throughout the continent, and that a universal wail as one voice went up from all the tribes of the unbroken wilderness.” A sentiment of universal experience emerged from Pokagon’s work that indicated a growing shift in indigenous societies to identify with the whole of Indian experience instead of solely by tribal affiliation.

Pointing out the irony of celebrating Christopher Columbus on ground stolen from his own people, Pokagon told white fairgoers Indians would celebrate over the “graves of [their] departed fathers” before they would “celebrate [their] own funeral, the discovery of America.”

71 Pokagon, 7, 9.
The incredible spectacle of the WCE and all of the accomplishments displayed therein were “at the sacrifice of our homes and a once happy race”—a race displayed as now obsolete. The close of “Rebuke” invoked the Great Spirit or God with a description of the Second Coming where God will separate the handful of white men from the masses who truly aided the “red man” and they will have wings and deliverance. The remaining majority, however, will be thrown into the burning fires of Hell for their failure to do their holy duty to bring Christian salvation to the indigenous of America. Pokagon’s invocation received a great deal of attention. Both Carter Harrison, the mayor of Chicago, and a women’s organization read “The Red Man’s Rebuke” (by then strategically retitled “The Red Man’s Greeting”) at the WCE and invited Pokagon to “consult with them about the representation of Indians at the fair.” He had high hopes, telling visitors and organizers “we wish to rejoice with you” at the WCE, however “the world’s people, from what they have so far seen of us on the Midway, will regard us as savages; but they shall yet know that we are as human as well as they.” Carter Harrison invited Pokagon to celebrate the fair’s Chicago Day as an official delegate where both called for “greater understanding between the races,” and Harrison again asked him to return for the fair’s closing ceremonies. Those ceremonies, however, were marred by Harrison’s assassination.\footnote{Pokagon, 1-2 (Emphasis original), 13-16; Pokagon quoted in LaPier and Beck, 26; LaPier and Beck, 27-28.}

Pokagon’s legacy foreshadowed the “educated Indian activist” of the twentieth century who held to “strong tribal roots” recognizing modernity was “bringing rapid change to the Indian world.” Such change required strategic adaptation and adoption, which he demonstrated in both the physical presentation and the intellectual achievement of “The Red Man’s Rebuke.” Having fought for much of his life for back-payments from the United States government to the Potawatomi, Chief Simon Pokagon died in 1899, soon after receiving an annuity of $118,000 for
his tribe. While he died in “relative poverty,” he left behind many writings that exemplify the emerging Indian academic elite who would shape the future of indigenous peoples in North America.\footnote{LaPier and Beck, 28 ; “Old Indian Chief Dead,” Undated newspaper, p. 19 of archive.org copy of “The Red Man’s Rebuke” pamphlet, <https://archive.org/details/redmanquotesrebu00Pokas>.} 

II. Indian Education: Pratt vs. the Bureau of Indian Affairs

The elevated rail system built to transport visitors around the WCE encircled the model Indian school adjacent to the Anthropology Building. The exhibit was also “in close proximity to that monster peacemaker, the Krupp gun.” Even if this behemoth weapon was never used in the barely complete Indian Wars, the psychological impact of its juxtaposition with Indian school children cannot be overlooked. Here, in this “plain wooden building” was the greatest example of Indian pacification for fairgoers. While the Haymarket incident of 1887 may have been a fresh wound for white Chicagoans, Wounded Knee and the trauma of the Indian Wars were still a gaping chasm in indigenous experience. In the little, unassuming building, the government showed how “the dark skinned tribes…have come down…from their own ancient civilization to become a part of America to-day [sic],” divesting themselves once and for all of their “barbarism” to join “civilization and Christianity.” The Bureau of Indian Affairs, however, did not have a monopoly on representing the pacified Indian, and while reformers wanted to show their influence as absolute, Indian students defied these rigid categories, using the opportunity inherent in the WCE—originally marketed to white Americans—to their own advantage.\footnote{“An Indian School at the World’s Fair,” The Indian’s Friend, July 1893.} 

Obscured from official fair paraphernalia, the government exhibit of the state of Indian
education was one of several examples of reforming efforts. Others included displays from Richard Pratt and the Carlisle Indian Industrial School—who, in a seemingly petty move, opened his own exhibit after a dispute with then BIA Commissioner Thomas Morgan—as well as displays like that of Women’s National Indian Association in the Women’s Building and similar installations in state and national buildings like Canada’s model schoolroom. Even with the ongoing ill-feelings between General Pratt and the BIA, reformers presented a largely coherent message at the WCE in advocating for the “civilizing” of American Indians and other indigenous North Americans for their eventual integration, and thus disappearance, into white society. In fact, in emphasizing the capabilities of Indigenous Americans (with proper white education), reformers gave fairgoers a message counter to the racial otherness presented under Department M’s purview in the Anthropology Building and the Midway Plaisance.75

The conflict between Pratt and Morgan centered on the message of the Anthropology Department not so much reformers’ WCE goals. Commissioner Morgan wanted Pratt to take over the organization and running of the school—at the time he seemed a natural choice as the most recognizable figure in Indian education—but Pratt had serious objections to presence of ethnologists at the fair, as well as their BIA endorsed exhibit and access to Indians both as informants and performers. Even when Putnam’s display conflicted with the Bureau’s official message, Commissioner Morgan continued to cooperate with Department M. The Bureau was the original organizer of the “Indian encampment” that was supposed to demonstrate the evolution of indigenous society in North America with the BIA’s school exhibiting the heights to which Indians had climbed with benevolent white influence. The schema reflected the organization of other exhibits at the WCE where an object’s history displayed in conjunction

75 Trennert, 205-11; “Association News and Notes,” The Indian’s Friend V, no. 10 (June 1893), 1; Raibmon, 181-2.
with its most modern iteration demonstrated the fair’s theme of progress since 1492. In 1892, however, Putnam took over the task of telling this story from the BIA. When Congress came up far short of Morgan’s requested budget, the BIA could not financially shoulder the weight of such a task and ceded representation to anthropologists, whom Pratt considered reformers’ sworn enemies.\(^{76}\)

Just three days before the official opening of the WCE (although some two months before the Anthropology Building opened), the *Indian Helper* printed at Carlisle ran a small paragraph succinctly denouncing ethnologists who sought “arrow heads while Carlisle School is after Indian heads.” The rebuke was clear. Ethnologists looked for the historic Indian “under ground [sic]” referring to archaeological digs conducted as part of ethnological research. Indian schools were “after Indians above the ground,” hoping to secure a future in white society for the living remnants of these societies. The *Helper* gives no author for this brief note, but each issue takes pains to distinguish between the printers—Carlisle’s male Indian students—and the “man-on-the-band-stand” who served as editor and was “NOT an Indian.” The paper served largely as a place to reinforce Pratt’s ideology, which is apparent in this small blurb.\(^{77}\)

General Pratt, however, had a complicated legacy. Hailed repeatedly as the great villain of Indian boarding schools, easily forgotten is his lifelong belief in the intellectual capabilities of Indians. While this belief is patronizing in any time, Pratt was one of few powerful white individuals who fought for Indian rights in the nineteenth century. William Cody could also be counted among them—a fact that would horrify Pratt if he were alive to read this. Pratt’s work was misguided and rooted in similar, but distinct, racial untruths as anthropology and

\(^{76}\) Trennert, 205; Bank 597; Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 132-4.

\(^{77}\) *The Indian Helper* 8, no. 32 (28 April 1893), 2; Daniel Littlefield and James W. Parins, ed., *American Indian and Alaska Native Newspapers and Periodicals, 1826-1924* vol. 3 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 181-184.
entertainment at the time. Indian schools in North America, as discussed in the introduction, own a horrific segment of the story of indigeneity on the continent, but with their violence came a legacy of highly capable, educated Indians, adept at negotiating a white world often on behalf of their tribes. Richard Pratt believed in the possibility of these intellectuals, and the Oxford English Dictionary credits him with the first English usage of the term racism when in 1903 he denounced the segregation of Indigenous America from white society. So, while it may appear he acted out of self-interest or narcissism, Richard Pratt truly believed anthropology and entertainment entrepreneurs posed a grave danger to his Indian charges, and he was not the only one. 78

Chauncey Yellow Robe, née Kills in the Woods, was Richard Pratt’s protégé and represented Carlisle School at the exposition. Later integral to the Pan-Indian Movement, Chauncey Yellow Robe spent much of the WCE running the Carlisle exhibit in the Liberal Arts Building. His relationship with Pratt and strategic adoption of “white ways” earned him the ire of members of his tribe, but for much of his life he remained committed to helping the Lakota. According to several sources, his initial enrollment at Carlisle was a maneuver on his father’s part, Chief Yellow Robe, to help his tribe survive the onslaught of white violence and encroachment. To some, however, Chauncey became too enmeshed in white ways and so accounts of his life either deride him, obscuring his Indianness, or offer an apologists’ explanation for Indian education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The person of Chauncey Yellow Robe, like Simon Pokagon, defies categorization (which may explain why a

comprehensive biography of him does not yet exist), so perhaps to puzzle out his place in history, his presence at the WCE may be a starting point.79

Present for the dedication ceremonies where Pratt secured the prestige of providing the only Indian representatives, Chauncey later, according to accounts in *The Indian Helper*, was given charge of the students from Carlisle and the static exhibits because he had so impressed Richard Pratt. Possible, too, was Pratt saw Chauncey as a model of his pioneering “Outing System” where students spent summers working for East Coast farmers or in other strenuous labor jobs. The system had the “dual advantage” of further immersing students in white culture while also preventing them from returning to the reservation, both literally and figuratively. This return to the reservation made up the thrust of Pratt’s other disagreement with the BIA over the efficacy of reservation schools over boarding schools like Carlisle, something Chauncey would echo later in his life. Chauncey spent his first “outing” experience with a Quaker family in rural Pennsylvania, and, as he often was at Carlisle, proved a model participant. These “outings” also proved to be a source of revenue for the school, with the Women’s American Indian Association reporting the system earned $21,000 in 1892 for Carlisle with students accruing an additional $13,000 in savings.80

While Chauncey probably spent most of his time supervising the exhibit in the east gallery of the Liberal Arts Building, he along with other students from Carlisle who arrived later in the course of the fair, had a certain amount of freedom to explore the fair and the varied messages about Indians therein. Some of the money from 1893’s summer “outings” financed the

79 Marjorie Weinberg, *The Real Rosebud: The Triumph of a Lakota Woman* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 12, 17-8, 23-4; Richard Yellow Robe, “An Indian Boy’s Experience: Written by Himself as a Composition and Read at our last Month’s Exhibition,” *The Indian Helper* 3, no. 17 (2 Dec 1887), 1.  
80 Miss Burgess, “Miss Burgess’ Trip To and First Impressions of the Big Fair,” *The Indian Helper* 8, no. 46 (4 Aug 1893), 4; Weinberg, 20, 23; “Carlisle at Chicago,” *The Indian’s Friend*, August 1893.
excursion of five-hundred Carlisle students to the WCE. Directly contradicting the stereotype of Indians as “lazy, good-for-nothing,” the students “hardened [their] hands with good, honest WORK” over the summer in order to attend the exposition. Here they were to “hear and learn, each for himself and herself, thus carrying out Carlisle’s methods” in the great cultural classroom in Chicago. According to the account in the school newspaper, “boys and girls alike were given full liberty to go around and see what they wished,” which suggests there was a great deal of opportunity for cultural exchange and learning from an variety of displays, including those of Indigenous America. Direct accounts of students’ reactions do not survive, but Chauncey Yellow Robe’s later ideas and writings do. He in particular joined his headmaster in being opposed to the “evil and degrading influence of commercializing the Indian before the world.” Part of this came from his time translating for the BIA in their investigation of several deaths and strandings of Indians in Europe by Buffalo Bill and other Wild West Shows in 1890-91. His hatred of entertainment was further entrenched spending at least part of the WCE in immediate proximity to Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and other problematic exhibits of indigeneity.81

Twenty years later, he would deride the sensational new moving pictures that sought to capitalize on the emotional spectacle of Wounded Knee. As if the Seventh Cavalry’s original “cowardly and criminal act without diplomacy” were not enough, the production of “The Last Great Battle of the Sioux,” approved by the US government and filmed on the same field as the original massacre, was “a disgrace and injustice to the Indian race.” For Chauncey Yellow Robe, these productions, including Wild West Shows, created and reinforced the savage stereotypes that denied Indigenous America “equal opportunities, equal responsibilities, equal education,” an

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81 “Carlisle Indian School at the World’s Fair,” The Indian Helper 9, no. 3 (13 Oct 1893), 1, 4; Chauncey Yellow Robe, “The Menace of the Wild West Show,” Transcript of speech delivered at Fourth Annual Conference of the Society of American Indians, Madison, WI (6-11 Oct 1914), Clipping in Chauncey Yellow Robe’s school file from Carlisle Indian Industrial School; Weinberg, 21.
opinion most reformers held as well.\footnote{Yellow Robe, “The Menace of the Wild West Show.” Chauncey’s daughter Rosebud, the great broadcaster, would go on to direct the Jones Beach Indian Village for twenty years in New Jersey where she told both Lakota and Eastern tribal stories while in traditional Lakota dress, although with the addition of the recognizable feathered headdress traditionally reserved for men. In a sense, Rosebud Yellow Robe’s life indicated the Pan-Indian momentum through the twentieth century, helped along by her father, Chauncey, and the incredible flexibility and hybrid nature of tradition. See Weinberg, 2.}

Yellow Robe’s later actions and success cannot be distilled to a single season at the WCE, but his presence was significant, just like the presence of other indigenous students. Thousands of people visited the BIA exhibit on the South Pond, which featured a model classroom and a rotating group of students. Schools from Albuquerque, Philadelphia, and elsewhere traveled to the WCE for three to four week stays, with male students from Albuquerque permitted to arrive early so that they might help complete construction of the exhibit. The display itself focused on the model classroom where the rotating school groups used the space as a true educational room. Teachers taught lessons to students and expected them to learn as if they were in their regular class. Surrounding these participants, a different kind of performer but performers nonetheless, were examples of work from other BIA students including artwork, examinations, and original essays. Most of the time, students were confined to the dormitories in the school building, but they also gave performances throughout the fair. One such demonstration included a young student Gay Bear (Lakota) playing “the largest pipe organ at the Fair” to an audience of one thousand listeners. Students even received free transportation on the Intramural Railway as well as free admission to various exhibits. Such kindnesses certainly expanded the opportunities of students to see and experience the WCE and the wealth of knowledge assembled there.\footnote{Trennert, 208; “U.S. Indian Schools at the World’s Fair, No. 3,” \textit{The Indian's Friend}, October 1893.}

One can only speculate as to the individual reactions each student may have had to the
contradicting representations of Indigenous America at the WCE, but reformers made their opinions clear. Both entertainers and anthropologists posed a grave risk to the future of the Indians in their care. Chauncey Yellow Robe provides only one indigenous perspective, and does not preclude the possibility of other, varied reactions from Indian students. As the fair overwhelmed Henry Adams, descended from American royalty, with its dearth of information and questions, it is likely that each indigenous person present had as nuanced and unique an interpretation of the WCE. Even though the BIA cooperated with Frederick Putnam and Department M, there was a clear demarcation between the BIA’s (and others’) students and the Indian participants in the Anthropology Building. Later fairs would blur this line, but at the WCE, students could at least be visitors to the anthropological exhibits, and Putnam’s performers could browse the BIA model school, and the same with the Midway’s and Buffalo Bill’s performers. Even in trying to deride ethnologists and distinguish their students, reformers, in bringing their charges to the WCE, actually brought them into close contact with presentations of traditional ways of life.

III. Department M’s Ethnological Villages and the Bureau of American Ethnography

The entrance to the Anthropology Building bore the vague inscription “Man and his Wonders,” which reflected the vision of the WCE, or even contemporary world’s fairs as a whole. The “Wonders” in the department’s displays, however, tended to focus on more “primitive” cultures, especially Indigenous American, as a useful foil to the pristine civilization at work in the rest of the WCE, especially the central White City. The South Pond became a living exhibit of the past, intended to reach back to Columbus’s landing to display with scientific accuracy, life at contact and its progression since. Outside the Anthropology Building, Frederick
Putnam and his protégé Franz Boas organized a string of “ethnographical villages” around the rim of the South Pond, which included representatives of Cree, Jicarilla Apache, Iroquois, Penobscot, Navajo, Hopi, and many others in “the great aboriginal encampment.” Most groups set up model encampments where they “cooked, worked, talked with visitors (if they could), played musical instruments, sang, and danced,” in and around reconstructed dwellings. In this context, a complicated relationship between performance and science emerged, where integral to display, the fact of performance contradicted the validity of the exhibition. The living participants pushed these scientific constructions into the realm of entertainment—a conflict central to the politics of the museum. Attempting to duplicate indigenous life in artificial, so-called “laboratory” conditions entangled anthropologists, fair-goers, and performers in a web of contradicting, binary understandings of authenticity.\(^8\)

Putnam’s ethnographic displays presented “an Aboriginal authenticity that was inseparable from savagery” where the savage and “civilized” sat at opposite ends of the South Pond. “The red man as a savage wrapped in a blanket and his child in the dress of civilization” introduced visitors to explicit internal contrasts which reinforced the broader external contrast between indigeneity and white society. Just as Department M asked Indigenous North Americans to inhabit this dichotomy, Putnam also asked his “specimens”—for they were, to him, exactly that—to perform both past and present. The performance of everyday life was, thanks to the likes of Putnam and Buffalo Bill, becoming an occupation for indigenous peoples, and was distinctly modern. At the same time, however, Putnam’s obsession with authenticity relegated indigenous society as wholly past. The Kwakwaka’wakw had to forgo entirely their Hudson Bay Company blankets, which were a banal, everyday artifact, and had been for some time. In recruiting the

\(^8\) “A Fairness to the Indian,” *The Indian’s Friend*, Sept 1893; “All Kinds of Indians,” *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, 20 June 1893; Bank, 594-5; Raibmon, 158.
Navajo, Putnam instructed his assistant Antonio Apache to hire a single nuclear family (even though some 200 Navajo applied) in an “authentic” dwelling. Because of the Navajo’s geographic location, “contact” for them came much faster post-Columbus than for groups farther north and vestiges of Spanish culture were several hundred years old by 1893. Putnam demanded woven yucca fabric clothing when the Spanish introduced the Navajo to sheep and, thus, wool in the sixteenth century. No one alive knew how to make such clothing. But to Putnam these relics of white culture were of “no importance” and “not desired.” He also denied the Navajo contingent a stove in their dwelling in his quest for “timeless authenticity.” This “simulated authenticity,” however, created an Indian who existed outside of time, and thus, was a fabrication, undermining the validity of anthropologists’ entire department.\(^85\)

The ethnology department itself, originally planned for the northern section of the Liberal Arts Building, took up residence in a 158,234 square foot building on the southern lagoon. Included within was space for both national and foreign exhibits on archaeology, subfields of ethnology, neurology, and psychology. All of these fields had distinct racial ideologies where the indigenous figured heavily as the symbolic and literal starting point of progressive scales. Divided into the discrete sections of archaeology, ethnology, and physical anthropology, 362 domestic and 452 international displays cost Department M (outside the costs of the building) $129,046.05—a sum the WCE corporation provided. These funds paid for the field work of archaeologists, as well as the work of “salvage anthropologists” like Franz Boas who would collect ethnographic items from various tribes through trade, theft, or capture, which would then make up the static displays. This included human remains, which both archaeologists and

salvagists traded in. Both the Cliff Dwellers Exhibit and the main Anthropology Building featured bones, hair, skin, teeth, and even mummies.\textsuperscript{86}

In subsequent fairs, one will find clear examples of exchanges between performers in the anthropology exhibits and fair-goers demonstrating subtler forms of agency, but two examples of the more overt “agency as resistance” are striking at the WCE. While in the education departments and entertainment exhibits, agency for American Indians took on forms like strategic adoption and self-representation, two groups, the Inuit from Labrador and the Kwakwaka’wakw from Vancouver, give clear historical moments of Indigenous American resistance at the World’s Columbian Exposition. Both groups in their displays and performances countered the prevailing anthropological narrative of a “vanishing” indigenous society (viewed as largely a single entity at the WCE) doomed to extinction, expressed clearly in Frederick Jackson Turner’s “racial and geographic determinism.” Presented at the WCE, the “frontier thesis” argued “the primitive wilds” of the ever-moving frontier had produced “a new American” from their European predecessors after the colonist “plunged from civilization back into an earlier stage of social development.” But here, Turner gave voice to a new anxiety in America: if the frontier was the catalyst for the unique American institutions and individual, the closing of that frontier ushered in a crisis of identity. Just as Henry Adams recognized this turning point, so too did anthropologists, who believed that in showing the American past, they might illuminate the white future. In order to display the past, however, scientists relied on performed and constructed representations of indigeneity, which relegated the Indian participants to the imagined past, with their role as part of the now pacified American wilds complete. But as the “White City [rose] where log cabins and the homes” of Indians once stood to declare “the glory

\textsuperscript{86} Johnson, 315-322; Raibmon, \textit{Authentic Indians}, 45.
(and cost) of progress,” indigenous people like the Kwakwaka’wakw and Inuit openly declared their existence and persistence, defying anthropologists’ narrative of annihilation.\textsuperscript{87}

Historian Philip Deloria argues Buffalo Bill’s Wild West functioned largely as a metaphorical method of “containment,” where “the potential for—and the containment of—Indian violence” dominated and constituted a large part of the allure. Department M had a similar effect. Each anthropological encampment resembled the Indian encampment adjacent to the Wild West with both touting “realistic and accurate representation” of the savage. In the Wild West, the masculine rout of the show gave way to the “feminine” reality of the encampment where Indians demonstrated various daily tasks viewed in the white world as “women’s work.” Thus this depiction associated femininity with pacification and containment. A similar mode was at work in the ethnological villages around the South Pond. Here, in being relegated to an anthropologist’s constructed past, the myth of vanishing with the closing of the frontier collided with emerging narratives of Indian containment and the new American masculinity, perhaps best embodied in Theodore Roosevelt. And while physical containment seemed all too real following Wounded Knee, the creativity and flexibility of indigenous culture was not to be

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Nancy Columbia, “Columbia, Eskimo Queen. Seattle Alaska-Pacific-Yukon Exhibition.” 1909. Published by Oakes Photo.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{87} Bank, 601; Philip Deloria, \textit{Indians in Unexpected Places} (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 62.
The “Esquimaux” village was not included in the array of encampments Putnam organized at the south end of the fair. Instead, the encampment ended up somewhere towards the north near either the Canadian or British buildings. Captain McConnell, who brought the group to the WCE, appears to have had a contract with the Eskimo Village Company whose provenance is unclear. They were, however, “collected” as part of the broader anthropological missions of Department M. It may have been this muddied authority that gave way to the abuse and neglect of the performers from Labrador and left them without official recourse. Under Buffalo Bill, other Midway entrepreneurs, and reformers like Richard Pratt, indigenous peoples received a fair amount of autonomy, permitted to move about the fair as they desired during their off hours, even receiving free admission by virtue of their ethnicity and accompanying novelty to white observers. Captain McConnell, however, informed the British Consul of the “practical imprisonment” of the group of Inuit he had gathered for the WCE, dubious as to their prospects for surviving the season in Chicago. Confined to their two-acre encampment, many developed pneumonia-like symptoms and were not being paid. Conditions were deplorable, lacking appropriate clothing and basic sanitation. Perhaps the owners of the exhibit bought too much into the myth of pacification or containment, because the Inuit did the last thing anyone expected: they went on strike. Here indigenous people coopted a white mode of resistance against the exploiting capitalist system responsible for their condition. In a city at the center of the Gilded Age labor conflicts, their actions have added significance. The Inuit labor strike defied the myth of pacification not with the stereotypical violence typified in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West but with a

88 Deloria, 62-65.
deeply feared contemporary protest.\textsuperscript{89}

Several members went on strike or quit and found work elsewhere, with some forming their own exhibit on Stony Island Avenue. This area was a popular destination for fairgoers on Sunday when the WCE, in order to keep Chicago’s religious elite happy, was closed for Sabbath. These Inuit entrepreneurs and their white partners were so successful their group toured for at least sixteen more years. They appeared at later exhibitions, even performing in Madison Square Garden a year after the WCE closed. When one of them gave birth, Mrs. Potter Palmer, wife of the head of the WCE Corporation and head of the Women’s Commission of Chicago, christened the child Nancy Columbia in honor of the fair. Nancy Columbia, nicknamed “Little Columbia” would tour with the group for much of her adolescence, spending more time in the United States touring than in her “native” Labrador. In a sense, with Nancy came the birth of a new show tradition for the Inuit community, including Alaskan Natives and other northern Canada tribal groups.\textsuperscript{90}

The Kwakwəwəltem’et from Vancouver Island, demonstrated their resilience through their contracted performances, taking their anticolonial message directly to fairgoers in an attempt to thwart both government and anthropological views. The Kwakwəwəltem’et came to the WCE at Franz Boas’ behest in a troop Greg Hunt, a “half-breed” (son of a Kwakwəwəltem’et mother) organized for the exposition. Boas had a special interest in the Kwakwəwəltem’et. He spent several years in British Columbia studying their tribal customs, especially their musical and spiritual customs. The “peculiar culture” of western Canada “had its origins in … the


\textsuperscript{90} LaPier and Beck, 24; Advertisement, \textit{New York Times}, 6 Mar 1894, 7; Nancy Parezo and Don D. Fowler, \textit{Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 254.
Kwakiutl,” and were thus afforded the most comprehensive exhibit and space for tribal representatives. Their physical culture made up a large exhibit in the Anthropology Building on the Pacific Northwest, including the Kwakwaka’wakw, Alaskan Natives, and other indigenous groups in British Columbia, but the Kwakwaka’wakw themselves camped near the papier-mâché Cliff-Dwellers exhibit where they gave regular performances.

The space was a project of the H. Jay Smith Exploring Company and was a one-tenth model of the mysterious ruins of the “Cliff Dwelling People” of the American Southwest. The massive structure had later iterations at World’s Fairs, but the Smith Company exhibit set an interesting precedent for archaeological displays. Believed to be an “extinct race, leaving no history by which modern investigators arrive at a definite knowledge” of the time they lived, archaeologists displayed them as the “earliest examples of civilization on the American continent,” contemporary with ancient European groups, demonstrating “almost as high a degree of civilization” as the Aztecs. The exhibit featured cultural artifacts and human remains, which emphasize the complex relationship between display and entertainment. The mummies of this ancient (and more importantly, deceased) civilization added elements of the macabre and sensational to what otherwise was yet another static display. In relegating this society to the past, archaeologists elegantly sidestepped the controversy of exhuming human remains. No descendants presumably existed to contest the treatment of their ancestors. Putnam and Boas, however, used the exhibit and its theatre to relegate the present indigenous peoples to the same ancient past as the Cliff Dwellers. The Kwakwaka’wakw and other groups performed dances, songs, and other cultural practices for audiences in the “last castles of an extinct race,”

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91 Often referred to as Kwakiutl or Kwagiulth in contemporary literature, Kwakwaka’wakw more accurately refers to a confederacy of tribes who speak dialects of the Kwak’wala language. I will continue to use Kwakwaka’wakw to refer to this group, but sources may use alternatives. See Raibmon, “Theatres of Contact,” 157, Footnote 1.
92 Johnson, 344.
juxtaposed against and blended with the sensationally primitive past.\textsuperscript{93}

In some ways, this setting gave the Kwakwaka’wakw an unique opportunity. After performing relatively tame dances and customs for much of the WCE, in August of 1893, they decided to play out their audience’s “most lurid imaginings of the wild and savage Indian.” At a fair where anthropologists asked indigenous peoples to reenact the traditional and reformers and governments pushed them to forsake their traditions, the Kwakwaka’wakw “successfully played these colonial viewpoints off against each other” in their performance of their hamatsa or cannibal dance. Historian Paige Raibmon describes the scene “horror-struck spectators watched” in the ‘Cavern of the Cliff’:

…the rest of the troupe surrounded the two young men and began singing and chanting to the beat of a drum…George Hunt used a razor to slash four deep gashes across the back of each initiate. Neither man flinched as Hunt lifted the loose strips of flesh off their backs, slid ropes beneath them, and tied the ends together. As several performers yanked violently on the loops of rope attempting to tear the flesh loose, the intensity of the singing increased. The initiates finally grabbed the ropes themselves ripping the flesh from their backs.

With their skin flayed, one of the initiates then appeared to bite off a large chunk of George Hunt’s arm. The whole enactment seemed to the audience to speak of “social chaos, uncontrolled depravity, and savagery.” The real story of the hamatsa was far more complicated and makes sense only when situated in the colonial pressures facing the Kwakwaka’wakw at home. For several decades, the Kwakwaka’wakw were the subject of concerted efforts to “civilize” and tame (or contain) their culture. The church and Canadian government especially wanted to see an end to the potlatch tradition, an example of communal resource-sharing that ran counter to white,

Protestant, capitalist ideals of “progress, industry, thrift, and sobriety.”

The *New York Daily Tribune*’s account of the dance reflects the white interpretation of the *hamatsa*, meaning “the eater,” as a sign of depravity. The article refers to the *hamatsa* as an individual with the “unsavory privilege...to devour corpses and bite pieces of flesh from the living during the festival season,” a four-month period for the Kwakwaka'wakw. The “abridged” ceremony performed in Chicago had all the hallmarks of the savage so long feared in white, European myth. According to Raibmon, however, the *hamatsa* was a ceremony of rehabilitation where a “supernatural cannibal spirit” possessed the initiate and the community attempted to tame and reintegrate the individual to the group. The ritual for the Kwakwaka'wakw demonstrated “the danger of disrupting the careful balance between human desire and socio-moral requirement.” When the rite invoked depravity, chaos, and savagery for a white audience, for the indigenous performers, it was about “the exorcism of these same destructive, anti-social traits.”

The August performance occurred in the context of ongoing tensions between the Kwakwaka'wakw, the missionary of the Anglican Church Alfred Hall, and the Canadian government. A common misconception, reinforced in Putnam’s anthropological displays, was the impossibility of “Aboriginal people to be both Aboriginal and modern” simultaneously. For anthropologists, authenticity was key to the success of their exhibits, so indigenous peoples on display must represent as closely as possible ethnological assumptions, and the sometimes contradicting popular ones. If indigenous peoples denied these expectations, they were rendered inauthentic, and thus not truly “Indian.” Racial ideologies further complicated the position of

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94 Raibmon 157-158, 166. For a thorough, illuminating, and important study of the Kwakwaka'wakw’s presence at the WCE please see Paige Raibmon, “Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka'wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia and at the Chicago World’s Fair,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 2 (June 2000), 157-192. 95 “Folk Music in Chicago,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 6 Aug 1893, 14; Raibmon, 166.
Indigenous Americans who, having forsaken their “authenticity” to become “civilized,” found themselves continually racialized. For the Kwakw̱a’wakw, however, their intense performance at the WCE declared their authenticity as indigenous, but also their adaptability, using the white mode of theatre performance to their own political ends. Their grievance with the Canadian government and Hall rested on Hall’s unwillingness to teach Kwakw̱a’wakw children while the potlatch system persisted. Often perceived in indigenous moments of resistance is a desire to return to an imagined pre-colonial past, but this is a misunderstanding of most indigenous realities. The Kwakw̱a’wakw wanted in education not an opportunity to become white, but the tools to “survive in a white world.” Their WCE performance declared their adeptness in strategically adopting white innovations to their own purposes in a rebuke to Canada and the Anglican Missionary Society.96

Department M suffered from the same chaos of representation much of the rest of the fair did. Visitors were overwhelmed as they browsed the massive building (although a great degree smaller than other WCE structures). Where Putnam dreamed of a cohesive evolutionary message, the smorgasbord that emerged and its contradictions within and without, gave space for indigenous self-representation. At a fair about American self-representation to the world, with hegemonic whiteness at its core, groups like the Inuit and Kwakw̱a’wakw found creative and powerful means to displaying themselves to the world. Even in the context of domination, displayed as objects to a largely white audience, indigenous peoples on the South Pond could not be controlled so utterly as to silence them.

96 Raibmon, 159-160,173.
In Black Elk’s narration to John Neihardt, he expressed a desire to rehabilitate the sacred core of his people. When he left for Europe with Buffalo Bill in the 1880s, he thought in studying white culture, technology, and innovation, he might find not a path into the past where the Lakota could live as they once did, but one forward where they might coexist with whites. Coexisting required defensive maneuvering where literacy would help tribal groups interpret treaties and legal documents, as well as broader cultural understanding. Black Elk’s desire for strategic adoption is echoed throughout indigenous participation at the WCE. Chauncey Yellow Robe, Simon Pokagon, the Cherokee, the Inuit, the Kwakwaka’wakw, and many others all exercised their agency to express and adopt what was most important for their cultural moment.

Chicago in 1893 was as critical a juncture for Indigenous America as it was for Henry Adams’ intellectual class. With Wounded Knee fresh in their cultural memory, indigenous peoples faced abuse, exploitation, and ridicule at the WCE, but they also encountered and created the fact of their persistence. After centuries of violent conquest, here at the World’s Columbian Exposition, a new shoot emerged from the stump—a shoot that might grow with the ever-changing indigenous culture into the twentieth century and beyond. Performance culture shaped reservation life and vice versa, eventually bringing anthropology and entertainment colliding into each other in Omaha. As warrior culture shifted to accommodate military defeat, dance and performance became the “opportunity for young men to prove themselves and earn respect within their communities,” and entertainment and anthropology shifted to accommodate this cultural need. Aware of anthropologists’ efforts in to ethnologize them, indigenous performers used the opportunity of performance to position themselves “in relation to the forces which, on a practical level, dominated their lives” and engage with those constructed representations in anthropology, entertainment, and education. At the 1898 world fair, the Trans-
Mississippi and International Exposition, the Indian Congress proved to be one of the most significant gatherings of Indians since the Ghost Dance and fueled a decades-long, three-way feud between entertainers, anthropologists, and reformers.\textsuperscript{97} 

Chapter 3

The Enduring American Desert: Indigenous Agency at the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition

“One of the great laws of life is progress, and nowhere have the principles of this law been so strikingly illustrated as in the United States.”
President McKinley, 12 October 1898, Omaha

To say Omaha, Nebraska’s, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition was ambitious is an understatement. When selected to host the Columbian Exposition, many opponents (like elites in the losing bidder New York) derided Chicago as too far west to feasibly attract the attention the celebration of Columbus’s landing in the Western Hemisphere deserved. Omaha, the city which took it upon itself to propose the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition (TMIE), was even farther into the former frontier land and lacked the benefit of the Mississippi River and Lake Michigan. Omaha city leaders were determined, however, and in 1894 began the process of organizing the exposition. With the success of Chicago inspiring Omaha’s plan, organizers parodied the World’s Columbian Exposition. Reusing displays and even dubbing the central plaza “The White City,” leaders in the TMIE organization also hoped to copy the most attractive displays of primitive Americans. The brainchild of either Gurdon Wattles, president of the exposition corporation, or Edward Rosewater, the editor and owner of the Omaha Daily Bee, the Indian Congress was envisioned as a central draw for fairgoers.98 While the Congress started out with earnest anthropological designs thanks to the Bureau of American Ethnography’s James Mooney, under the direction of Captain Mercer, it morphed into a secondary Wild West attraction. Unlike the World’s Columbian Exposition and the later

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98 The fair history by John A. Wakefield cites Wattles as having the original idea, while the Bee cites Rosewater. There is reason to doubt both sources, especially since the Indian Congress was one of the most successful exhibits of the entire exposition.
Louisiana Purchase Exposition, live, indigenous demonstrators participated only in this display and the Wild West Show in Omaha. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) both put forth static exhibits, and the Great Omaha Wild West set up shop as a similar attraction to Buffalo Bill’s at the WCE. The Indian Congress, however, eclipsed those earlier efforts in terms of popularity and scope, and the indigenous participants performed and lived in ways unique to this congregation of tribes from the western half of the United States.

John Wakefield’s official history of the TMIE describes the primary goal of the fair held in the “joint auspices” of the US government and the city of “Trans-Mississippi states” to be a project on the “whole range of human progress, exemplifying the growth of the United States.” Paying particular attention to the “civilization of the western region,” the TMIE comprised a concerted effort on the part of Nebraska and the surrounding states to assert their own chapter in national myth. While the Columbian Exposition half a decade earlier attempted to tell the story of “original” discovery, Omaha was in the business of writing the chapter of western expansion and the American pioneer. At the WCE, historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared the frontier period of American history decidedly closed, but the engineers of the TMIE like Wattles and Rosewater saw themselves as part of a continuing evolution of pioneer ingenuity, endurance, and invention.
as the western states industrialized.  

The exposition’s awards reflect this synthetic identity of Nebraska and her western siblings in Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas. A Mrs. Brooks won commendatory silver and bronze medals for her butter sculptures and the Getty Soap Company won silver for their laundry soap “Wash-a-lone.” Bozeman Agricultural College took gold for the “educational work of pupils” while Cudahy Packing received silver for their “Fluid Beef Extracts.” Medical technology also received special attention as Incubator & Scientific took top honors for their infant incubator and a number of other exhibitors were awarded for their prosthetic limbs—a vital industry following the Civil War and the previous forty years of industrializing warfare in the world. Individuals like H. P. Atwater and Harry Lee were commended for their displays of “natural historic relics” and fossils—a burgeoning field in the West as the race for fossil evidence of dinosaurs continued. And Captain W. H. Mercer received a “highly commendatory” medal for his “command” of the Indian Congress. In the same section, Wakefield recorded the “highest award” to architect and engineer Luther Stieringer for the electric illumination of the Grand Court. The list of exhibitors and their awards reveals the dual identity of Omaha as a railway town and Nebraska as a bread-basket state. The Trans-Mississippi states were, at the end of the century, the mixing point for technology and agriculture that would later come to define their role in the Union.  

Organizers like Rosewater and Wattles wanted a truly international fair, however, and

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this gave the exposition its rather wordy title. The “Streets of Cairo” exhibit resembled a similar attraction from Chicago’s Midway, and a Chinese village also demonstrated the feeble attempts at a truly international event. In fact, the 238 participants hired for the Chinese village mysteriously disappeared into the city at the end of the fair, apparently part of an elaborate scheme to avoid America’s anti-Chinese immigration laws. Despite the significance of Chinese labor in building many of the western railroads, which had essentially created Omaha, these performers had to obtain special permission from the federal government to travel to the United States for the TMIE. The “almond-eyed beauties” and their restaurant, advertised as an opportunity to witness the “tricks of the heathen Chinee” were brought as spectacle, but outwitted white intentions. The fair also featured one of the first Philippine displays, which started as a small exhibit of artifacts, but as the conflict with Spain escalated, George D. Steele brought 16 Manilan soldiers to the fair on their way to Washington. Steele advertised their appearance as a chance to see real cannibals, echoing the racial overtones of this and other expositions. The Old Plantation Village of “rollicking niggers” that shifted attention to the American South was another “decidedly educational” exhibit to show the progress of African Americans since Emancipation under benevolent white authority, and further asserted the white supremacist message of the TMIE.\footnote{Robert Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 119-20; Robert Rydell, John E. Findling, and Kimberly D. Pelle, \textit{Fair America: World’s Fairs in the United States} (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 47-8; “Best of Attractions,” Wakefield Scrapbook no. 1, 15 February 1898 to 1 June 1898, \textit{Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition}, Accessed 22 January 2018, \url{http://trans-mississippi.unl.edu/texts/view/TMISB04.html#}.}

Historian Robert Rydell argues the fair’s motives were explicitly imperial, coinciding as it did with the Spanish-American War. The statue of “Liberty Enlightening the World” atop a 178 foot column in front of the government building in the central lagoon lends credence to this interpretation. Her neoclassical design linked the United States, as did the similar design of
Chicago’s fair buildings, with the great European civilizations, but embedded her in American ideology. As she looked out onto the exposition, facing the Midway and its “cabaret” of cultures, she represented America as the leader in enlightened thought. The TMIE “provided ideological scaffolding” for popular support of the United States’ imperial work in the world. Whether this was as intentional as Rydell argues, however, is disputable.102

Other historians like Bonnie M. Miller assert that though the TMIE was effectively imperial, it was not because of the overt intentions of the organizers. The fair functioned to “galvanize support for national and imperial policies” but it struggled to “articulate coherently” this message, reflecting a lack of organized methods and ideology. Conflict within the governing body was apparent when the Omaha Daily Bee accused the awards bureau and other key fair institutions of corruption, even though Rosewater who owned the Bee was the head of the Department of Publicity. What emerged in this conflicting environment was a confused agenda, which, like the conflict between anthropologists, entertainment entrepreneurs, and the BIA at the World’s Columbian Exposition, gave “the ability to participants to shape their own representations,” including American Indians.103

In practice, daily life at the TMIE probably fluctuated between Rydell’s and Miller’s interpretations. The Spanish-American War occurred almost simultaneously with the fair, meaning an event whose origin lay in 1894 could have had little planning time devoted to galvanizing the war effort for a war so brief and sudden and America’s international imperial intentions. As such, it did consistently display military pageantry, reenactments of important battles and events in the war, and declared the week of October 10th through the 15th Peace

102 Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 107-8.
103 Bonnie M. Miller, “The Incoherencies of Empire: The ‘Imperial’ Image of the Indian at the Omaha World’s Fairs of 1898-99,” American Studies 49, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2008), 41; Wakefield, Review.
Jubilee Week to celebrate the winning of this “splendid little war,” allowing organizers to emphasize the “international” in the exposition. The Philippine section most overtly displayed the new American imperial tradition in racial terms, ascribing the Manilan soldiers all the vestiges of savagery, including their supposed cannibalism. It was the Indian Congress, however, which asserted imperialism as original and integral to American identity and inextricably tied to racial otherness. President McKinley did not announce his plans to acquire the Philippines as a colonial territory until November 1898, the month following the TMIE’s closure, but the fair sat at the crucial juncture of American expansion where the country “grappled with an undefined and divisive imperial agenda.” The TMIE demonstrated American imperialism had deep roots in westward expansion and the formation of the contemporary nation. Universal civilization was a shared cultural imperative and a fulfillment of the country’s (manifest) destiny. America was liberty, and she ought to lead the world into the civilization of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁴

I. Static Counterpoints

Other displays of Indians and indigenous Americans besides the Indian Congress were scant, but important. These exhibits help show the lack of a planned imperial vision, but the real presence of an inherent one. Few documents for the TMIE will name American expansionism in imperial terms, but westward expansion and the conquest of other peoples was the ideological background noise. The Bureau of Indian Affairs furnished its own exhibit in the government building and featured a mix of Indian education and traditional Indian crafts. To “arrest the attention” of fairgoers, “appropriate decorative effects” took the foreground of the exhibit, and their inclusion represented an emerging tension in Indian education. As with the dispute over

reservation or boarding schools discussed in the previous chapter, a similar divide developed over the value of traditional Indian craftsmanship. Samuel McCowan, superintendent of the Chilocco Indian School and head of the Indian school exhibit at the 1904 world’s fair in St. Louis, believed these artisan traditions were linked to savagery and backwardness. He also brought a group of students to the Greater American Exposition in Omaha the year following the TMIE. McCowan set out for this exposition with the goal to “embalm that odious expression ‘The only good Indian is the dead one,’ and substitute ‘The only good Indian is the educated one.’” Both sentiments expressed, at their core, the desire for an annihilation of Indianness, whether in the physical bodies of Indians or in their minds. Destroying traditional crafts was integral to McCowan’s ideological success. Reformers like Harvard anthropologist Alice Fletcher, however, saw artisans as proof of the industrious capacity of Indians and their ability to receive civilization. As such, Fletcher saw these traditions as worthy of preserving and even celebrating.  

A student of Frederick Ward Putnam, Fletcher worked for the Peabody Museum at Harvard under a fellowship from 1891 until her death in 1923. She also worked closely with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of American Ethnology at the Smithsonian. She was one of the few anthropologists at the time to bridge the divide between the two organizations. Although working as an ethnologist among the Omaha (and later the Nez Perce and Winnebago), Fletcher lobbied Washington to institute an early form of allotment on their reservation in the early 1880s, preceding the Dawes Act by four years. When the “brave, unselfish” Fletcher arrived on the Omaha reservation in 1881, the Indians she had come to study asked her to help

105 Wakefield, Indian Congress: Bureau of Indian Affairs; McCowan quoted in Robert A Trennert, Jr., “Selling Indian Education at World’s Fairs and Expositions, 1893-1904,” American Indian Quarterly 11, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 212.
them obtain a “strong paper” in order to protect their land rights. She organized a petition and later helped push it through Congress. The bill allotted each Omaha eighty acres of land, which Fletcher took the responsibility of distributing. After the Dawes Act passed in 1887, Fletcher helped institute the same policies on Nez Perce and Winnebago lands.  

Most anthropologists at the time, with the exception of Franz Boas, worked to avoid political activism on behalf of the subjects of their work. Fletcher’s fellowship, however, earned its endowment from the American philanthropist and reformer Mary C. Thaw, although it is unclear what influence Thaw exerted on Fletcher’s work. The association of Thaw and Fletcher, combined with Fletcher’s life-long devotion to the system of allotment and racial betterment, demonstrates the dual nature of her work. In Chicago in 1893, she presented a paper on American Indian musical tradition, which helped launch her career. Her work did not receive the acclaim of her male counterparts’ work in archaeology, physical anthropology, and material culture earned. William Henry Holmes and Franz Boas both gained notable prestige at the World’s Columbian Exposition, but although Fletcher’s contribution to the study of Indian music and religion was equal to her colleagues’ in other fields, as a woman she garnered a fraction of the notoriety. Her work continued, however, and in 1898 she published her study of Indian song and music in the *Journal of American Folklore*. Here she argued indigenous music disproved the notion of Indian savagery. Although simple, the music could not be described as that of “primitive men” and exhibited several hallmarks of European (i.e. civilized) music. Prior to her work among the Omaha, anthropologists believed Indian music to be a jumble of notes on a “minutely divided scale” as opposed to the half-step scale more familiar to Americans. Researchers regarded the music as random and improvised with no tradition or structure.

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Fletcher disproved these notions and revealed indigenous music as “ordered, stable, and easily transcribed.” The disregarded “music of savages” was, in fact, a “system akin to language, kinship, house design, or any other fundamental aspect of culture” currently studied in the field of anthropology.  

Indian music, like the blankets, sashes, pottery, weaving, stoneware, and other articles in the TMIE display “showed the native ability as distinguished from the ability acquired” in BIA institutions, or, as Wakefield described, “the fruitful soil in which seeds of education are sown.” Fletcher wanted to impress upon visitors to the fair the inherent ability already present in American Indians in order to break the stereotype of the worthless Indian. Because of her notoriety as an anthropologist, the Smithsonian Institution loaned the Bureau of Indian Affairs exhibit under her care two life-size figures of “a Sioux warrior and a Sioux woman with her baby.” The BIA surrounded the plaster family with Navajo blankets, Moqui draperies, and Chippewa mats, as well as Indian school pupils’ lacework, carpentry, blacksmithing, writing, painting, and other “civilized” industries. Four boarding schools (“non-reservation”) including Haskell Institute and Carlisle sent examples of student work, as well as nine reservation or Indian day schools like those on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservations, and for the Oneida, Winnebago, and Kiowa. The entire exhibit, including Fletcher’s modest pay, cost the fair $1006.35—a pittance compared to the more than $21,000 W. J. McGee spent for the Bureau of American Ethnology’s exhibit.  

W. J. McGee was the “ethnologist in charge” for the BAE’s static exhibit in the government building rotunda. Given central prominence, McGee’s exhibit presented “the leading

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108 Wakefield, Indian Congress: Bureau of Indian Affairs.
facts of human effort and progress” in nineteen cases filled with artifacts and accompanying explanations, which American Indian ephemera dominated. As with the Columbian Exposition, the BAE used deliberate juxtapositions of indigenous primitivism and white “civilization” in order to illustrate the “leading steps of progress” from savagery to enlightenment—a stage McGee added to the existing theories of social evolution. Wakefield describes the whole exhibit as a “race history” where all ethnicities were supposed to be represented on the evolutionary continuum, but the catalog of the display reveals a near total focus on American Indian primitivism.  

Divided into distinct categories, each of which reflected the development of some form of technology (with the exception of the display on art), the aim was to show the progression from least to most complex in the history of a technology. These categories had distinct stages, like in the “fire making and illumination” display where “the story began with the fire of volcanoes and lighting” and continued to human creation and manipulation of fire, ending with the “electric spark” so proudly shown in Luther Stieringer’s work on the central pavilion. To accompany these sequential displays of transportation, musical instruments, ceramic arts, “exploitative industries,” and others, McGee commissioned seven life-size plaster models of Indians at work with various primitive technologies. One, “The Flint Flaker” featured a model identified as “Powhatan” at work “roughing out stone implements.” A “homy n huller” described as a “southern Indian woman” used a mortal to grind corn while “the Potter” sat frozen, constructing a pot, helpfully described as a “simple process” to distinguish it from modern ceramic technology. Another plaster girl representing the Zuni sat at a “primitive loom” weaving a simple

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belt, and the Navajo “Metal Worker” worked with the most complex technology of the seven plaster models, but was described as having been “probably…introduced by the whites.” In the display, the emphasis was on the mode of production, reflecting the focus of a rapidly industrializing America, and the technology of implementation obscured the complexity or beauty of the finished product.110

McGee’s plaster models and sequential cases perpetuated the myth of the vanishing Indian and countered the celebration of indigenous craftsmanship in Alice Fletcher’s department. In Fletcher’s case, those pieces of art and craftsmanship were an attempt to attract the attention of a public fascinated with the primitive Indian, only to then subvert that assumption with ephemera of Indian education, which showed Indian capability in terms whites could easily assess. Frederick True, who composed the BAE letter to the TMIE’s board for their final report, made no mention of an explicit attempt on the part of the BAE to use savagery as a selling point for the exhibit, but the life-size plaster mannequins dressed in “appropriate attire” almost certainly attracted the attention of the same public the artifacts in Fletcher’s exhibit drew. The popular opinion lay not with the possibility of Indian survival, but in a morbid rejoicing in the TMIE as “probably the last opportunity to see the Red Man” as he existed in the cultural imagination. Of course, Frederick Putnam and Franz Boas argued the same at the Columbian Exposition, and McGee would say much the same at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904.111

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110 True, Indian Congress.
111 True, Indian Congress; “History of the Indian,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 16 August 1897.
II. The “Longest Sustained Powwow”

The Indian Congress, envisioned as a primary money maker for the TMIE, further complicated the cultural understanding of American Indians. At the fair’s opening ceremonies, President Wattles declared “the Great American Desert is no more,” and the West existed as “the pasture of the nation.” Only thirty years prior, the Trans-Mississippi territory sat “unbroken by the implements of civilization” but the “vanguard” of American pioneers of “self-reliant strength and sturdy manhood” subdued the land with the technology displayed in the TMIE. In speaking of the Great American Desert, Wattles failed to explicitly mention the indigenous inhabitants, but others echoed his sentiments, revealing an understanding of Indians as part of what needed subduing in the West. James Mooney, the anthropologist selected to organize the Indian Congress under joint BAE and War Department supervision, remarked on the significance of “such a showing” in a city where, within a generation, “citizens…were called upon to barricade their homes against an attack of hostile Indians.” This history dictated the narrative of pacification and assimilation intended for the Indian Congress. Just as the city of Chadron, Nebraska sent the “Ryan collection of Indian curios,” comprised mostly of war trophies taken at Wounded Knee still bearing the blood of their original owners to further demonstrate the utter domination of the Indian menace, the participants in the Congress declared the opposite. Binary views of authenticity entangled indigenous performers at the WCE, and so too did the prevailing belief in “assimilation as a mode of ‘vanishing’” entrap Indian Congress members.112

This diverged from anthropology’s goal to study and display “pre-civilized native life.”

The discipline depended on the “maintenance of a precarious balance between ‘primitive’ and ‘civilized’” divergence. In order to demonstrate progress, primitive Indians needed to exist in perpetuity, and with “Indians…captives on the reservations,” ethnologists had what they saw as a kind of quarantined laboratory to study the origins of humankind. At the same time, however, there no longer existed an “untrammeled Indian” who had not taken on some vestige of white culture and technology, forcibly, by choice, or the grey area between. As the westward frontier moved, so too did the “authenticity” of the Trans-Mississippi Indians. The audience, or, to use the industrial capitalist term, the market, determined the kind of authenticity on display. While James Mooney, who had worked on the Kiowa camp circle display at the Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition in Nashville the previous year, sought one brand of authenticity most recognizable in the BAE’s static display or contemporary museums, Captain Mercer and Edward Rosewater believed and executed others.\textsuperscript{113}

The Bureau of Indian Affairs backed the idea of the Indian Congress as proposed by James Mooney, in part to scale back their own exhibit, and agreed “a group of long-haired Indians engaged in native industries” would offer the desired contrast to the new generation of “civilized” Indians. William Jones, the commissioner of the BIA, however, regretted endorsing the Congress. Because of disputes between Edward Rosewater and Captain Mercer and the late arrival of a somewhat powerless Mooney, the exhibit bore almost no resemblance to the careful plan Mooney detailed to the BIA and Department of the Interior. Mercer asserted himself as the sole director of the Congress and hijacked its original purpose. The ensuing feud between Rosewater and Mercer caught Mooney in the middle, but gave the indigenous performers considerable room to maneuver. The ongoing conflict left the more than 500 participants the

\textsuperscript{113} Miller, 46; Lester G. Moses, \textit{The Indian Man: A Biography of James Mooney} (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 115, 121.
ideological space to assert their own agendas and ideas and to capitalize on the experience of Omaha.\textsuperscript{114}

While Wakefield’s history of the TMIE asserts President Wattles was the originator of the Indian Congress idea, most later histories ascribe Rosewater credit, which seems to be based on reports in the \textit{Omaha Daily Bee} that Rosewater owned. The provenance, however, is less important, as Rosewater was the one who worked directly with Mercer and Mooney to compile and execute the display. A Bohemian immigrant, he founded the \textit{Bee} as a political paper in the midst of the battle for public schools in Nebraska and developed it into the most important paper in Omaha by 1898. An ambitious man, Rosewater envisioned a great “Indian wigwam” which would include representatives of every tribe in North and South America. It is difficult to discern whether the grandeur and scale of his vision rested in an ignorance of the true diversity of tribes in the Americas or in the overall hyperbole of the TMIE whose literature routinely refers to itself as the “grandest” of all world’s fairs in America. James Mooney convinced the newspaper man to scale back his dream and limit the Congress to tribes representing the seven house types of the Trans-Mississippi territory, including the tipi, Hogan, pueblo, board house, grass house, and wigwam (albeit, a great deal smaller than Rosewater’s plan). Even though Mooney and Rosewater hammered out this plan in August 1897, the U.S. Congress failed to pass the requested $100,000 appropriation (winnowed down to $40,000) for the exhibit until June 30, 1898—a month after the opening of the TMIE.\textsuperscript{115}


Immediately, Rosewater ran a piece in the *Bee* extolling the “incalculable benefit to students of ethnology” this gathering of “Uncle Sam’s red wards” would have. The “object lesson” for fairgoers in the “habits, customs, religious rites, and ceremonial dances” of the assembled indigenous people would be “far reaching.” Meanwhile, Mooney had not been idle while waiting for the government appropriation. For the Bureau of American Ethnology, who also had a stake in the Congress and functioned as his official employer, James Mooney traveled through the southwest and northern Mexico studying peyote use in the Lipan, Jicarilla Apaches, and Tarahumaras. Absconding with an “Indian mummy” from the area near Aguas Calientes in violation of Mexico’s ban on the removal of antiquities, Mooney sent the human remains into the care of the National Museum and returned to the Oklahoma Territory and then Washington D.C. W. J. McGee sent him out again to Oklahoma to “collect” representatives of groups who would then go to Omaha for the Congress. He returned to Omaha with both Wichita and Chiricahua Apache groups, including the infamous Geronimo in his first world’s fair appearance.116

Mooney, however, faced stiff opposition from the managing agents of the Kiowa and Comanche, as well as from Lt. Frederick Beach at Fort Sill where the United States held the Chiricahua as prisoners of war. Beach argued the group would “better serve their race” if they remained to farm and take care of their family members sick with malaria following their imprisonment in Florida. Beach was not the only agent with these feelings. Agent W. T. Walker openly subverted Mooney’s attempts to recruit among his Kiowa and Comanche “charges,” spreading the word to the Kiowa Walker “would not allow any members of the tribe to go to Omaha.” Ethnologists were little better than entertainment entrepreneurs in the eyes of many

BIA agents and bureaucrats. The likes of Buffalo Bill or Pawnee Bill had to rely on personal connections in the BIA and with individual agents to recruit for their shows. Mooney’s work on the Kiowa only a few years prior had earned him great notoriety and a professional civility with the former Kiowa agent Captain Frank Baldwin, but Walker had “little intention” of letting Mooney “borrow” the Indians under his authority.\(^\text{117}\)

Not all American Indians wanted to travel to Omaha either, even without threats from their BIA agents. Captain Mercer who served jointly as Indian Congress director and the local Omaha and Winnebago agent was surprised when his would-be recruits met him with “a collective yawn.” Even though the fair eventually would have implications reaching into the twentieth century, at the time it represented a disruption to their lives. As Lt. Frederick Beach argued when Mooney came to recruit the Fort Sill prisoners, “a three-month paid vacation to see the splendors of the world’s fair” was a serious disruption to the agricultural cycle the U.S. government was attempting to force on indigenous wards with the allotment system. Where Mercer had expected to have to turn away droves of participants, what he discovered was “if there was to be an Indian Congress at all, it would be held largely on Native terms, not the government’s” or Mercer’s. Demanding pay, many agents balked, with Pine Ridge agent W. H. Clapp blaming Wild West shows for the insidious “idea of their commercial value as show men” Indians knew they held. And when told there was no salary, most interested Indians declined.\(^\text{118}\)

The Pueblo and Jicarilla Apache negotiated pay to subsidize the loss they would suffer missing the annual celebrations in Santa Fe and the Colorado State Fair respectively where they performed and sold their pottery. The BIA forbade paying TMIE participants directly, which

\(^\text{117}\) Moses, *The Indian Man*, 117.
\(^\text{118}\) Clough, 71-2; Clapp quoted in Clough, 72.
meant Mercer engaged in extensive negotiations to pay for travel and handicraft materials the participants would need. Pueblo participants negotiated ten dollars pay each in the form of materials if Mercer wanted them in Omaha by August 4, and the Jicarilla requested twenty dollars a piece to subsidize the cost of assembling “appropriate” native costume. The Pueblo were not the only group who wanted to arrive at the TMIE “when it was convenient for them,” and the Santa Clara Pueblo joined the Kiowa, Omaha, and Winnebago in negotiating their departure dates. Because Mercer depended on the nearly 200 Omaha and Winnebago recruited from his own reservation being present, the two groups forced him to accept August 4 as the opening day of the Congress. Insisting on the opportunity to complete their wheat harvest and hold their annual powwow before starting out for Omaha, the Omaha and Winnebago forced Mercer’s hand and dictated the opening day of one of the TMIE’s central features. The Kiowa and Pueblo arrived in September, as did the famous Fort Sill contingent and Geronimo. On August 4, only about half the eventual 500 participants were present to take part in the opening ceremonies.119

The journey, too, proved a powerful opportunity for Indians. Mooney reported the spontaneous celebration of the Wichita accompanying him when their train came in sight of the Arkansas River, which Mooney described as the “great river of their home country.” For much of the journey, the Wichita invited the other delegates traveling with them to sing together until nearly all one hundred individuals joined in song. Geronimo, too, took full advantage of the journey. Consistently displaying an entrepreneurial spirit, he cut buttons off his coat when the train stopped at stations, selling them for twenty-five cents. For five dollars, one could purchase his hat. On the train between stations, “he diligently sewed buttons on his coat and equipped

119 Clough, 72.
himself with a new hat from a supply he had thoughtfully provided.” His journey to Omaha represented Geronimo’s first excursion as a prisoner of war aside from journeys undertaken as prisoner transfer. The experience later informed a sharp ability to negotiate pay. In Buffalo in 1901, he received $45 a month, and in St. Louis three years later, he negotiated a $100 monthly disbursement.¹²⁰

Once at Omaha, Geronimo had a unique opportunity to petition for redress. In a widely reported encounter between General Nelson Miles—the general who accepted Geronimo’s formal surrender—and Geronimo, white newspapers like the Bee described the embrace between the two as a greeting like “a father who had not seen his son for years.” Geronimo surrendered to Miles on September 5, 1886, more than a decade earlier, but the myth of the man had only grown. The sixteen warriors, fourteen women, and six children, along with their leader had taken “five thousand men of the regular army, a network of heliograph stations…, and false promises” to secure their capture. Those broken promises formed the center of Geronimo’s grievances, and he accused Miles of having lied, to which the general “smiled broadly” and admitted he had indeed, but had learned to lie so convincingly from Geronimo himself. When Geronimo continued to ask that he might return to Arizona, Miles argued Arizona did not miss him. In Geronimo’s subjugation, “folks in Arizona…[had] no fear that Geronimo will come and kill them.” Biographer Angie Debo points out that this account of Miles words by Jimmie Stevens is probably heavily fictionalized since Miles, a respected military commander fresh from the Spanish-American War “would not have ridiculed a fallen foe…before an audience” as this account suggests. The confrontation did happen, though, and observers consistently report Geronimo’s supposed pacification and demur. Occurring during the Peace Jubilee Week to

celebrate the end of the “splendid little war,” the peace celebration ascribed special significance to the meeting for at least one observer who reported:

…a new realization of what ‘peace’ means to this country was attained by those who saw the meeting of the once fanatical foe to civilization and the commanding general of a victorious army that had so recently defeated the descendants of the crafty Spaniards, who centuries ago changed the innocent natives of the New World into beings as cruel and fiendish as themselves.\textsuperscript{121}

Harriman connected the “unique” savagery of the Chiracahua Apaches to the toxic influence of the freshly defeated Spanish who polluted an otherwise banal and passive Indian. Here, even Geronimo’s own “savagery” is not his own. Fair publicity, too, imposed an expected image of the defeated chief. Rosewater’s department used an image of Geronimo in full regalia, when in all the photos the Rinehart Company took during the TMIE, he appeared in a western suit or military duds, and would continue to appear in public this way through the end of his life (excepting the occasional headdress). Harriman’s account comes nine months after the meeting, which took place at the end of the fair, giving time for the immediate imperial meaning of Miles and Geronimo’s meeting to grow. The imperial overtones were overt by October 1898, but August and September of the Indian Congress operated under an implied imperial ideology, unarticulated until after the fact. Rosewater, Mercer, and especially Mooney did not set out to create an exhibit to justify American colonization, and neither did the indigenous participants. Meaning at the TMIE was quite literally painted over the real experiences of fairgoers, organizers, and the displayed Indian performers, but it was rarely a unified ideology.\textsuperscript{122}

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\textsuperscript{121} Mary Alice Harriman, “The Congress of American Aborigines at the Omaha Exposition,” \textit{Overland Monthly} 33, no. 198 (June 1899): 510.
\textsuperscript{122} Bee quoted in Miller, 40; Debo, 3, 405-7; William M. and Verla P. Rieske, \textit{Historic Indian Portraits: 1898 Peace Jubilee Celebration} (Salt Lake City, UT: Historic Indian Publishers, 1974), 55. These photographs have been colorized but the Rieskes do not speak as to whether Rinehart colorized them at the time of taking or if Historic Indian Publishers colorized them for the Rieske publication; F. A. Rinehart, “Indian Congress Poster-Chief
As Mooney rolled into the station at Omaha and the delegations prepared for the “omnium gatherum of America’s races,” Mooney found himself caught between Rosewater and Mercer. Both Mooney and Rosewater pressured Mercer to keep “to the aims of the ethnological exhibit,” but as the disbursing agent for the government payments to participants and vendors, Mercer took out an injunction against Rosewater. The newspaper man then removed all of Mercer’s announcements around the grounds, which prompted Mercer to refuse to reimburse Mooney (whom he viewed as Rosewater’s co-conspirator) for the cost of transporting his replica Kiowa camp circle to Omaha from Washington where it sat in storage. According to historian L. G. Moses, the Congress “degenerated” into a Wild West exhibit under the influence of Mercer and his “sham battles.” In order for the exhibit to have “degenerated,” however, implies a nobler purpose on the part of Rosewater and Mooney. Rosewater admitted to envisioning the Congress as a money grab, and Mooney engaged in dubious practices throughout his anthropological

career in a science whose main body of work at the time implied the racial (i.e. inherent) 
inferiority of Indians. Mooney has a legacy as complicated as Carlisle founder Richard Pratt, so a 
wholesale dismissal of his career as racist would be irresponsible, but Rosewater, Mooney, and 
Mercer came to the Congress with their own goals and agendas. So, too, did the diverse and 
unprecedented conglomerate of Indians who travelled to Omaha and spent three months 
performing, living, and communing with one another.  

Writing in 1899, Mary A. Harriman reported the Indian Congress was populated with 
“wards of a nation that had conquered but not subdued them.” In that conquest, the Indian fought 
“with the desperation of despair until conquered and then await[ed] his doom, extinction, with 
stoical resignation.” For white observers, this was a gathering of the final members of a dying 
society with no hope of survival, made clear in the juxtaposition with the technology used to 
“subdue” Nebraska. If they did not die outright, they were losing “the characteristics of their full-
blooded ancestors,” and thus their authenticity and value to the science and entertainment of 
dominant culture. At this “last time that the primitive life” could be observed firsthand, 
indigenous performers repeatedly demonstrated their permanence in the face of a narrative 
insistent on their annihilation. The stoic “noble savage” was not engaged in the business of 
dying. Indigenous performers set to work creating a Pan-Indian identity and culture that would 
sustain them through the coming century. Harriman was right: They were not subdued.  

Central to the demonstration of agency at the TMIE was the intentional creation and 
reestablishment of communal ties. As Geronimo arrived in Omaha, he sought out the White 
Mountain Apaches with whom the Chiracahua had social and cultural ties. Mooney described the 

124 Harriman, 506-7; “Opening of Indian Congress,” *Omaha Daily Bee*; Wakefield, Indian Day.
encounter as a simple exchange of “reminiscences,” but for Geronimo, whose contact with his tribe was limited due to a lingering, pervasive fear of his “treachery and cunning,” it was far more significant. Americans so feared the Chiracahua chief that when he and his companions failed to return to the TMIE grounds in a timely manner following an outing, people panicked. American newspapers ran headlines like “Geronimo and Nachee Escape / Apache Murderers Thought to be on / Their Way Back to Arizona” when it turned out their guide Jimmie Stevens had simply gotten lost. The officer in charge of the prisoners at Omaha came to collect them only twenty miles from town in the countryside Geronimo derided for its lack of mountains.

Geronimo and his kin in the White Mountain Apache group, however, reestablished an existing connection war had once severed. Connections like these would prove integral to indigenous ability to bargain and advocate collectively for their rights and dignity.125

Mooney suggested to Rosewater in 1897 that the Congress focus on the distinct house types of various Trans-Mississippi tribes, and to a certain degree this came to fruition. A number of tipis and wigwams accompanied their owners, and the Sac and Fox delegates built a rounded wigwam with a covering of woven rush mats. The Chippewas made a similar structure covered in tree bark. The Fort Sill group stayed in U.S. Army tents that routinely flooded and contributed to the overall feeling of ill treatment in the Chiracahua group. Visitors to the Congress, however, found the wigwams and tipis only “mildly interesting,” and flocked to the Wichita grass house and Pueblo dwelling. The Pueblo structure required 2,000 mud bricks, created by mixing mud and straw with the delegates’ bare feet. Construction attracted a great deal of attention from fairgoers who dubbed the house the “bachelor’s quarters” because of the all-male delegation. Mooney purchased the grass house and had a Wichita contingent of women and Chief Tawacomi

125 Mooney quoted in Moses, The Indian Man, 118; Debo, 406-7.
Jim disassemble the structure, accompany it to Omaha, and spend a week reconstructing it. It was this structure that became a central gathering point for delegates from other tribes to commune with the Wichita and neighbors several nights a week.¹²⁶

Captain Mercer noted in a report included in Wakefield’s history of the TMIE that Indian participants “mingle with and visit among one another with the greatest freedom.” To Mercer, speaking for his charges, this alone made the Congress “worth…all that it cost the Government [sic].” The earliest arrivals greeted the newly arrived delegations “at the camp’s entrance gate with a handshake, a calumet ceremony, or song of welcome” even though traditional enemies lived in close proximity at the Congress. The 88 “Sioux” from reservations at Standing Rock, Rosebud, Pine Ridge, and three others often took the lead in organizing these welcoming ceremonies, possibly because they were the first to arrive at the four-acre site set aside for the Congress. Historian Josh Clough relates instances of “intertribal good will” including when multiple women from various Plains groups helped Goes-to-War’s (Sioux) wife fix their tipi. When Turns-in-the-Wind gave birth to a little boy at 3:30 on August 8, only four days after the Congress opened to the public, a contingent of other Indians arrived at her tent to congratulate her with “gifts of food, clothing, blankets, pipes, bows and arrows, calico, red cloth, and everything to make an Indian mother and father happy” as they might have celebrated at home. A few days later, Spotted Back, the father, held a feast and dance to commemorate the birth and his (temporary) neighbors’ generosity. The Bee ascribed special significance to Little Spotted Back’s birth in a front page piece, describing his mother’s birth at Sulphur Springs “hardly a mile” from the encampment of his birth. For whites at least, this offered a pleasing symmetry.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Clough, 73-4; Moses, The Indian Man, 118.
¹²⁷ Clough, 75-6; “One More Little Injun Boy,” Omaha Daily Bee, 9 August 1898.
According to Clough, special significance rests in the practice of the Omaha Grass dance, which the BIA had been “trying to stamp out” for years. The BIA deemed it a type of “war dance” which were “demoralizing to all involved” and contributed to a return to “savagery”—a fear made acute following the Ghost Dance revival a decade earlier. Agents withheld rations, threatened military force, and imprisoned Grass dance participants, but the BIA had no legal grounds to ban the dance, so Indians in the “Northern and Southern Plans continued to dance.” Indians knew the BIA’s hands were tied and continued to practice the dance because of its cultural importance and flouting of BIA authority. When Mooney and Rosewater originally reached their compromised vision in 1897, Mooney proposed the distinct house types and Rosewater “insisted that something extraordinary and innovative was also needed” and dictated the inclusion of “Indian days” of regular performance, content to be determined. On opening day, August 4, 1898, the scheduled program of “foot races, wrestling matches, and ball games” failed when delegates refused to take part. Caring “little for European American Sports,” the Indian participants influenced Mercer to create a program of special dances. Mercer attempted to draw up rehearsal and performance schedules so the performers might portray a dramatic scene to contextualize the dance, but the Bee reported it was “impossible to tell just what the Indians [would] do.”

Participants showed a marked enthusiasm for the dances, and Clough argues the summer of 1898 could be called “the longest sustained powwow in recorded history.” The celebration(s) included all the “key elements of present-day powwows”: the central drum group which rotated between tribal delegations; a master of ceremonies chosen collectively prior to the dance; dancers from multiple tribes; a head man dancer the master of ceremonies picked; “giveaways”;  

128 Clough, 77-8; Moses, The Indian Man, 115; “Training the Indians to Show,” Omaha Daily Bee, 13 August 1898.
and spectators. The Omaha Grass dance spread across the Plains between 1870 and 1900, and as each tribe adopted the dance, they “altered the songs to reflect their own war heroes and battles,” so as they entered the Indian Congress, they came prepared with a shared cultural relic. The Congress gave them the opportunity to share those traditions, which served to bolster the generational heritage process. Fairgoers expected to see evidence of the great end of the First Nations of the Americas, but instead confronted the truth of cultural survival. The “domestic precedents” to American imperialism, by all reports, were dying out, but in the case of the TMIE Indian Congress, Indian children received their evolving heritage.129

_Bee_ reporter Octave Thanet described in August the case of a young boy, approximately twelve, in a “painstaking imitation of a great brave’s dignity” bedecked in dance finery. To Thanet, the boy’s costume and demeanor for one so young was “funny,” but the unidentified boy’s presence and dress indicate cultural persistence on display. At the TMIE, the boy represented an active attempt to pass on cultural traditions, even when subject to oppression and violence. When the time came to dance, the boy danced with the same ferocity and vigor of his older companions that included Lakota, Fox, and Apache. As Mercer developed other forms of entertainment, the younger generation also confronted the burgeoning show tradition in Plains tribal groups. Buffalo Bill for the past decade had cultivated rich ties with the Lakota and the

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129 Clough, 78-9; Miller, 44.
benefits of the *oskate wicasa* life became apparent to more and more indigenous performers. When a group of Indians dressed interpreter George Stewart’s five-year-old son in paint and breechcloth and he “pranced into the ring” to the amusement of both white spectator and Indian performer, reformers and Indian educators cried foul. These incidents of cultural inheritance were not “innocent or amusing,” but indicated a future for these children “perpetuating the ‘sins’ of their forefathers.” But in the indigenous community, as it outraged the likes of the BIA, it was “also the hope of Native elders.”

Agent William H. Smead in charge of the Salish Flathead, Pend d’Oreille, and Kalispel Indians in Montana, when asked to assemble a delegation of the same groups for the Omaha Congress, expressed his doubts upon discovering the individuals would “discard their civilized dress.” Smead, who had aggressively pushed for allotment against the wishes of the Indians in his purview, was later removed and prosecuted for corruption, but he expressed a central tension in the managerial and ideological dispute over the exhibit. Was the Congress “education or entertainment?” Reformers had underestimated the “flexibility” of the Grass dance and Indian desire to make those traditions as “inclusive as possible” to ensure its survival. They also failed to recognize the ability of indigenous professional performers to enter a wage economy and use their traditions to their own gain. Just as the Kwakw’akw’akw turned the mode of performance into protest, performance in Omaha became a means of capital gain and cultural longevity. Mooney argued Mercer’s “sham battles,” which helped pay promised earnings to indigenous delegates, were measured in “the amount of noise and by ticket sales” and offered no ethnological value, but the battles represented yet another venue for Indians to assert their own

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The “sham battles” started on August 10, but due to the failure of their “opponents” in the Improved Order of Red Men to arrive, Mercer had to improvise. The previous year, press agent “Arizona John” Burke had advertised Buffalo Bill’s show as “An Ethnological, Anthropological and Etymological Congress” reflecting a popular assumption that these entertainments existed as fact. When Mercer organized these battles, he operated well within popular conceptions of authentic Indian representation, but popularity did not protect him from later criticism. The battle was supposed to be a “frontier reenactment” where the white members of the Improved Order came in to rout the Indian performers from the Congress. Mercer, instead, called upon members of Frank Mattox and Rattlesnake Pete’s Great Omaha Wild West, white and indigenous, to fill in. Borrowing guns from the cadet team at a local high school, he “had some 600 or 700 men lined up for the fray” by sunset. Holding “top billing as a renegade white man” and donning the title of “Wyoke Nicyople Tigurebli Acolthy” or “Great White Man Who Fights Them All,” Mercer led his brigade of Indians into battle against a group of white performers posing as settlers. The whole fracas “froze the marrow” of spectators as a frenzy of scalping and general butchery ensued. The offending Indians and Mercer, however, were eventually defeated and the show concluded with the “renegade” taking his band of “Indians to the reservation.” The Bee reported the show would be repeated the next afternoon “if a supply of ammunition can be secured.”

Captain Mercer did procure more blank cartridges for performers’ rifles and continued with regular performances of the sham battles. They proved immensely popular with spectators.

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131 Bigart and Woodcock, 18-19; Clough, 79; Mooney in Moses, The Indian Man, 119.
and Indian performers alike as the performers received half the gate receipts. Clough estimates
the indigenous participants pocketed as much as $3,000 combined from these performances.
Unfortunately for the exposition, the proprietors of the Great Omaha Wild West brought
litigation against the TMIE for “steal[ing] their act” to the tune of $15,054. Performers exerted a
certain extent of control over the reenactments, too. When the “Great Father to the Indian”
President McKinley visited the fair for Peace Jubilee Week, Mercer pressured the Lakota
delegates to perform the murder of Sitting Bull. They balked. When they also refused to build a
replica of the cabin where the Indian police agent Red Tomahawk shot and killed the leader of
the Ghost Dance movement and Hunkpapa Lakota, apparently “too proud to work,” Mercer
asked the Pueblo delegation to do it instead. Upon its completion, Lakota performers passed the
house claiming to see an apparition of Sitting Bull warming himself by a fire, only to be struck
down by another apparition. After this incident in October, other delegates refused to go near the
cabin. Despite the captain “doggedly” insisting on the reenactment, the presence of Sitting Bull’s
spirit put an end to his attempts to convince the Lakota to perform the solemn moment in their
history. Whether a ruse concocted on the part of the Lakota or a true experience, the delegation
successfully outmaneuvered Mercer.133

Poor sanitation and housing conditions, as well as the extremes of a Nebraska summer
and encroaching winter put a considerable strain on the indigenous delegates. The heat in August
canceled several scheduled dances and battles, and in October, several delegates were
hospitalized due to freezing temperatures. On one August day, Hits-the-Eagle-in-the-Wing, an
elder Assiniboine, glanced out of his dwelling to find “the mercury was near the century point”
and decided “lying in the shade” was preferable to dancing and “informed his braves” as much.

133 Clough, 81; “Great Omaha Wild West,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 24 December 1901; “Pueblos Build the Cabin,”
*Omaha Daily Bee*, 7 October 1898; Miller, 48; “Great Father and Indian,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 13 October 1898.
While the implication of laziness here is evident, Hits-the-Eagle-in-the-Wing demonstrated the degree of control Indian performers exercised. In a growing wage-labor economy, Indians were adept at recognizing their value and their power to negotiate for better terms. Performers also had to contend with the unabashed curiosity of fairgoers. In the same Bee article, the reporter discussed the disappointing nature of the entertainments where the performers “did not enter into the spirit of the sport.” Other visitors failed to appreciate the indigenous desire for a modicum of privacy in the encampment and frequently invaded the personal and dwelling spaces of performers. McCowan and McGee later dubbed the issue “rubbering” in St. Louis where visitors assumed everything in the Congress area was open to the public. The intrusions forced Indians to get creative.  

“Impertinent visitors” invaded tipis, wigwams, and all other dwellings without invitation and “made [Indian] home life miserable by night and by day.” Early in the exposition, Geronimo sat outside his army-issue tent watching a passing parade without attracting much attention until a small crowd gathered to stare. When he realized he had struck the gazes of a dozen or so onlookers, he seized his chair and rushed inside “as if someone had shot at him.” While Geronimo may have capitalized on his fame for monetary gain, the unwelcome white gaze brought objectification and connotations of subhuman origin in this “human zoo.” Other Indians in the encampment resorted to roping off their dwellings or tying the flaps shut on the entrances. One report claimed an elder Indian woman, when an observer attempted to take her picture without her permission, ran the offender off with a stick. At the end of the fair when Mercer organized a barbecue celebration, performers insisted on visitors being kept out so that they

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might celebrate in peace. In an attempt to secure their privacy, the Pueblo “bachelors” hung a
sign on their adobe home warning white onlookers to “Keep Out.” After a century of warfare
where invading white forces desecrated the original homes of many performers at the Indian
Congress, the aggressive assimilation policies of the BIA, and the abuse and overreach of Indian
agents under allotment, the ability to declare who could enter their dwellings, even when on
display, represents an enduring indigenous ability to resist white encroachment.135

Backlash was swift. Mercer faced criticism for exploiting his charges, but that was not
the case. Indians dictated to a degree not seen at previous or subsequent world’s fairs the terms
of their performance. Commissioner Jones of the BIA spent the next five years trying to “atone
for his sins at Omaha” where he had enthusiastically endorsed the Indian Congress. Installed as
BIA head because of political patronage, Jones had little experience with indigenous affairs,
especially the politics of display and the ongoing tensions between reformers, anthropologists,
and entertainers. As such, he failed to appreciate “the necessity of having a counterpoint to
traditional Indians” in the Congress. Alice Fletcher’s section in the Government Building sat a
great distance hence and received little attention aside for what the plaster figures in traditional
costume garnered. Civilizing missions took a back seat in the plan at Omaha in 1898, but starting
in 1899, Jones prohibited the participants at the Greater American Exposition (also in Omaha)
from performing the Grass dance. In 1900, he refused to allow Buffalo Bill to recruit performers
on reservations. Other agents announced their displeasure, casting “Indians as helpless victims of
a Bureau-exposition management plot” intended to exploit indigenous culture for the

135 Omaha World Herald, 17 October 1898; “It Will Be Lively Today,” Newspaper clipping, Indian Congress
mississippi.unl.edu/memorabilia/view/TMI04493.html; “Farewell to the Indians,” Omaha World Herald, 20 October
1898.
“amusement of the public.” By the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, the drive to create an effective counterpoint to Indian savagery in an exhibit came to fruition in Samuel McCowan’s Indian school, constructed atop a hill overlooking the rest of the anthropological village—the height of civilized indigeneity.\(^{136}\)

In 1904, too, the imperial message was cogent with W. J. McGee’s anthropological villages stationed beside the U.S. Government’s Philippine compound. Both pointed to the new international age of American imperialism and to the historical precedent of colonization. Omaha, however, suffered from a certain chaos along the way between the organizational goals and the audience’s interpretation. In between the TMIE corporation and fairgoers stood a diverse group of performers and organizers encompassing a wide range of agendas. As Mercer, Mooney, and Rosewater clashed over the ideological goals of the Congress, performers asserted their own that flouted audience expectations and desires. In practicing and adapting the Grass Dance and other traditions at Omaha, American Indians reflected their “vibrancy and adaptability” at the dawn of a new century. Their audiences expected to see these performers only once, and for the performance to be part of the inevitable process of vanishing. But Omaha afforded the indigenous communities gathered there the tools to persist.\(^{137}\)

No single event can be identified as the root of Indigenous survival—that fact lies in the people themselves—but Omaha cannot be ignored. This “most notable of Indian gatherings in modern times” was supposed to be notable in its finality, but when indigenous people persisted, the TMIE went largely unstudied. Situated between the pivotal World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the massive Louisiana Purchase Exposition and its extensive ethnological exhibits,

\(^{136}\) Clough, 83.
\(^{137}\) Clough, 83; Miller, 41.
Omaha’s small fair seems insignificant, especially to a white audience. There was little else to the rest of the fair. The technology was interesting to agriculturalists and few others, and only about 20 percent of the 2.5 million visitors came from east of the Mississippi. The hopes of a global exposition fell flat. The fair made its investors a 92.5 percent dividend and sparked the copy-cat Greater American Exposition the following year, but rests in relative obscurity today, especially when compared to the exhaustive collection of work on the WCE and LPE. The entertainment did little to reinforce the burgeoning American mythology. For indigenous participants, though, it marked a moment of agency where resistance to white civilizing or annihilating projects resembled not armed resistance as it had for much of the nineteenth century, but persistent cultural adaptation and intertribal community that would define the next phase of American indigeneity. Exposition president George Wattles was wrong. This part of the Great American Desert endured.138

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138 Harriman, 512; Bigart and Woodcock, 23; Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 124; Miller, 54.
Chapter 4

Fantasy, Myth, and Authenticity: Indigenous North American Agency at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, 1904

“Where is the savage Indian? The street car conductor told me there was one here who was kept chained all the time.”
_Indian School Journal_, 18 June 1904

“It is the ultimate aim of the science to trace the course of human progress and classify individuals and peoples in terms of that progress, and thus to learn so much as may be of the origin and destiny of man.”
W. J. McGee

The Louisiana Purchase Exposition (LPE) of 1904 arrived in St. Louis at the same moment Indigenous Americans faced increased pressure to adopt allotment, forsake communal living, and embrace the toil of subsistence farming, all to become “useful” citizens. Prevailing forces that had been so at odds in Chicago and Omaha appeared reconciled as scientists, concessionaires, and reformers remarked on the inevitability of progress, and thus the death of the “blanket” Indian. In the Original American’s place, so it seemed, rose the reformed, educated Indian, trained at white institutions in trades beneficial (but non-threatening) to the center. A generation of indigenous individuals, adept in navigating dominant culture, now stood at the vanguard of their societies and seemed poised to bring the savage out of darkness into the light of civilization. Contemporary writers spoke of the “blanket” Indian toiling in idleness while their children learned of hard work and success, bolstering the binary of the Indian of the past and the Indian of the future. The LPE stood at the moment, so it seemed, that Indianness would finally

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collapse into obscurity, and born from imperial education, the new Indian would take their place in modernity. The indigenous participants of the centennial celebration of the Louisiana Purchase, however, again defied white expectations and not only endured, but thrived, even in the subjugation of display.

Exceeding the scale and scope of any previous exposition, American or European, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, dubbed the “University of the Future,” borrowed the sentiment of the engraving above the World’s Columbian Exposition’s Anthropology Building—“Man and His Works”—except here the phrase applied to the entire event. In the words of LPE Corporation president David Francis, “If all man’s other works were by some unspeakable catastrophe blotted out, the records here…would afford all necessary standards for the rebuilding of our entire civilization.” Hoping to encompass all of humanity’s achievements up to 1904, reverent display demonstrated the “inevitability of the March of Progress,” and installed the “white American ‘race’” as the single qualified leader of the future continuation of this movement. The process of progress at the LPE was inextricably linked to American democracy, capitalism, and culture, as well as the country’s industrial, commercial, and technological prowess. This differed only modestly from the goals of the World’s Columbian Exposition a decade earlier, but the LPE made explicit the link between progress and American imperialism. And integral to that connection was the racial other—the imperial subject, in need of betterment from a benevolent white civilization.¹⁴⁰

Befitting the largest exposition to date, the LPE assembled the largest indigenous encampment of between two and three thousand “subjects.” Under the direction of W. J. McGee,

former head of the Bureau of American Ethnology, the Anthropology Village encompassed a confederation of indigenous peoples from across the globe, including Africa, Asia, and South America, as well as Native North Americans. Despite McGee’s recent disgrace at the BAE as part of an embezzlement scheme, LPE organizers selected the anthropologist to add the same veneer of authenticity the World’s Columbian Exposition (WCE) and Frederick Ward Putnam had varnished its racial exhibits with. McGee eventually provided literature and advertising that brought any exhibit featuring non-Anglo Saxon peoples within his vision of “unilineal evolution” and scheme for the fair. While he did not exercise administrative control over concessions or displays outside the more than forty-acre anthropology compound, he worked to establish each represented ethnicity within his racial and progressive categories. The positioning of the infamous Philippine Village across the intramural railroad line from McGee’s villages only further enmeshed anthropology within the imperial needs of the United States.\footnote{Parezo and Fowler, 3, 6-14; McGee, 811-12.}

The display of Philippine natives, including the Igorot, Negrito, Visayan, and Moro, was under the administration of the United States government and gave McGee no opportunity to provide input. By far the largest exhibit, the “Philippine Reservation” functioned as a propaganda piece for the federal government. An “exposition within an exposition,” as many as 99 percent of LPE visitors navigated the $1.5 million exhibit. After the Spanish-American War of 1898, the Philippine territories transferred from a more than three-century colonial relationship with Spain to the “benevolence” of American expansionism. Indigenous Filipinos, however, rebelled against their new colonizers. These moments of active, armed resistance earned the indigenous people the reputation of savages in the eyes of Americans, and thus ensured the appeal of the 1904 exhibit. The compound, complete with a model American school
and other charitable pursuits of the civilizing conqueror, projected a similar message to the Anthropology Department. Part of the “evolutionary array of indigenous groups and the advancement of humanity,” the Filipino Natives were entangled in the same imperial, civilizing designs as indigenous North Americans.\textsuperscript{142}

The consistency between a US Cabinet department project and a display like McGee’s was a remarkable moment for government-anthropological relations. Even with broadly similar messages, however, the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) acted out the same territorial battles present at previous expositions. The Department of the Interior, instead of placing the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) exhibit in McGee’s hands, asked Samuel McCowan to spearhead the partnership with the LPE’s anthropology display. Reverting to the intended model at the WCE, the BIA and the LPE formed a joint exhibit of educated Indians and their savage counterpoints.\textsuperscript{143}

William J. McGee, unlike previous exposition exhibit managers like Putnam, Franz Boas, and James Mooney, was not strictly an ethnologist. Known as a “self-trained geologist,” McGee later gained leadership in the BAE via a combination of political patronage and pure chance. Designated “ethnologist in charge” of the Bureau of American Ethnology, McGee dove into his new discipline. He faced strident opposition and critique, with other anthropologists deriding him as unscientific and undisciplined—claims which continue to hold weight when reading McGee today. An “occasionally” brilliant man, he was “slender in supporting data” and contributed to an age of anthropology that used fragmented evidence to designate racial others as second (or third), class peoples. When McGee became entangled in an embezzlement scheme, he had no political

\textsuperscript{142} Parezo and Fowler, 164-5.
\textsuperscript{143} Parezo and Fowler, 59.
capital with which to cling to control of the BAE and resigned in disgrace. His ideology relied on broad generalizations as he had little interest in the singular, intensive study of his peers like James Mooney and his meticulous reconstruction of the Kiowa camp circle. Disregarded as “erroneous and unusable,” McGee saw the LPE anthropology display as an opportunity to reclaim his prestige, but the exhibit suffered from the same flawed racial designs of his previous work.144

The LPE was a place for McGee to “fashion the national identity out of his own…theory of racial progress” as he organized primitive peoples in their “evolutionary” order. This was the “ultimate aim” of anthropology, and with its completion, one might be able to decipher “the origin and destiny of man”—the past and the future of the human species. McGee reflected the racial-utopian ideas best expressed at the WCE in 1893 and used the LPE to justify his theories like “cephalization” (progress explained by the increase of cranial capacity between races) and “cheirization” (progress as explained by the increase in dexterity between races). With the help of Franz Boas’ associate Robert S. Woodworth and his student Frank Bruner, as well as Aleš Hrdlička, McGee set up a several laboratories dedicated to the quantification of participants’, organizers’, and visitors’ physical value. Practices like anthropometry and craniometry, as practiced at the WCE, only furthered the assessment of “lesser” races as unintelligent and incapable. Hrdlička attempted to acquire the bodies of the Native participants who “inevitably” died at the LPE for dissection, but the relevant authorities “reluctantly” refused. Following the LPE, however, three Filipino brains mysteriously appeared at the Smithsonian Institution. They were likely victims of pneumonia.145

144 Parezo and Fowler, 35, 47-8.
According to McGee, contemporary anthropology used four systems of classification to categorize humankind: by race, “genetic affinity,” “activity” or “in terms of what they do...rather than what they merely are,” and the “mental progress which...has raised man from the plane of the animal to his distinct and exalted position as a progressive conqueror of lower nature.” In his elaborate exposé of his efforts at the LPE, McGee detailed the relative humanity of various “types,” giving the distinct categories of savagery, barbarism, civilization, and enlightenment. Most indigenous peoples, or any non-white society really, fell into the lower two categories while he divided whites into the two upper levels. He made sure to distinguish between Western Europeans and Southern and Eastern Europeans, reinforcing growing immigration concerns by deriding their “racial fitness.” All of these “unscientific” opinions relied on the great racial gathering McGee planned at the LPE to perform a living model of unilineal evolution. For McGee believed even though his theories lacked evidence, the Anthropology Department at the LPE would show the world how “obvious” these ethnological structures were.  

When the Department of the Interior placed Samuel McCowan as McGee’s partner in the joint BIA-BAE endeavor, however, McGee’s elaborate scheme came up against a powerful personality. McCowan was one of the few senior BIA educators with previous exposition experience. At the Greater American Exposition in Omaha 1899 (a remake of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition), he was responsible for a delegation from the Phoenix Indian School where he worked as superintendent. He got his start as the superintendent of the Rosebud Reservation day school, eventually taking the same position at the Chilocco Indian School in 1902, where he began to design the 1904 LPE Indian School. McCowan believed in the “inevitability of assimilation” and abhorred traditional lifeways and practices. Believing

146 McGee, 815-17; Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 161-2.
“superstition and the downgrading of women” defined indigenous cultures, he was certain of the vanishing of these societies. Education represented the only solution if Indians wished to survive. He also expressed disdain for the traditional crafts and skills of his pupils, which was at odds with the likes of Alice Fletcher from the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition (TMIE) and others in the BIA who saw these skills as valuable and evidence of inherent intelligence. Traditional crafts, by McGee’s design, were to make up at least half of the LPE’s display of indigeneity.  

The conflict between McGee and McCowan arose primarily from budget disputes. McGee believed he had lost “98 percent” of his requested allocation and being forced to share the remaining moneys with McCowan placed severe strain on his grandiose plans. The Indian School became the central building for the exhibit, constructed atop “Indian Hill” in the northwest corner of the LPE grounds with the dwellings of the indigenous participants strewn in order of evolution on the southern slopes. As with the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Anthropology Village and Indian School were far removed from the central lagoon and plaza, with the agriculture, forestry, and international sections obscuring it from view. Quite likely the exhibit succeeded in part due to its proximity to the massive Philippine Village, but it also capitalized on the American fascination with its past. Here, on display were the ancient forms of humanity from which the white race had “ascended” to enlightenment. Integral to this enlightenment was the belief “man has no higher duty than that of mending the way of human progress,” or acting as benevolent teachers to the unenlightened savage. Inside the Indian School, Indian students from around the United States worked in industrialized skills while outside, surrounding them “in primitive fashion, sheltered by their tepees and huts, [were] those who

147 Parezo and Fowler, 59.
had] not had the benefits of the guiding hand of the government” schools.  

Indigenous peoples, however, defied these designs. Where W. J. McGee wished to demonstrate “harmonious progress” from one stage to the next, and McCowan planned an evocative display of pacification, indigenous peoples from all over the nation and the world arrived with their own intentions and goals. At the LPE, visitors witnessed not the final demise of indigeneity, but its persistence and adaptability. Performers built cross-cultural friendships, adopted white technology to their own means, and consciously and unconsciously exerted their agency within the oppression of display. Commercial exhibits on the Pike—the LPE’s version of the Midway Plaisance—also created and reinforced the economic opportunity of performance for indigenous peoples. Concessions like the Cliff Dwellers Exhibit and the Esquimaux Village offered indigenous North Americans economic, cultural, and social opportunities that found echoes in the anthropological village. Across these exhibits, including McGee’s village, organizers stressed the “commercially viable” and thus forced the innovation and adaptation of traditional customs and handicrafts to a capitalist exchange system, which in turn meant the acquisition of skills needed to survive and thrive in the coming century.

I. The “Thoroughly Genuine” Pike

Just off Lindell Boulevard at the very northernmost border of the LPE grounds stood the mile long, three hundred foot wide “Street of All Nations” where advertisers announced the mingling of races and cultures “as never before” along this entertainment section of the fair. The

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149 Parezo and Fowler, 3, 56-9.
Pike, as it was known, featured exhibits representing Asia, Africa, and Europe, as well as “Old St. Louis” and two displays of North American indigenous life. A replica of Henry Roltair’s popular Coney Island attraction “Creation” occupied the same space as an ostrich farm, the Irish Village, baby incubators, and a “Temple of Mirth.” With a price tag of ten million dollars, Pike concessionaires and organizers wanted a “bigger and better” entertainment zone than Chicago in order to maximize profits for the five hundred businesses on this one-mile promenade. In order to visit every concession, a visitor needed twenty dollars for admission tickets, as well as several days to peruse the zoos, performances, restaurants, and more. Most of these exhibits were “ethnic worlds of the imagination” which produced for consumption “the exotic ethnology [the public] wanted.” The public included W. J. McGee who argued encounters between races were always educational, extending his anthropological vision to include the Pike, as Frederick W. Putnam did in Chicago. The symbiotic relationship between performance and ethnology created a space where “science justified showmanship and showmanship advanced science.” While McGee displayed his savages and primitivism, the Pike profited in barbarism and lower civilization and offered the “student of sociology a variety of…instructive lessons” that could not be “secured from the libraries of the world.” The union between ethnology and entertainment concessions, however, was “problematic and forced,” as one valued one brand of authenticity, and the other thrived on the “humbug” and illusions.¹⁵⁰

Just as McGee inserted himself into the bureaucratic licensing of concessions, Samuel McCowan also tried to influence Frederick J. V. Skiff, director of exhibits, in the decisions on which displays received space. Concerned over the joint BIA-BAE exhibit degenerating (in his view) into a Wild West attraction, McCowan reiterated those concerns as he tried to influence

the make-up of the Pike. Reiterating the concerns of Richard Pratt, founder of Carlisle Indian School, and his student Chauncey Yellow Robe expressed beginning in Chicago, McCowan saw little to no educational value in the Indian exhibits on the Pike. His primary concern was the exploitation of Bureau of Indian Affairs charges performing in the Cliff-dwellers concession and Cummins Wild West Show. Able to cite clear examples from 1893 and Wild West Shows where Indian performers died, were abandoned, or neglected in the care of entertainment entrepreneurs, McCowan believed BIA wards would function solely to “make money for the concessionaires” on the Pike. Worse still, he assumed these exhibit organizers “possessed the right to reproduce ‘alleged Indian dances, customs, and rites’” that existed either solely in a far distant past or were imagined entirely. (Re)Creating these events or gatherings would “misrepresent the real Indians” to such an extent as to “destroy the value of the government’s more authentic exhibit.” The true demonstration of American aboriginality another mile down the northern border of the fair where McCowan and McGee assembled their performers was “realistic, strictly educational, and entirely free from barbarous features that do not now exist,” thus giving fairgoers a true depiction of the Indian’s contemporary conditions. His concerns fell on deaf ears, however, even when he threatened to withhold the government disbursement for the anthropology exhibit. Skiff and exposition leadership recognized the opportunity for immense profits Pike concessions peddling in barbarity and savagery represented.151

Of most interest to McCowan were three specific exhibits: the Cummins’s Wild West Show, the Cliff-dwellers concession, and the Esquimaux Village. The Wild West posed the most significant threat to McCowan’s ideology as the largest concession at the LPE. Located just

north of the Pike off the official fairgrounds, “Colonel” Frederick T. Cummins, according to McCowan, “erroneously glorified…the wild Plains warrior.” While certainly not a unique depiction of American Indians, Cummins’s was an experienced exposition entrepreneur and managed the Indian Congress at the 1899 Greater American Exposition where McCowan brought a group of students from Phoenix. Cummins stated goal for his 1904 show was to “reproduce his Indian Congress” at the request of LPE organizers and create “one of the crowning features” of the LPE. The scandal that arose from the 1898 Indian Congress in Omaha, where Commissioner Jones spent the rest of his career attempting to mitigate entertainment’s influence on the popular opinion of Indians, affected the LPE’s negotiations with Cummins. Fearing another Wild West attraction at a world’s fair would malign the efforts of the government, BIA officials stonewalled talks to hire Indian actors and delayed the completion of an LPE-Cummins contract. The LPE required the show to pay a ten-thousand dollar rental fee and 35 percent of its earnings back to the organizing corporation, as anthropologist Nancy Parezo describes it, “a much worse deal than Cody had negotiated in Chicago.”

Using the same hyperbole evident in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, Cummins’s “mysteriously acquired” military title and his habit of referring to himself as “Chief La Ko’Ta” to demonstrate his “first-hand knowledge of Indians” created a coat of authenticity for an otherwise fabricated program. Like Buffalo Bill’s show, Cummins’s was rooted in the celebration of “Western heroes, adventurous deeds, and Americans’ belief in Manifest Destiny.” These myths relied on the static, unchanging past Plains Indian. For the illusion to hold, Cummins needed Indians with “long hair, dignified features, and superb equestrian skills” to impress his audience. For St. Louis, his show advertised 750 “blanket Indians” (i.e. authentic) from fifty-one different tribes. Performing

152 Parezo and Fowler, 240-1.
alongside cowboys—“the centaurs of the American Plains”—Mexicans, soldiers, Cossacks, and Zouaves. In reality, the show contained around 200 male Indian individuals, as well as an “indeterminate” number of women and children. The inflation arose from Cummins claiming every Indian on the LPE grounds as part of his number, as well as every celebrity who passed through St. Louis. Chief Joseph toured the fair for one day on his way to Washington, D.C., but show paraphernalia claimed he stayed with the Cummins’s Wild West for five months. Geronimo, staying in the Anthropology Village as an official guest of McCowan and McGee, also appeared in Cummins advertising even though Geronimo likely only visited the show off the Pike.¹⁵³

Many of the indigenous performers in the show were former employees of Buffalo Bill. Having fallen on tough financial times, mostly because of his own ineptitude and uninformed investments, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West was not as lucrative an employer as shows like Pawnee Bill’s, Cummins’s, or the Miller Brothers’. The increased mobility show life afforded also empowered indigenous performers to seek different or better opportunities. With a specific skill set to trade in, these performers, especially the Lakota of Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Standing Rock became the cornerstone of Wild West Shows in the prime of the entertainment’s history. Each male Indian received a salary and individual contract (as per BIA regulations) and were offered bonuses if their families accompanied them. Their food, shelter, and other necessities were all provided. If a performer had a special skill like the athletes Leaping Panther (Comanche), Black White-Bear (Crow), or DePoe (Rock River), they received higher pay. If, in the course of their performance career, they had gained notoriety like Will Rogers (Cherokee), they also received a pay increase. This particular stipulation marked a shift in indigenous

cultures, much like the Indian Congress at Omaha. The act of performance was becoming a mark of prestige in the way warrior culture had functioned prior to 1890. To gain standing in their communities, the Lakota and other Plains groups turned to the arena, model village, or stage. Overall, Cummins “treated Indians fairly” and spoke of them with glowing admiration. Advertising called them “the most outstanding equestrians in the world,” while the event, like previous world’s fairs and Wild West Shows, “offered them an opportunity to provide for their families” outside of the “repressive reservation.”

As liberating as it may be tempting to see the Cummins’ show at the LPE for indigenous performers, the exposition occurred simultaneous with the dissolution of a large section of the Rosebud Reservation. The BIA “opened for settlement” the reservation as part of the continuing encroachment of allotment. At the “farewell exercise” held at Ponca Creek in early July 1904, Old Swift Bear delivered “a bitter tirade against the whites” after a years-long battle to hold on to their land. Refusing to sell at any price, the government stepped in and took possession of the land “as guardian of the Indian,” holding the money in trust for the Rosebud Lakota. Their experience was not unique. For the mythology of Wild West Shows to hold, the narrative in the arena required a degradation of Indian performers, too. The “famous chiefs, brawny braves, lovely squaws and pretty papooses” were present to demonstrate their “pastime pleasures and wartime woes,” not the truth of their existence. Demonstrating a constructed past that placed them as “savage obstacles” to the frontier march, indigenous performers, even with agency, performed the trauma of annihilation daily.

154 Parezo and Fowler, 242; Moses, 168.
Even though he “out buffaloed Buffalo Bill,” Cummins’s show was close to bankruptcy by the close of the LPE at the end of November 1904. In order to placate conservative religious factions in St. Louis, LPE organizers had closed the fair on Sundays. For William Cody in 1893, Sundays often proved second only to Saturday in profits, and the decision, as well as the poor deal Cummins cut with LPE management, meant he dissolved his corporation in the months following. Various setbacks, including a train derailment that robbed him of a large contingent of his Lakota actors, and a disgruntled railway worker shooting three people outside the show, left Cummins in the red, nowhere near the one million dollars Buffalo Bill earned in Chicago. The train derailment, however, brought future Pan-Indian leader Carlos Montezuma (Yavapai) into tangential contact with the world’s fair. In the crash, three were killed and fifteen critically injured, and as Montezuma was an independent physician and surgeon, he provided most of the on-site emergency care. Because the delegation was mostly Lakota, their agent John Brennan was responsible for negotiating a settlement with the railway. Montezuma wrote to Commissioner Jones protesting the miserly agreement, to which Jones responded by asking for
Montezuma’s estimate of the damages. Proposing much higher settlement rates (and likely fairer as several individuals were crippled so that they could no longer continue in showmanship work), Montezuma took his proposal to the BIA. The BIA, however, sided with Brennan’s rates and “considered the matter closed.” Montezuma remained an activist until his death in 1923, helping found the first Indian rights group, the Society of American Indians in 1911.\footnote{Parezo and Fowler, 243, 246; “Shooting Affray at Exposition,” The San Francisco Call, 19 June 1904; Colin Calloway, First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2015), 194-195.}

The other two main concessions that used indigenous American performers relied also on living demonstrations as a central draw. The LPE Corporation approved an exhibit titled “The Cliff-dwellers” at the same meeting it approved McGee’s and McCowan’s Anthropology Village and Indian School. W. Maurice Tobin’s concession proposed to give whites their “first introduction” to the Hopi (in 1904 known as “Moki” or “Mocqui”) and Zuni tribes in a remake of the 1893 exhibit in Department M of the same name. The 1893 exhibit was a model of Battle Rock Mountain, Colorado, but had featured no permanent live performers. The feature had a stage used for performances like the Kwakwaka’wakw’s cannibal dance, as well as the remains of “ancient” deceased peoples, but as a replica of the habitations of an extinct society, lacked the anthropological subjects the rest of Department M’s anthropological settlement featured. The 1904 exhibit had a “spectacular” entrance—a “beetling mass of rocky ledges” over sixty feet high that offered a view of the entire Pike from its summit. Tobin’s 1904 concession clung to much of the original Cliff-dweller model, but brought “several hundred” Hopi and Zuni to St. Louis to perform the ancient culture for fairgoers.\footnote{For more on the 1893 Cliff-dweller replica and the Kwakwaka’wakw performance, see chapter two; Parezo and Fowler, 246-7; “Cliff Dwellers at the St. Louis Exposition,” Scientific American no. 20, 91 (12 November 1904): 339; “The Ten Million Dollar Pike,” LPE World’s Fair Bulletin no. 8, 5 (June 1904): 68.}
humbug. His relationship with the truth was not part of his concessionaire career. Catering to the desires of his audience, he provided “exotic difference” in the form of an “ancient race” living in a replica that included tunnels, caves, hieroglyphs, and catacombs. For twenty-five cents extra, however, visitors could “see remarkable rituals” in a “unique form of theater.” The indigenous performers reenacted a range of dances and ceremonies, most of which the BIA banned or discouraged on Hopi and Zuni reservations. Dances like the Eagle, and Ghost Dances all evoked strong imagery for Americans. The Kachina Dance, advertised as the “Hopi Plaza Dance” was actually a Rio Grande Pueblo winter dance, but when San Juan governor Ramon Archuleta led the performance, it attracted considerable attention. Working with the Pueblo artisans, Tobin worked to show that the southwest communities “were not savages” and allowed the participants to sell their pottery for profit, Maria Martinez among them. Martinez went on to attend exposition after exposition as “one of the most celebrated San Ildefonso potters.” The skilled potters, weavers, silversmiths, basket and blanket makers, and “other Indian workers gave the final ethnological touch” to the extensive village. Tobin took pains to exert an aura of authenticity, even cultivating sage and cacti in the crags of the plaster-of-Paris cliffs. Visitors could ride a little burro to the top of the “cliffs” to see a panoramic view of the exposition. In the end, however, Tobin sought the illusion of the authentic, whereas McGee and McCowan both believed in their versions of authenticity.158

Initially, McGee and McCowan attempted to block the exhibit. McGee thought the commercial exhibits featuring Indigenous Americans were “becoming uncontrolled” to an extent where they would compete with his Anthropology Village. McCowan argued Tobin’s concession was “nonrealistic and barbarous,” imperiling the government’s “true exhibition of the Indian and

his life.” He especially opposed the live demonstrations of “pagan” rituals that, to him, represented “backwardness, not progress”—the center of the LPE’s utopian theme. Unlike the government exhibit, however, Tobin was willing to pay his performers a wage—not just compensation for materials or travel. The LPE governing body also knew savagery attracted visitors and gave him the green light. McGee would come to change his mind about the ethnological value of the exhibits, however, when Tobin created a performance of the Snake Dance based on Walter Hough’s *The Moki Snake Dance* (1899). The book itself was a promotional device by the Santa Fe Railway, advertising the BIA-banned biannual dance as a kind of tourist attraction. Up until about 1897, few whites had ever seen the ancient ceremony honoring the snake which saved the Hopi people from a devastating drought. The dance was “a movable feast, both as to time and place,” making it difficult for the Santa Fe Railroad to pin down its exact location, but over a very short period, a network of couriers and messengers developed so that once the Hopi priest designated a time and place, the railway could inform interested parties.¹⁵⁹

Within a decade, thousands of white travelers came to the Hopi Mesas and Grand Canyon area to witness this holy dance. The visitors, however, showed little respect for the Hopi. The *Indian School Journal (ISJ)* reported during the celebrations, audience members jostled for the best spots, interfering with the dance. Photographers set up without respect for the movements of the participants and individuals would wander in and out of the Hopi’s homes without invitation. Two years later, the Hopi erected placards asking visitors to “refrain from disorderly conduct and interference with the rites of the dance.” While the *ISJ* was more interested in the contrast of

indigenous “civilization” to the whites’ inappropriate behavior, the placards indicate two more significant Hopi declarations. The first is their recognition and exploitation of the Snake Dance as a performance, where whites were visitors participating in a transactional relationship. The Hopi expected good behavior and for whites to purchase the crafts they had on sale and seem to have had the means to enforce this structure. The second declaration, however, is that this dance was the Hopi’s and only theirs. Whites were guests. They could only be visitors in this holy moment and could not, in fact, cross over to experience “savagery” or indigeneity themselves. Pike and other LPE exhibits declared the opposite. These concessions like the Cliff-dwellers Exhibit presented themselves as an immersive experience in being indigenous, but in order to provide this, Tobin radically altered these ceremonies to conform to white expectations. The ISJ argues that in performance, the Hopi surrendered the authenticity of their ceremonies, but the placards say differently. The Hopi summarily declared this dance their own.\footnote{\textsuperscript{160} “A Great Ceremony,” \textit{ISJ}, “The Cliff Dwellers at St. Louis.”}

The Cliff-dwellers exhibit, however, was seen as “a study in authenticity” because of the Snake Dance, even though the performers’ costumes, advertised as true to the ancient race of kings the Hopi and Zuni represented, were, in fact, a combination of northern Plains, Plateau, and Prairie styles. Both McGee and Tobin turned Indigenous Americans into “exotic proxies for the past” representing what the dominant culture believed authentic. In the Cliff-dwellers exhibit, surrounded by a fake past, however, the Hopi and Zuni celebrated \textit{their} past as integral to their future, reflecting the experiences at Omaha and Chicago and in the contemporary Wild West Shows. At the LPE, Tobin encouraged the performers to flout BIA authority, and in those performances, the Hopi and Zuni worked to create their cultural persistence. For them,
performance as a part of their cultural and social agency was new.\textsuperscript{161}

For the final concession on the Pike to feature North American Indigenous peoples, however, show business success was at least a decade old and thriving. “Dick” Crane, an Alaskan explorer known for his success in the gold trade, with his partner George Voris created an exhibit McGee described as a place for “visitors to be explorers.” Attempting to replicate Alaska in 1865 when Secretary of State William Seward purchased the territory from Russia, Crane and Voris employed the Inuit from Labrador and Alaskan Natives, both of whom were veteran exposition performers. Despite the 2,700 miles distance between the two groups’ native homes, having been performing since 1893, mimicking each others’ traditions was straightforward. Indigenous Inuit and Alaskans had yet to populate the American imagination, so this offered Crane, Voris, and the performers a certain degree of freedom. McGee pronounced the exhibit “quite ethnologically correct” (although he said much the same about the Cliff-dwellers). Modern anthropologists Nancy Parezo and Don Fowler agree, however. This was possible, in part, because the Esquimaux Village, as it appeared in fair literature, lacked the pretentions of the Cummins’s Wild West and the Cliff-Dwellers Exhibit. While Alaska was a frontier at the time, it was not \textit{the} frontier, now represented in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba.\textsuperscript{162}

Having gone on strike in 1893 to protest abominable working conditions, the Inuit performers were

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\item \textsuperscript{161} Parezo and Fowler, 252.
\item \textsuperscript{162} Parezo and Fowler, 252, 255.
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skilled professionals by 1904. Many of the group worked the Chicago WCE and had spent the vast majority of the previous eleven years touring the United States. Under new management since Chicago, the “Esquimaux” brought seventeen tons of hunting tools and art to sell to LPE visitors. On top of purchasing Inuit wares, entrants could take a dog sled ride for an additional twenty-five cents or view various ceremonies, hunting “expeditions” including a seal hunt, or a daily sled dog race. The elaborate compound featured papier mache icebergs and stream where “experienced miners” panned for gold. A “Piker” (a visitor to the Pike) could also witness an epic battle between the Inuit and a polar bear. At night, Crane and Voris hired technicians to project a version of the Aurora Borealis on the underside of a glacier at the back of the exhibit.163

Nancy Columbia, born at the World’s Columbian Exposition, accompanied this confederation of Inuit, too. Since her birth, she had spent three-quarters of her life touring the United States at world’s fairs and other entertainment venues. She was the beginning of a new generation of Inuit and broader indigenous performers, like the famous Esther Deer, also known as Princess White Deer, who became famous film actors but began their entertainment careers in exposition environments. Columbia was elected “Queen of the Fair” at the 1909 Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition, beating out a white woman, and later married Ray Melling. She appeared in the wildly successful The Way of the Eskimo (1911) as the star, billed as Nancy Enutseak, her mother’s name. Except for the three years she spent in Labrador after 1893 as a young child, she and some combination of her family appeared in an exposition or ethnographic exhibit every year through 1909 when the group transitioned to film. In the next decade, she starred in nineteen films, mostly with the Selig Company, later writing her own—the first of her people to do so.

Well educated and eloquent, she surprised visitors who mostly knew her as a “beauty” with her passion for advocating for her people and their way of life. Even in 1904, at a mere eleven years old, she attracted copious attention, and became a crowd favorite along with her team of sled dogs.164

The Pike offered a complicated racial fantasy where fairgoers could shed the burdensome scientific finaglings of the likes of McGee or Skiff, and instead immerse themselves in the most pleasing versions of American and colonial myths. Here not only were Indians given their low tier in society, but so were the Irish, Moors, the Germans, the Boers, and more. No placard described how each neatly fit into the spectrum of civilization, and the Pike’s layout, unlike Chicago’s Midway Plaisance, did not progress from lowest to highest social evolution. No convenient planning helped visitors order their experiences in the entertainment zone, as the LPE governing body saw little reason to do so. Their goal was to pile in as many exhibits as possible to create the largest return on investment. McGee, on the other hand, attempted to organize his favorites like the Esquimaux Village, Fair Japan, Cummins’s Wild West, Mysterious Asia, and the Gates of Jerusalem into his evolutionary scheme. Overall, his exhibit and the Philippine Village a mile away represented savagery, while the Pike was an exercise in barbarism and early (or lower) civilization. In providing his views in fair literature, he made sure his ideas reached Pikers and expanded the scope of anthropology’s role in the LPE. Samuel McCowan, however, remained largely consistent in his dislike of the Pike’s vision of indigenous America. The

fascination with Indian “backwardness” threatened his “true” exhibit of the modern Indian.\textsuperscript{165}

Reformers like McCowan believed these exhibits (perhaps rightly), even McGee’s Anthropological Village, dehumanized America’s indigenous wards. McCowan’s very presence as McGee’s “assistant” (although fencing partner may be more accurate) was a compromise BIA Commissioner Jones forced to avoid yet another scientifically endorsed Wild West Show. The “demoralizing…and utterly subversive” influence of these shows and exhibitions had on Indian wards who saw the opportunity to make a decent wage encouraged Natives under BIA control to flee the “moral” influence of Uncle Sam. The experiences turned otherwise upright, educated Indians into “utterly ruined” individuals, incapable of living “by honest and legitimate means.” The outside world was “far more degrading” than the reservation, and on reservations of “better class,” Indians did not leave to join shows. Most of this is misguided hyperbole and an attempt through drawn out rhetoric to reestablish dominance over a dispersing people. Shows and exhibits did, however, misrepresent their indigenous subjects before a white, and thus powerful, audience. When viewing Indians on the Pike, fairgoers knew nothing of “the real life and thought that are back of it all,” with interpreters, misleading pamphlets and spielers, or their own bias leading them to view indigenous peoples as dying, pathetic, or incapable. For McCowan and the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ exhibit at the summit of the anthropology hill, the goal was to subvert these insidious assumptions, and replace them with the future possibility of American indigeneity as dominant culture dictated.\textsuperscript{166}


II. The “Up-to-Date,” Educated Indian

Commissioner Jones installed Samuel McCowan as W. J. McGee’s assistant chief of the Anthropology Department with the help of Frederick J. V. Skiff, the director of the Chicago Field Museum (a relic of the WCE) and LPE exhibits. Still atoning for the Omaha Indian Congress, Jones wanted to mitigate the influence of anthropology on the representation of American Indians at the LPE. All previous attempts to display the success of the “civilizing” process had failed to garner the same interest exhibits of savagery had achieved, and McCowan was responsible for placing the benevolence of the US government front and center. His plan involved juxtaposing traditional Indians—“self-evident problems”—working with “authentic and commercially viable art” with a fully functioning Indian school—“the solution.” In order to receive any contracts for American Indian performers, the LPE also had to consent to McCowan having final say and control over all Indian exhibitors at the fair. This threw a wrench in McGee and McCowan’s professional relationship. McGee needed Indians of his choice to successfully illustrate his theory of social evolution, but McCowan “believed in the inevitability of assimilation” and attempted to thwart efforts to depict Indians as backward or uncivilized. To soothe McGee’s wounded ego, Secretary of the Interior Ethan Hitchcock told McCowan to choose acceptable Indians for the anthropologist, and LPE organizers gave McGee extra funds to recruit international examples of primitive “types.”

An experienced BIA official, McCowan came to the LPE from the Chilocco Indian School where he served as superintendent. He had spent the past decades working in various reservation day schools and commanded at Chilocco a 9,000 acre site, with 70 teachers, 700 students, 1,000 cattle, and 500 pigs. Even with his hefty resume, McCowan encountered serious

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167 Parezo and Fowler, 55-61.
hurdles in constructing the government exhibit. The physical building was of government design, and somewhat inevitably, suffered from poor construction. Completed in January 1904, the leaks in the roof caused the plaster on the second floor (where the students were to be quartered) to fall in huge chunks. McCowan requested LPE maintenance fix the issue, but they refused on the grounds of it being a government-constructed building, and thus they were not responsible for repairs. With minimal grading and a lack of sewers—despite LPE promises—the building flooded as well. With a $60,000 initial budget, the project hemorrhaged money. In an attempt to save money, McCowan requested older male students arrive early to complete the needed repairs to the building, promising room and board. The St. Louis Building Trades Council, however, had an agreement with the LPE that disallowed nonunion labor, forcing McCowan to pay the students a union wage. He subtracted room and board and told them to work “all day, every day to get any money,” but the students did pocket some of the wages in the end.168

McGee also contributed to the blood-letting in McCowan’s budget. Behind his back, McGee promised multiple delegations of “old” Indians funds to attend the fair, eventually creating a $40,000 deficit for McCowan. The BIA as well failed to tell him the LPE Government Building would feature a separate Indian Service exhibit under the direction of a “Miss Cook” with the assistance of Alice Fletcher. Fletcher by now was a renowned reformer and anthropologist, having run the BIA’s 1898 and 1901 exhibits. Cook and McCowan wrote to the same agents requesting examples of Indian pupils’ schoolwork, creating confusion. Eventually, McCowan started requesting agents send anything and everything, and he and Cook would sort through it once it arrived, hoping to receive anything useable. Cook’s exhibit, however, was often overlooked in the shadow of the immense Indian School. Richard Pratt decided that he too

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168 Parezo and Fowler, 63-4.
would disrupt McCowan’s efforts. Offended that he was not offered McCowan’s post, he berated Commissioner Jones and McCowan for “trying to perpetuate the past” and caving to the will of ethnologists, his sworn enemies.169

Perhaps Pratt had a point. McGee referred to McCowan’s students as “counterfeit Caucasians” but saw their value in representing the “evolutionary stops of progress—from timid, halting ignorance toward confident knowledge and competence.” Even better, the fair offered “the whole world in a small space” where indigenous or otherwise could play “traveler” for a time. McCowan dreamed that in his “Hall of Revelation,” fairgoers might see Indians as “ordinarily endowed physically, mentally, spiritually; that they are not abnormal in any sense.” According to the Indian School Journal published daily on the Indian School printing press, he succeeded. One visitor explained “I have always thought a good Indian was a dead one. After going through [the exhibit] and seeing what has been done, I am fully convinced that I was wrong.” This particular blurb echoed verbatim the sentiments of organizers from Chicago and Omaha,

169 Parezo and Fowler, 62-4, 68.
making it difficult to take it as a true candid comment, but the *ISJ* consistently printed similar comments. Visitors were shocked to find young Indian girls serving tea and baking delicious confections or to observe male students at work on the printing press, the carpentry and blacksmithing shop, or other industrial demonstrations. The Indian School showed the new generation of indigenous Americans “living industrial lives.” In 1904, “the time [was] not far distant when a majority of the Indians [would] be self-supporting and and [sic] self-respecting citizens.” English literacy among BIA-controlled tribes had doubled since 1887, as had the use of “citizens’ dress” and the number of families farming allotments. More than 25,000 Indian students were enrolled in BIA schools. In McCowan’s exhibit, “Old Indians” working in their toil across from the “honest” work of “new” Indians worked to provide a “subliminal object lesson” which needed little explanation. According to Ida Little Pifer, a student in the printing press room, the juxtaposition “tells the whole story.”

In order to achieve the best visual impact, McCowan designed the enormous model school to feature Indian classrooms and displays along one side of the main corridor with traditional Indian artisans in booths practicing and selling their wares on the opposite length. This allowed visitors to see both examples simultaneously while keeping the old and new segregated. In the photograph of the Pima basket-makers, visible in the background are large signs designating the domestic sciences division, including a kitchen, laundry, seamstress workshop, and dining room. While Effa Rhodes and Amy Enos plied their traditional craft, their daughters were hard at work baking, sewing, and serving white visitors—or at least that was the desired effect. In the photograph, visible is the dehumanization of Rhodes and Enos. One blurred spectator hangs his arm into what can only charitably be described as a pen. While intent on their

work, they and other demonstrators endured taunts and insults as to their intelligence, often under the assumption they did not understand English. The ISJ printed a *St. Louis Republic* piece stating there was a “touch of the pathetic” to the traditional Indians, described as “broken…his ambition…dead.” The traditional Indian lived “almost a prison life” afraid to adopt the “scientific” conveniences of plumping, wall paper, etc, watching the world change “with fear and apprehension.” The *St. Louis Globe Democrat* described the scene within the building with a metaphor for the vanishing Indian:

> From one booth comes the aimless, monotonous beating of a skin-covered, hollow log, and the droning of “ai-ai-hai!” but both are drowned by the ring of hammer upon anvil from where a young Indian builds a useful farm wagon…The capability for all this expert work is developed in a short school life which shows the latent energy and capacity that have but waited the call to rise in mighty upheaval and make of the younger Indian generation a quickening leaven to lift the great inert mass of the race.  

The “droning” of tradition gave way to the “useful” new skills acquired in Uncle Sam’s great Indian institutions. Indigenous peoples in the building found themselves again entangled in binary views of authenticity. Visitors arrived wanting to see blood thirsty savages like those on the Pike and often left disappointed. Others believed the BIA’s project a failure, and “the Indian [was] just like he always was—you can’t change him.”

BIA schools, however, were not interested in providing a white education for Indians. The government worked on a curriculum of “practical education” in labor-oriented fields like domestic sciences, farming, and skilled craftsmanship. In the classrooms, girls sewed doll clothing, baked apparently delicious donuts, and took in laundry while boys demonstrated new skills in animal husbandry, wagon-making (of which they sold several), and furniture building.

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The male students were also “loaned” all over the fair to make repairs, and because of the union agreement with the LPE, made excellent wages. The girls working in the dining room were so popular, organizers had to limit the meals available to visitors to a simple tea in order to accommodate the explosion of interest. Even so, the girls made excellent tips (though they were technically not allowed) to earn spending money for the rest of the fair. While the exhibit was a functioning school, complete with daily classes, drills, and pseudo-military discipline, with the little free time they had, indigenous students did see the rest of the fair. Most of the time these outings occurred under the direct supervision of McCowan and other teachers in order to control what and whom the students came into contact. Some students snuck out at night to visit the Pike and other concessions, with three boys running away (a common reservation protest) during the fair.  

Around 150 students from a variety of schools and tribes attended the St. Louis fair, with at least three-quarters remaining for the duration, with the rest attending for the summer. McCowan paid none of his charges—neither students (aside from the boys working to finish the building’s construction) nor traditional craftspeople earned a wage from the BIA or LPE budget. Because of Commissioner Jones’ crusade against “Show Indians,” McGee and McCowan could only offer pay in extraordinary circumstances to American Indians like Geronimo, but otherwise could promise only to pay for transportation, craft materials, and food, with the opportunity to earn money from selling handmade souvenirs. From these sales, however, McCowan collected a five to fifteen cent tax from each indigenous craftsperson in the Indian School building not affiliated with a school. McCowan invited Emma Johnson’s (Pottawatomie) Pima and Maricopa kindergarten class to the fair to initial success. At first McCowan planned for the students to

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173 Parezo and Fowler, 146-9, 157-8.
demonstrate their skills only in the cooler mornings, but because of their immense popularity later added an afternoon time slot. By July, however, the sweltering heat and poor living conditions for the young children took its toll. Mary Thomas, one of the students, died from an unspecified illness, and Emma Johnson, who participated in the 1893 model school, demanded to take the eleven remaining students home to avoid an epidemic.174

Even as McCowan and Commissioner Jones decried the influence of the “Show Indian” career, the Indian School exhibit relied upon the performative skills of the students. Pupils gave recitals, recitations, and daily parades in their school uniforms. McCowan organized a band to compete with the popular Carlisle band and athletic competitions between Indian school sports teams and local teams, mostly notably the undefeated Ft. Shaw girl’s basketball team. In order to help McCowan create his Indian band, one agent tried to entice Andres Moya, a painter working in Old Albuquerque for twelve dollars a week, to leave his job for an unpaid summer in St. Louis playing the cornet. Despite having achieved the assimilation and success that was the stated objective of the BIA’s Uniform Course of Study, the agent persuaded Moya and several others to give up their jobs to aid in assembling the band. The program’s most popular song was titled “The War Dance” and mixed European instruments with indigenous musical tradition to great effect. Here the musicians in McCowan’s band performed their evolving understanding of their indigeneity, but were arguably more exploited than the performers on the Pike who at least earned their own wages. For the BIA’s band, McCowan made sure each musician had “proven Indian ancestry” and were “visibly red.” They also had to be able to read music, and be sober, reliable, diligent, and “agree not to run away.” Other bands like the Haskell Indian Band under the direction of Dennison Wheelock, the Wyandotte Boarding School Band, and the Carlisle

174 Parezo and Fowler, 144,150-1.
Indian School Band all gave regular performances, with Wheelock’s group combining popular, classical, and indigenous music in their shows. The Haskell spectacle even included war whoops and native dancing.\textsuperscript{175}

Caught up in the thought of making his exhibit the most popular on the grounds, McCowan courted the idea of bringing Hopi priests to perform the Snake Dance—albeit a more “authentic” version than that performed daily in the Cliff-dwellers Exhibit. He “justified reversing his position” by arguing the exposure to the LPE for the Hopi and the opportunity to perform the Snake Dance under BIA supervision rather in the wilds of the Southwest would be of immeasurable benefit. The white missionaries in the Hopi territory, however, were scandalized and convinced Commissioner Jones to abandon the plan. In a sense, McCowan replaced the popular Indian dances and pagan ceremonies (still performed in the Anthropology Village, but outside his purview) with new performances of musical and athletic accomplishment. Attempts to organize a male baseball team fell through, but the Ft. Shaw basketball team came and dominated every athletic competition they entered.\textsuperscript{176}

The Ft. Shaw Blues arrived in St. Louis on 14 June 1904. The eleven-woman team spent the first few weeks touring the exposition, much to the amusement of lookers-on. Delighted in their “ecstatic little shrieks of ‘O look! look!’” the white attendees had a patronizing first impression of the team. Over the course of the coming months, however, the Blues proved themselves as fierce athletes. Their first games were against the team from Chilocco, held twice weekly, of which only a handful were not shut-outs. Later, playing an “all-star girl’s team” in Fargo, Ft. Shaw won 36-0. Spectators were entranced with the Ft. Shaw Blues’ “skill in pass and

\textsuperscript{175} Moses, 158-60; Parezo and Fowler, 154-7; “Haskell Indian Band,” \textit{LPE Daily Official Program}, 16 June 1904, 5.  
\textsuperscript{176} Moses, 160; Parezo and Fowler, 159.
throwing” and doubted “if even one of the young men’s teams of Fargo would have fared much better.” Even with this dominating win, however, reporters still referred to them as “pretty maidens,” suggesting their attractiveness was “undoubtedly” what attracted the crowds. On the first and third of July, they played the Illinois and Missouri state champs respectively, winning both games. Later in the month, 46 Indian School students accompanied the team to O’Fallon High School whose girls’ team was the best in southern Illinois. Played at the Bellville County Fairgrounds to benefit the local YMCA, the Blues came out on top 14-3. Two members of the St. Louis girls’ team were avid fans and accompanied the team as well, declaring “they can’t be beaten. They haven’t a poor player on the team.”

Following their success, Philip Stremmel organized an alumnae team of former Missouri and Illinois champions to take on the Blues in a three-game “Championship of the World’s Fair.” The first game was a 24-2 defeat for the alumnae team where they “met their Waterloo,” as the Indian School Journal proudly reported, “when they came in contact with our Indian maidens.” Visitors speculated they were “fully capable of defeating any team in the United States,” male or female. On 17 September 1904, the alumnae team met the Ft. Shaw Blues of Montana at the court outside the Indian School Exhibit, and, once again, the BIA team defeated the white team. The eleven-person team from a reservation school in the remote reaches of Montana had defeated the best the St. Louis area had to offer in a mere two games. McCowan later won a grand prize from the LPE commission for the Blues’ performance, but the team received no such recognition. Nevertheless, the team went on a multi-state tour following the LPE and several students received full scholarships to Vassar College, the elite women’s institution in New York.

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The Blues are also an oft forgotten chapter in the history of Indian athletic performance. They belong in the same lists as Vine Deloria, Billy Mills, and Jim Thorpe, but are frequently overlooked in favor of their male counterparts. American Indian contributions to the US athletic culture is undeniable, having coopted lacrosse from an identical indigenous sport, and claiming the Olympic accomplishments of Jim Thorpe, Billy Mills, and the latest indigenous Olympians like Ashton Locklear and Rickie Fowler as part of American athletic domination.178

Despite their best efforts, the BIA and Samuel McCowan unwittingly created a new transactional Show Indian career. Perhaps being a domestic student in a model school was not as lucrative as touring with the Esquimaux Village or the Wild West Shows, but the participants still earned money as part of the process of display. Visitors rewarded them for their compelling performance of Indian education. The athletic displays the school sponsored were just a BIA-endorsed performance. The Ft. Shaw team may not have appeared in traditional costume, but turning their athletic feats into an attraction echoed the Wild West performances which showcased foot races and indigenous sporting between Indians. Even in the bands, the directors capitalized on America’s love of the traditional Indian, performing works like “An Indian War Dance” mixing a celebration of the old and new into a single event. In the end, McCowan’s Indian school objectified and dehumanized his Indian wards in distinct ways from the Pike concessions, but to similar effect. Instead of giving his charges the chance to showcase themselves as multidimensional individuals, most of the faces blurred together, now understood as valuable to dominant society for their training in menial jobs the growing white middle and upper classes sought to avoid. Indians were now maids, carpenters, and wagon-makers—a trade

swiftly becoming obsolete with the advent of the automobile. In the Indian School, Indian
students had not “caught up” to whites, but instead continued to lag behind, filling the gap left
with the Gilded Era upward mobility of white society.¹⁷⁹

III. “Chief McGee and His Wards”

In the course of creating the great racial show at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, W. J.
McGee earned several names. Fair paraphernalia referred to him as “Chief McGee” while a
cartoon in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch called him the “Overlord of the Savage World.” His
assistant McCowan had few kind words to say about him, as did his fellow ethnologists who
found him increasingly detrimental to the science. The Anthropology Village in St. Louis was
McGee’s opportunity to rectify his flagging prestige. He touted the exhibit as having all the
“elements of great adventure” and an opportunity for “mutual observation” between the races.
His vision capitalized on the “innate and intuitive curiosity which renders alien races so
attractive” to draw in visitors, but rarely found the savages in “aboriginal perfection,” free from
the contaminating influence of civilization. Many Indigenous Americans had to re-clothe
themselves in the “blanket” in order to satisfy the rabid interest of white fairgoers. Performers
were objectified and disrespected, forced to put up with intrusive habits of visitors who often
treated the indigenous dwellings as circus attractions, moving in and out without so much as a
glance to its inhabitants. Even this maltreatment, however, served as an opportunity for
performers to assert themselves. So too did they declare their reality and authenticity to an
astounded audience who believed them pacified. Since 1893, however, life for indigenous people

¹⁷⁹ “Haskell Indian Band”; Moses, 166-8.
had transformed, and here, in the most visible of places, tribal groups from across the globe capitalized on the attention and opportunity to further their own cultural projects.\(^{180}\)

In order to gather these disparate peoples together, McGee and the LPE financed several international expeditions. Technically all indigenous peoples within United States territorial boundaries (aside from Alaskan Natives who had special status) were under the direct control of the BIA and thus supposed to be only McCowan’s responsibility. McGee, however, flouted the government directive, organizing his own recruitment parties to visit the Pawnee, Osage, Wichita, Arapahos, Zunis, Hopis, and various Indian celebrities like Quanah Parker, Chief Joseph, and the famous Pomo artists Mary and William Benson. Using LPE and government funds, McGee sent expeditions into the Congo to find Pygmies, Patagonia to come back with Tehuelches or the “Patagonian Giants,” the northern island of Japan to find the “Hairy Ainu,” and Canada and Mexico to recruit Nootkas, Kwakiutl (Kwakw̱a’ḵw), and Cocopas. Unfortunately, McGee was unwilling to offer wages to participants (which he was allowed only if they were not BIA wards) as doing so would mean scaling back his exhibit. Instead he could only offer to pay for travel and “maintenance” at the LPE, plus any money earned from the sale of a group’s handicrafts or souvenirs. For some, this was enough enticement, but for others, like the experienced performers the Kwakw̱a’ḵw who had received twenty dollars per month compensation in 1893 for lost fishing time, they took a great deal more convincing.\(^{181}\)

Eventually the Kwakw̱a’ḵw did agree to attend after McGee promised to purchase a Nootka house, nine bundles of woven mats, and Dr. Atlieu’s sea-going canoe for a total of two-hundred dollars. Dr. Atlieu was a shaman and “literature man” whom Dr. Charles F. Newcombe


\(^{181}\) Parezo and Fowler, 73-99.
recruited for McGee. Newcombe, part of McGee’s “‘old-boy’ network,” was already working in the Vancouver area, studying Haida totem poles for the Smithsonian. McGee especially wanted an example of a Vancouver Island clan house, totem poles, and house panels, as well as performers of the “unusually light skinned” tribal group. Excited as he was by the ritual scarring visible for many Kwakwaka’wakw, as well as their incredible artwork, McGee refused to pay performers a wage. The Kwakwaka’wakw were Canadian subjects, living just across the border from Seattle, so McGee was allowed to offer them a wage, but was unwilling to sacrifice any part of his budget to ensure their presence. Dr. Atlieu, and his party of five artisans were the only Kwakwaka’wakw in the Anthropology Village as a result. Even their carefully deconstructed house and Atlieu’s canoe failed to make it to the LPE, left unclaimed at the St. Louis railway station, although they appear to have constructed a new communal house on the grounds.182

McGee sought out indigenous peoples from northern Mexico, seeing them as some of the most primitive on his scale of civilization. Situated at “the Dawn of the Stone Age,” the Cocopas from northern Mexico, took three months of convincing on the part of E. C. Cushman, Jr. to entice them to the LPE fairgrounds. Cushman failed altogether, however, to obtain any Seri participants. Having been imprisoned in a work camp near Hermosillo, forced to work for Sonoran landowners, the Seri had escaped and hid themselves in the wilderness, just as they were when previously McGee, “fixated on the ‘primitive’ Seris,” had gone to study them. At one point, McGee “seriously” considered a military expedition to find and/or liberate the Seris but decided the project was too costly. Cushman then focused his efforts on recruiting Cocopa participants, which McGee decided to use as “proxies” for the elusive Seris. The Cocopa leaders

182 Parezo and Fowler, 88-91; McGee, “Anthropology,” 42; Bennett, 677.
expressed little interest, concerned as they were that such an extended stay would interfere with their annual cycles of harvest, fishing, and hunting. Half a year without pay was a long time away and could seriously disrupt the wintering preparations of the Cocopa. Other Indian agents and leaders in the United States stated similar concerns. More than one also pointed out the irony of the Indian donning the “blanket” once again to perform in the ethnological congress. After much negotiation, Cushman set out for the LPE on 27 April 1904, with twenty-two Cocopa in tow and two wagonloads of housing materials, tattooing equipment, grasses for baskets, and cooking utensils. Of particular interest was the height difference between male and female Cocopa. The Department of Exploitation, responsible for fair publicity, emphasized “the men being among the tallest and the women among the shortest of the North American Indian.” The Cocopa men were compared to the delegation from Patagonian, the Tehuelches “Giants,” and the women were said to resemble the Pygmies from the Congo in stature.183

Dr. George Dorsey, another “old-boy” of McGee’s, working with James Mooney helped bring contingents of Pawnee, Wichita, Arapaho, and Cheyenne, all of whom McGee authorized behind McCowan’s back with McCowan’s budget. McGee invited the Osage, Lakota and Dakota, Navajo, Kickapoo, and Pueblo to construct their native dwellings around the bottom of Indian Hill. He also sponsored a failed expedition to the Hopi and Zuni in an attempt to recruit performers of the Snake Dance. When the expedition failed, McGee decided to extend the legitimizing rhetoric of anthropology to the Cliff-dwellers Exhibit on the Pike. Chief Joseph and Quanah Parker received offers to work the LPE as paid participants, but Chief Joseph, after nearly a year of negotiations, died in September 1904, even though the World’s Fair Bulletin promised him daily through November. Quanah Parker intended to use the fair as a political

183 Parezo and Fowler, 76-8; McGee, “Anthropology,” 41; Bennett, 677.
platform to advocate for better treatment of his people and potentially run for Senate, but family illness prevented his attendance. And while Geronimo did attend and was certainly a celebrity, that success belonged to McCowan, not McGee. The only celebrities McGee did manage to recruit were the Bensons, expert Pomo craftspeople. Mary was a skilled basket weaver, making baskets as small as a pinhead and William fashioned beads from stone, carved pipes, and created expert featherwork. The Bensons were adept at negotiating with ethnographers and entertainers and agreed to come only if they kept all the proceeds from the sales of their crafts, on top of pay for room and board and transportation. Other indigenous artisans could expect to pay as much as 25 percent of their sales to the LPE, Indian School, or Anthropology Department.

As the “rare and little known, dark-skinned Native peoples” assembled in St. Louis, many arrived to find an incomplete exhibit, with the early arrivals like Geronimo, the Benson, Acomas, Ainus, Cocopas, and Tehuelches selling crafts on the porch of the still unfinished Indian School.

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184 Parezo and Fowler, 86-8, 93-5; Bennett, 677.
McGee continued to rework his exhibit to the last minute, causing delays in construction and organization. The sewage system the LPE promised never materialized, leaving the performers in squalid conditions. When the indigenous residents complained, they were often scapegoated, as McCowan and McGee reverted to racial stereotypes to justify inaction. When the Arapaho contacted McCowan to express their concerns, McCowan explained they were unhappy with the rationing system, wishing to “help themselves” to the food stores, playing into the trope of the greedy or lazy Indian. In truth, the Arapaho, Wichita, and Pawnee wanted to leave the exposition because of low craft sales and the noise from the Philippine Village. The Pawnee also claimed the Igorots stole and ate the Pawnee working and pet dogs for their famed “dog feasts.” All Pawnee and Wichita performers eventually left by July 19 because of the issues with sanitation, leaving behind only their houses.  

   Poor sanitation was not the only issue performers and artisans faced. One of the most intense drawbacks to being part of a living exhibition was the “visitors’ insatiable curiosity and boorishness.” Fairgoers rarely respected the physical boundaries of a dwelling, let alone its inhabitants. Relying on stereotypes, they were often rude and insulting, forcing McGee to distribute “courtesy lists” at the entrance to the exhibit and to newspapers, but the crowds continued to treat indigenous participants as “freaks in a carnival sideshow who existed only for their amusement.” Newspaper coverage did little to help, referring to Indians as “pathetic” or “simple,” making it difficult to see beyond “exotic difference” in order to understand indigenous peoples also had feelings. The Indian School Journal believed the “apparently sane and educated visitors” ought to “feel ashamed of their own race” for the intrusive and “absurd questions” directed at the “Indian, whom we are supposed to be trying to civilize.” Mary Benson, the famed

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185 Parezo and Fowler, 97, 109, Map by Sternberg on 101.
and accomplished basket weaver, was asked at one point if a visitor could feel her hair. When she reluctantly complied, the visitor was astounded to find it “not much coarser” than her own.186

In another instance, an Indian woman came running towards her dwelling, “behind her a white woman sped in pursuit.” Arriving first, the Indian woman slammed her door closed while the white woman stood outside crying, “Can I look at your baby, can I look at your baby?” When the Indian mother failed to emerge with her child, the other woman walked away in a huff, decrying “the savages!” The problem of intrusive visitors or “rubbering” as it was called often revolved around picture taking, which was a main source of income for many groups like the Pawnee and Geronimo’s band. Geronimo had several male relatives stand guard to ensure pictures were paid for, and a Tehuelche leader’s “main occupation” became destroying the cameras of those taking unwelcome photographs. The St. Louis Republic claimed the “big men tired of posing” smashed the camera in question because of an aversion to standing still, and a “serious altercation” was avoided only because of the decisive action of their interpreter. More likely, the “overzealous photographer” ignored the explicit requests of the Tehuelches, which most other participants also asked, to receive remuneration for their posing. Two Wichita boys clung to the coat of a photographer as he walked away without paying the promised fee. They “valiantly clung in spite of all the visitor’s efforts to get away,” until the boys’ mother “rescued” the man and the “boys received damages.” The Igorots in the Philippine Village, too, refused to pose without compensation and a copy of the photograph.187

Following the mob of visitors on July 4, McGee and McCowan began requiring each

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photographer, amateur or professional, to acquire “permits, pay a small fee, ask permission of the participants, and pay them.” Most complied with the first two requirements but ignored the requests for pay and permission for and from participants. While well intentioned, the permits resulted in indiscriminate picture taking without respecting the desires of the performers. Sam P. Hyde, one such amateur photographer, wrote in his diary of his experience stalking “an old savage in all his glory of bead and feather” in order to take his photo. He thought, “I’ll shoot him if I lose my scalp for it.” Even knowing the aversion the performers had to having their picture taken, Hyde was determined in his “enterprise” to photograph the “fine specimen.” Snapping the photo and escaping as the Indian uttered “grunts like a hog” at Hyde’s retreating form, it was not until he developed the photograph that he realized his subject had removed his feathered headdress. The headdress marked Hyde’s subject as distinctly Indian, and, as it seems he knew Hyde was photographing him, the Indian removed the prized object from the shot, ruining the photo’s value.188

The Cocopa also had an altercation with a photographer following the posting of the July 4 rules. The delegation posted a sign requiring a fifty-cents fee for a photograph, and when a man failed to pay the posted price, Annie Flynn and Thomas Moore seized the camera. The offending photographer called on the Jefferson Guard, the official policing organization for the LPE, to confront Flynn and Moore. The two Cocopa stood their ground, however, and McGee supported them. The sign clearly stated the required fee and the photographer had violated that transactional agreement. Having acquired the Cocopa delegation to represent the earliest annals of the Stone Age, McGee in this instance acknowledged their legitimacy in a capitalist exchange. The altercation allowed the Cocopa, as well as other groups struggling to keep the unruly mass

188 Parezo and Fowler, 273; Hyde quoted in Parezo and Fowler, 270.
of white fairgoers in check, to gain legitimacy in a white-dominated space. The “contested terrain” of the village was contested from both sides, with indigenous participants succeeding in various ways. The seizure of cameras or demand for compensation for photographs were not the only forms of agency the village performers expressed, as anthropologists Nancy Parezo and Don Fowler argue:

Native people managed daily life by using role inversions, pranks, ironic language, poise, authority, educative speeches directed at officials and fairgoers, defiance, humor, and compassion.¹⁸⁹

The breadth and depth of North American Indigenous agency at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition could fill several volumes. As in Chicago and Omaha, indigenous people demonstrated their flexibility and ingenuity in navigating oppressive institutions to the greatest effect. The fair was an opportunity to express political dissatisfaction, reconnect with family, build new relationships, adopt new practices and technologies, and perform culturally significant ceremonies. McGee’s recruits were “in no case…the compliant individuals of [his] dreams.”¹⁹⁰

According to McCowan, Geronimo, now attending his third world’s fair before moving on to appear in Theodore Roosevelt’s inauguration parade, was “not more than a blatant blackguard, living on a false reputation.” Despite his contempt for Geronimo as a person, McCowan knew he would be an irresistible draw for the exhibit. Because Geronimo lived under guard at Fort Sill, it was McCowan, not McGee who recruited him, as Captain Sayre would only agree to allow the delegation to leave if under McCowan’s supervision. Geronimo still negotiated one hundred dollars monthly pay and the right to keep the proceeds from the sale of his crafts and autographs. McCowan hoped to contract the former Chiricahua Apache

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¹⁸⁹ Parezo and Fowler, 268.
¹⁹⁰ Parezo and Fowler, 268, 274-282.
revolutionary for sixty-five dollars, but the Cummins’s Wild West offered him one-hundred, forcing McCowan to match their offer. The myth of Geronimo, however, often failed to hold in the face of the “feeble old man” fairgoers encountered. Many hoped to find the embodiment of the fierce savage who eluded capture for so many years and remained under military arrest when all other Indian leaders had since been released. The “greatest war chief…cruel and vindictive almost beyond belief” appeared before the world, as he had in Omaha and the Buffalo fair in 1901, in a western suit and subtle regalia. Visitors were disappointed when he refused to sing on command or offer a war cry for their entertainment, but still flocked to his booth in the Indian School to obtain his signature or purchase his tiny bow and arrow sets and miniature canoes.\(^1^9^1\)

Geronimo also found opportunity for interpersonal growth and connection among the tribes collected in St. Louis. Most notably, he reunited with his daughter Lena whom he had not seen since she was an infant. When reunited, white reporters observed Geronimo forgot his “dignity…with tears coursing down his cheeks” as he greeted his daughter. As her train pulled into the station, the “enraged old chieftain” was replaced with “a weepy, happy old man.” Geronimo was “getting civilized.” On another occasion, Geronimo and Oscar Norton led a group of teachers, old Indians, Patagonians, and Ainus to the Pike to view a performance in the Boer War concession. Often he “treated the girls of the sewing class to a serenade” on the instruments he built out of bamboo at the LPE. Later, he accompanied an Indian School outing of 150 students to a special exhibit in the Nebraska theater in the Palace of Agriculture featuring moving pictures. He returned frequently. As much as McCowan attempted to limit the interaction between pupils and “old” Indians, Geronimo was an exception to the rule. He moved

freely among various tribal groups from around the world due to his intelligence and notoriety, using both to his advantage. As much as he represented the pacification of American Indians, he also demonstrated their ingenuity and refusal to be confined. 192

Friendships developed between the Ainu, Cocopa, and Tehuelche, as well as between various American tribal groups. The Lakota in the Anthropology Village held a welcome ceremony for the Dakota working for the Cummins’s Wild West on the Pike. In fact, Pike workers often visited those in the village and vice versa establishing intimate friendships. The St. Louis Republic reported the story of Yellow Hair and Roan Chief “burying the hatchet” as the Pawnee and Lakota leaders shook hands at the LPE, which, to add to the sensationalism, the Republic reported as the first handshake between the Pawnee and Lakota. The “feud” between the two tribes dated back centuries, and the United States as it attempted to pacify the two groups, played up the conflict to weaken both groups. Their unity at the fair may have appeared as a nice show to observers, but for the Pawnee and Lakota, it was a significant moment in their history. 193

With the public zeroed in on the display, other individuals used the platform as an opportunity to advocate for their own rights. The Osage, who McGee pursued because of their status as the original occupants of St. Louis, were part of the “civilized” Indians in Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma). Governor Ohlo-ho-wallah led his delegation to St. Louis at seventy-five years old, bringing the best and brightest of his tribe. Fred Lookout, a Carlisle graduate and later spiritual leader and principal chief of his people, was allowed to give speeches

193 Bennett, 677; “A Day of Visits,” Indian School Journal, 11 July 1904; “Indian Tribes Bury the Tomahawk,” St. Louis Republic, 11 May 1904; Parezo and Fowler, 130; “Yellow Hair and Roan Chief Bury the Hatchet,” Illustration, St. Louis Republic, 29 May 1904.
during recital time slots in the Indian School auditorium. Most of his speeches, however, railed against the abuses of allotment—a program the very existence of the Indian School was supposed to bolster—and the need for the Osage to retain the rights to the mineral deposits on their reservation land. Lookout and other Osage delegates would wander the anthropology department grounds engaging visitors in diplomatic and political discussions, embarrassing McCowan and McGee. Ohlo-ho-wallah also embarrassed organizers and fairgoers alike when he employed white workers to construct the Osage grass house and ramadas. McGee attempted to dismiss them as no longer “ethnographically pure,” and thus, not true Indians. The Osage, however, were some of the most proactive in preserving their cultural traditions and were excellent patrons of other craftspeople selling their wares at the LPE. But their declarations of sovereignty soon caught the attention of the federal government. Later in August, the Osage agent issued an order “prohibiting Indians under his charge from leaving the reservation without a permit.” Their outspokenness and oil wealth continued to bring rebuke and violence well into the twentieth century.\(^{194}\)

Other Indians, like Lakota minister Scott Charges Alone, used the fair as a platform as well. Charges Alone, an ordained Episcopalian priest, used his skills not to give speeches or for polemics against American tyranny, but instead demonstrated the successful cultural adaptation of a dominant culture religious ceremony to the needs of the Lakota. Bishop Hare of South Dakota “commissioned” Charges Alone to “visit the sick and prepare persons for baptism” at the LPE, and he took it upon himself to organize a “sun service” every Sunday for the Lakota performing on the slopes of Indian Hill. While the Republic’s reporter joked, “it’s all Sioux to me,” he admitted English hymns sung in the Lakota language “greatly increased in musical

\(^{194}\) Parezo and Fowler, 118-20; Untitled, Indian School Journal, 13 August 1904.
beauty.” The weekly gathering of more than one hundred Lakota attracted the attention of other performers, with the Dakota of the Cummins show attending regularly. Charges Alone and his “sun service” represent a successful transition of an Indian whereby cultural practices are integrated into new structures, ensuring their survival under increasing dominant culture pressure.¹⁹⁵

Agency in St. Louis was not always serious like the actions of Fred Lookout, Geronimo, or Scott Charges Alone. Some participants responded to visitors’ rudeness with humor, defying the imposed cultural expectations of the masses. One of the Jicarilla Apache contingent attracted the attention of a white infant who “went to her gladly, playing with her beads and ear rings. The woman joked “she wanted to keep it, starting off down the hall with it,” frightening the mother but to the raucous laughter of those around. Another man, Jim Walker, encountered an army officer on the Pike who engaged him in elaborate sign language, to which Walker responded in perfect English. When children of indigenous performers acted up, mothers would point to the nearest visitor and say, “That bad white man will get you if you don’t shut up.” The Post-Dispatch, however, may have missed the point, calling this a reversal as “always the Indian has been held up as a bogey to scare white children,” thinking the reverse was not true of people violently ripped from their homes over generations by whites. An Indian guide for the exhibit responded when asked where Sitting Bull was in the encampment with a trite remark of “under the sod.” Each example marks a moment where an indigenous person responded with humor to painful inquiries or invasions, demonstrating their intelligence. Visitors were less surprised by

¹⁹⁵ “Full-Blooded Sioux is a Minister,” St. Louis Republic, 11 May 1904; Parezo and Fowler, 133.
the content of these encounters than they were with the ability of indigenous peoples to laugh.  

A Navajo mother Skyblue took it upon herself to ruin “the real sense and appearance of the exhibit” when, after attending the opening of the fair’s Playground of All Nations, decided her baby deserved a baby carriage. As a “world’s fair baby,” the little one had “a perfect right to the dignity of such a title,” including a modern baby carriage. She told reporters “nothing was too good” for her daughter, even as the newspaper tried to pass her desire as laziness. Skyblue was not alone in adopting modern technology and “destroying” the authenticity of the Anthropological Village. Red Cloud (Lakota) wore eyeglasses throughout the fair. Participants wore shoes, used modern cooking implements, and even used hired labor to construct their dwellings. Artisans learned from one another and the industrial processes on display at the fair to modify their production strategies, hoping to improve output. Strategic adoption became integral to individual success at the fair, and continually visitors were left wondering when they hopped off the railway, “Where is the savage Indian?”

The North American Indigenous under McGee’s purview confronted racist, sexist, and colonial stereotypes daily. Their humanity was consistently questioned or ignored on the part of visitors and organizers alike. All children who accompanied their parents to the Anthropological Village were required to attend the Indian School during the day in an attempt to ensure the “old time Indians’ days [were] numbered.” Anthropology needed indigenous survival in order to remain a viable science, but in its partnership with reformers, actively worked to quash what was most interesting (to them) in the Indian. As McGee regaled against McCowan’s “counterfeit

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197 “Proud Navajo Mother Desires to have a G-Cart for Her Papoose,” St. Louis Republic, 18 June 1904; “Living Pictures,” Indian School Journal, 1 July 1904.
Caucasians” and McCowan fired back with accusations of exploitation, however, indigenous participants consistently worked to derive and declare their own meanings. They would not be relegated to the past—imagined or otherwise. At St. Louis, they faced dominant society as a recovering, if not thriving, society, continuing to develop its many modes of cultural persistence.  

As part of the joint Indian School-Anthropological Village display, W. J. McGee hosted multiple congresses and conventions. The Women’s Temperance Union, Improved Order of Red Men, and the National Geographic Society gathered in the halls of the Anthropology Department to discuss the problems of the time. The Archaeological Institute of America drafted the first copy of the Antiquities Act of 1906 in St. Louis. These gatherings were “celebration[s] of the pure knowledge behind the technological products” of the LPE and were important in contextualizing many exhibits. The Congress of Indian Educators met at the end of June to discuss training, standardized education, and how to preserve “the best characteristics of the race.” McGee even organized the “Pan-Savage Conclave”—a congress of the native peoples of the whole fair in the central plaza, which served mostly to underline existing racial stereotypes.  

From September 19th through 25th, the LPE hosted the International Congress of Art and Science, organized and run by Simon Newcomb, McGee’s father-in-law. Touted as the “crowning achievement” of the fair, the convention was “designed to visualize science and humanistic knowledge as an integrated whole,” and featured more than two thousand attendants.

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198 Parezo and Fowler, 135.
199 Parezo and Fowler, 328-334.
and five hundred speakers, McGee among them. As McGee explained his three subcategories of anthropology (somatology, archaeology, and ethnology) and expanded on his racial theories of progress from the Stone Age to “the now maturing…Age of Power,” he was unaware his colleague Franz Boas was about to shake the very foundations of the science. Even having helped propound the racial theories of unilineal evolution in Chicago, Boas in his speech “The History of Anthropology,” argued anthropologists had done human societies a disservice in understanding each only in relation to white progress, if, in fact, progress was what was of interest in deciphering the history of mankind.200

For Samuel McCowan, Indians were becoming indistinguishable from each other with “a great and growing tendency toward amalgamation of custom and habits” between tribal groups. He argued this was a success of the BIA, but the unfolding twentieth century revealed what looked to be homogenization as persistence and cultural innovation. A visitor to the Indian School wondered if the students were happy in the work, and asked “if they enjoyed our way of living, or were forced into it.” The LPE revealed the possibility of both realities coexisting. Students may be forced to work at a printing press, but were also capable of enjoying the trade. Playing in the school band, touring with an athletic team, tourist exhibit, or anthropological village, or living alongside and within a burgeoning industrial society had the potential for living an authentic indigenous life. In the midst of ongoing oppression and violence, Indigenous North Americans were capable of constructing their own meanings and goals, and thus, exercising their own agency.201

Conclusion

The Unimagined Future

“As you know, I am keeping silent and at the same time pulling the trigger of my pen.”
Carlos Montezuma to W. G. Thompson, 1907

The vibrancy and diversity of ethnological displays at the turn of the century presented
fairgoers with a garbled set of messages relating to white supremacy, Manifest Destiny, and
industrial-capitalist imperialism. Ideas swirled about in the ideological and physical spaces of
world’s fairs about indigenous annihilation, racial determinism, and the new frontier mythology.
Gender politics, Christian morality, and labor conflicts inhabited the contested terrain of
anthropological villages, Midway and Pike concessions, and government exhibits. While
imposing, world’s fairs of the era were rarely as unified as they wished. The cohesive, utopian
message management dreamed of did not materialize in the face of political conflicts and
organizational realities. Historians of these ideological, technological, and imperial displays tend
to focus on the infighting among organizers, but often obscured in these retellings are the actions
and ideas of the objects of display. Indigenous or otherwise, the performers who attended to
display their ethnic or racial otherness are still objectified in modern retellings. Histories rely on
the racially imbued accounts of historical actors like Henry Adams, Samuel McCowan, or
Frederick Ward Putnam, and tend to treat human subjects of exhibits as single entities or objects,
even if accidentally, as their contemporaries did. The truth, as best one can reconstruct, tells a

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202 Carlos Montezuma to W. G. Thompson, Carlos Montezuma, 1907, The Carlos Montezuma Papers, Newberry
nuanced story of resistance, compliance, strategic adoption, persistence, and survival of North America’s indigenous peoples.

In the past decade, historians have begun the work of uncovering indigenous experience from the archival record and surviving traditions. The likes of Paige Raibmon and Josh Clough, as well as anthropologists like Nancy Parezo and Don Fowler, have worked to tell and interpret stories of indigenous agency at world’s fairs. Much remains to be done, however, if the humanities are to offer a more just picture of the politics of display. Previous retellings which elide the individual and collective agency of performers in world’s fair contexts have laid the groundwork for understanding the political, social, and economic motivations of fair organizers and reconstructed the framework of world’s fair ideology. This is only half of the story, and to stop here would be to perpetuate a grave injustice against America’s First Nations. The historical record, especially that most propounded in the United States, has relied on a set of myths about the frontier and American identity that serve to justify the violence of the country’s founding. In continuing to view the indigenous participants in Chicago, Omaha, St. Louis, and other world’s fairs of the era as objects, even incidentally, is to buy into myths of cultural fixity and vanishing.203

The common misunderstanding of indigenous societies as in decline following the end of the wars of westward expansion created a generation of “salvage anthropologists,” intent on documenting (or stealing) Indian culture and cultural objects before they disappeared. The original focus of American anthropology was in preserving indigenous culture for future study,

but not for future Native use. Following Wounded Knee on 29 December 1890, most Americans had little difficulty conceiving of the total annihilation of American Indians. The Seventh Cavalry’s assault on Spotted Elk’s band of Hunkpapa and Miniconjou Lakota lasted only a few minutes, but as officers lost control of their command, soldiers pursued fleeing men, women, and children into the prairie. Charles Eastman, an Indian intellectual, doctor, and future Pan-Indian leader, recalled as he searched the site for wounded, he discovered the body of a woman some three miles from Wounded Knee Creek, with a trail of other bodies leading into the grassland. This massacre was not a unique event, either. The same month as Wounded Knee, a South Dakota militia attacked the Lakota of Pine Ridge on their reservation, killing 75. The Sand Creek (1864) and Washita Massacres (1868), and many other instances of one-sided violence paint a gruesome picture of westward expansion. To understand the Indian Wars as white-only violence, however, would serve to erase the history of Indian armed resistance to settler colonialism. From the first arrival of Europeans in the Western Hemisphere, indigenous peoples fought and worked to survive expansionist violence. Despite the bold claims of the World’s Columbian Exposition, Europeans did not sweep aside the original inhabitants of the Americas like dead leaves. The destruction of the Ghost Dance revival in 1890, however, held special significance in American popular culture. An indigenous religious revival associated with the coming of an Indian savior represented a significant threat to the rising order of the West, and the Seventh Cavalry’s success conformed to the prevailing attitudes of white dominance and successful pacification of the American frontier.204

Imagining Indigenous North Americans as a disappearing race took little creativity.

While not justified, the scramble to preserve the Original American for posterity is at least understandable in this context. Most military engagements since the Civil War involved the triumph of western regiments over unruly Indian peoples, often with high death counts. War and displacement had forced Native populations into decline leading up to 1890. The science progressed in the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, salvage anthropologists employed dubious practices including stealing cultural objects in order to “protect” them. The prevailing myth of the vanishing Indian, one they reinforced with their scientific opinions, justified the forced capture of Indian culture. Often the easiest targets were graves and thus began a nefarious trade in burial objects and human remains of American Indians. At the same time, as Indians continued to exist, in spite of anthropological projections of vanishing, scientists linked the concept of decline to ethnographic purity and authenticity. This showed in the selection processes for the Chicago, Omaha, and St. Louis exhibits. In the name of authenticity, Frederick Ward Putnam at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, required the Kwakwaka’wakw to discard their Hudson Bay Company blankets and the Navajo to create woven yucca fabric clothing not used for more than two centuries. Without yucca clothing, Putnam could not display the Navajo as true Indians, and thus implied the Navajo as they existed in 1893 were not real in an ethnographic sense, having lost their distinctiveness from settler society. James Mooney, Captain William Mercer, and William J. McGee echoed Putnam’s actions at the subsequent world’s fairs. The convoluted logic argued that in adopting any vestige of white culture or technology, Indians vanished into inauthenticity, and thus were not the true Original Americans and could not claim their relics as their own.205

These fairs, at their core, created a “structure of legitimation” meant to give meaning to

205 Raibmon, Authentic Indians, 35-40.
social experience. They were the beginning of what historian Richard Slotkin conceptualizes as the industrialization of national myth making. Along with contemporary Wild West Shows, world’s fair exhibits featuring indigenous peoples helped to create the “myth-historiography” which linked the subjugation of the American wilderness and the destruction of American Indians to the “achievement of a national identity, a democratic polity, an ever-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and ‘progressive’ civilization.” In trying to explain the unique American character, world’s fairs and turn of the century entertainment set about creating “the illusion of white society’s innocence” in the story of colonization. Today, the industry of myth-making Slotkin describes exists across a broad spectrum of entertainments and other narrative processes, but in 1893, industrialized entertainment existed in print and performance. Caught up in the closing of the frontier, the end of the Indian Wars, and rapid industrialization, the WCE and its ideological heirs in Omaha and St. Louis set about the “production of memory and the creation of tradition.”

World’s fairs became “cultural technologies” that perpetuated nationalism and imperialism in this era and disseminated the myths integral to those systems. Anthropology exhibits and entertainment zones served to justify the narrative of American progress which originated on the enslavement of millions of African slaves and the violent destruction of First Nations. In order to accommodate these contradictions, popular culture—especially Wild West Shows and the Midway Plaisance and Pike in this era—created the “myth of the ‘savage war.’” The myth creates Indians “as instigators of a war of extermination,” and is best “understood as an act of psychological projection that made the Indians scapegoats for the morally troubling side

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of American expansion.” As the scapegoat, Indians were a convenient means of deflecting other social ills, like class discontent, by creating a united front in white supremacy’s struggle against the racial other.\(^{207}\)

As entertainments evolved into the twentieth century, with Wild West Shows giving way to film and the enduring genre of the Western, and popular representations of Indians retained the savagery and one-sidedness of turn of the century performances, they provided “ideological and cultural armor” to Americans. The myth of annihilation stuck, as well, since America could not be triumphant without the total defeat of the Indian menace. Since 1890, however, Indian populations have only increased in the United States. Even during the turn of the century and the Chicago, Omaha, and St. Louis fairs, Indigenous Americans were thriving in ways the popular histories cannot accommodate or sufficiently explain. Early twentieth century indigenous history is the story of the blossoming of a new form of resistance to white violence. A new class of white-educated Indians now explored the false dichotomy of civilized (pacified) and traditional (authentic) Indianness. Several individuals emerged as leaders who demonstrated the possibility of adopting white technologies or cultural practices and “still be Indian.” Writers like Zitkala-sa and Luther Standing Bear explored both the violence of their education, and their skillful negotiation of the shifting ground of indigenous relation to dominant culture. Doctors like Carlos Montezuma and Charles Eastman became powerful advocates for their people, and defy easy categorization. Eastman supported the Dawes Allotment Act and worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Both argued for assimilation policies, and were later charter members of the Society of American Indians (SAI)—the first national Indian rights organization “conceived, developed, and run by Native people themselves.” Like the stories told throughout these pages,

\(^{207}\) Slotkin, 13.
these individuals adopted white cultural forms and technologies like the novel, memoir, arena performance, and western medicine without forsaking their identities as Indians.  

A group of “Red Progressives”—most of whom were educated at institutions like Carlisle or other boarding and reservation schools—founded the Society of American Indians in 1911 in Columbus, Ohio. In order to create a forum to discuss the “pressing issues of the day” including the “intolerable condition” of American Indians as wards and the possibility of future Indian citizenship, Indian intellectuals from across the spectrum of tribal identity in America banded together. The inaugural meeting took place on October 12: Columbus Day. First celebrated in 1892 as part of the dedication of the World’s Columbian Exposition, SAI leadership deployed a “sophisticated sense of indigenous irony” as they organized events in and around Ohio State’s campus on the celebration of Columbus’s landing in the Americas. Speeches at local churches and event halls and staged photo ops for the press at iconic local sites, like a set of ancient earthen mounds, gave the events a “keen sense of indigenous performance.” In fact, performances became a central attraction of the annual SAI meetings, revealing an evolving relationship between entertainment and indigenous self-representation.

Carlos Montezuma at the 1914 annual meeting suggested creating a “scene complete with an old Indian, an interpreter, and an agent, a slice of reservation life” for the white attendees who remained largely ignorant of Indian conditions on the ground. To accompany this “entertainment,” tribal leaders gave speeches about their histories and current reservation conditions and issues, albeit after heeding the direction of SAI leadership to “tone down criticism

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209 Allen, 4; Michelle Wick Patterson, “‘Real’ Indian Songs: The Society of American Indians and the Use of Native American Culture as a Means of Reform,” *American Indian Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 44.
of government officials” and to speak “elegantly,” reflecting self-censorship. Just as Samuel McCowan at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition was concerned the “savage counterpoints” of W. J. McGee’s exhibit reinforced negative stereotypes about Indians, the SAI hoped to avoid “racist attention” or to legitimize racist assumptions. Even as indigenous people formed self-advocacy organizations like the SAI, they continued to confront prevailing views of their inherent inferiority.

The decade following the Louisiana Purchase Exposition saw the beginning of modern indigenous activism that relied on a synthetic relationship between acquired aspects of settler society and the enduring and evolving indigenous culture. Indigenous peoples created their own modes of resistance from the world around them. As seen in Chicago with the Kwakw̓a̓k̓w̓a̓l̓kw̓, the Indian Congress in Omaha, and the Hopi in St. Louis, dance evolved as a means of cultural persistence and expression, as well as a space for adaptation and experimentation. Dance, as with the rest of culture, was not fixed. Ceremonies like the hamatsa, Grass, or Snake Dance may have ancient origins, but performed in the context of turn of the century indigenous conditions, or more specifically, display at world’s fairs, meanings shifted to accommodate new objectives and projects. Culture is never fixed. Indigenous Americans existed in what Lester G. Moses describes as “communities of memory” where peoples were able to “conserve tradition while possessing the creative capacity to reinterpret traditions and practices.” The performative tradition became the creative arena during the decades following 1890 where indigenous peoples replicated, reenacted, or revolutionized their cultural practices. This process continued into the age of film.

210 The Society of the American Indian had contemporary allies in organizations like the New England Indian Council (founded 1923), the newly formed Native American Church organized around a synthesis of Christian values and peyote traditions, and the Alaskan Native Brotherhood (1912). See Calloway, 396-400.
211 Patterson, 44; Calloway 393.
well into the twentieth century, developing most tangibly into the powwow tradition.²¹²

Performers like Nancy Columbia and Esther White Deer made successful transitions from exposition and Wild West work to film. Columbia appeared in the popular *The Way of the Eskimo* (1911) as she transitioned from exhibit work. Her family also went on to appear in a number of films. Princess (Esther) White Deer, whose family had owned their own Deer Family Wild West that toured Europe and South Africa, promoted her distinct Native identity, but mixed European performance and costume into her acts and films in order to break the illusion of the unspoiled Indian. The early days of moving pictures saw diverse indigenous participation. Several American Indians owned production companies (James Young Deer and Edwin Carewe), wrote or produced films (Nancy Columbia), or became acclaimed stars (Luther Standing Bear, Princess White Deer). Racial ideologies in the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century began to drive Indians out of the business, however, as filmmakers began to use blackface and redface with increasing frequency. Jim Thorpe and William Hazlett lobbied Congress to enact a law requiring Indian film roles to be filled by Indians, but the measure failed. With the advent of the Western in the 1920s, white culture again played out the “great, violent myth of the American West” where America could reinvent itself “out of its inconsistent and fevered imagination.” The brief decade of indigenous control at the beginning of the century gave way to a white-dominated space, but one where indigenous peoples continued to create their own forms of resistance and survival.²¹³

World’s fairs continued to thrive after 1904, although no fair in the United States has since rivaled the scale of St. Louis or popularity of Chicago. Portland, Oregon hosted the Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition in 1904, and Seattle organized the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in 1909. Nancy Columbia attended both. The former celebrated the arrival of the Lewis and Clark Expedition at the Pacific Ocean, while the Alaska-Yukon event hoped to encourage settlement of the largely vacant Alaskan Territory. In 1915, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition opened in San Francisco, but featured no living anthropological exhibits. Meant to celebrate the recently opened Panama Canal—one of America’s greatest imperial projects to date—the Panama-Pacific Exposition zeroed in on the technology of empire, as opposed to the subjects. Anthropology took a back seat to industry and technology, but several congresses of ethnologists discussed the evolving field of “race betterment” or eugenics. Fairs in their utopianism worked to “engineer a better future,” and the inclusion of racialized science like that in Chicago, Omaha, and St. Louis, even on the periphery, helped to legitimize the eugenics movement and Jim Crow.\(^\text{214}\)

Understanding the history of racism in the United States, then, requires a careful examination of the treatment of Indigenous America. In national origin myths and justifications for violence in America are complex ideas about inherent (i.e. evolutionary or racial) inferiority of people of color, be they black, Latinx, indigenous, Asian, or otherwise. American racism is grounded in the settler colonial stories of just war, \textit{res nullius}, and other conqueror ideologies as much as it is rooted in the enslavement of black bodies. World’s fairs and their organizers—be

\(^\text{214}\) Rydell, Findling, and Pelle, 56-65, 135.
they entertainment entrepreneurs, reformers, or anthropologists—took on the task of creating a support structure for existing and evolving justifications for progress that seemed to leave a great many disenfranchised in its wake. Even as individuals like Franz Boas worked to counteract the eugenics movements and its insidious brethren, evolutionary anthropology had provided the scientific backing to the ideology. Entertainment repeated and sanctified violent annihilation of Indigenous North Americans, and reformers continued to attempt to scrub the stain of indigeneity from “Uncle Sam’s red wards.”

Indians defied the institutions created by and for their destruction. In the early twentieth century, it became clear the indigenous population was not going anywhere, having survived Westward Expansion, and were not “vanishing Americans.” They survived, even thrived, in the context of racial segregation and subjugation, both in display and broader society. The New England Indian Council, founded in 1923, adopted the defiant motto “I still live” as a rebuke to the continued projection of vanishing. Members of this new organization from the Mi’kmaq Indians had recently entered into a new wage-labor system, working as tourist guides and seasonal laborers in the potato and blueberry fields. At the same time, they “maintained important ties of kinship and community and began to develop regional networks and pan-Indian organizations.” The Kwakwaka’wakw, too, entered into an annual cycle of wage labor and potlatch celebrations, infuriating reformers who worked to break communal resource sharing. Indigenous peoples across the continent successfully maneuvered in and out of capitalist exchange systems, be they in performance like the Hopi and the Snake Dance in the Southwest,

or in craftsmanship like William and Mary Benson and their incredible basketry. Quanah Parker revealed himself as a “savvy politician,” maneuvering the American government institutions to his and the Comanche’s advantage, but he refused to cut his hair or be monogamous, even as he appeared “civilized” in other respects to white society.  

Though the power relations in the context of display remained unequal, throughout the history of the live exhibit, performers—indigenous or other—worked as agents of their own lives. The indigenous peoples in the displays of Putnam, Mercer, McGee, Buffalo Bill, William Cummins and others were not controlled. They responded to their objectification with humor, defiance, and ingenuity. The racism, objectification, and oppression inherent in the display of human subjects in attractions like anthropological villages, model schools, and entertainment concessions is important to understanding the origins of the American identity, but it does not tell the whole story. To study only the motivations and effects of white supremacist intention buries the actions of its victims. In world’s fairs, Indians emerged as survivors of genocide in the West, and proclaimed their permanence in the American landscape. The story of agency at these world’s fairs reveals the complexity and difficulty of extracting stories of agency from the historical record. Rarely were indigenous actions straight forward or easily recognizable as what they were. The story of survival is there, however. Through political speeches and campaigns, labor strikes, performances, smashing cameras, or even purchasing a baby carriage, Indigenous Americans thwarted the narrative of their vanishing and coopted and created the tools to thrive in the twentieth century.

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216 Calloway, 396-8; Raibmon, Authentic Indians, 74-98.
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