EXHIBITING CULTURES

The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display

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On the cover and title page: *Aboriginal dancers at the opening ceremonies of the Commonwealth Games, Brisbane, Australia, 1982.* Photo by Eckhard Supp. Reproduced by permission of the photographer.

CHAPTER 18

The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893

CURTIS M. HINSLEY

> The world exhibitions glorify the exchange-value of commodities. They create a framework in which commodities' intrinsic value is eclipsed. They open up a phantasmagoria that people enter in order to be amused. The entertainment industry facilitates this by elevating people to the level of commodities. They submit to being manipulated while enjoying their alienation from themselves and from others.[1]

The second half of the nineteenth century was the age of the industrial exposition in the North Atlantic metropolitan world. Beginning with the Great International Exposition in London's Crystal Palace in 1851 and the American response, New York's "Crystal Palace" fair of 1853, for seven decades—until World War I—every few years saw the organizing, funding, and launching of a new exhibition enterprise: London, New York, Paris, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Buffalo, San Francisco, Seattle, Atlanta, New Orleans, Nashville, and many others announced regional, national, and international pretensions. Like most of the buildings that housed them and the landscapes on which they stood, these exhibitions were ephemeral constructions, at once catalytic and celebratory events, economic risks taken in expectation of future return. They were carnivals of the industrial age, communal activities undergirded and directed by corporate boards and interests of state. None lasted more than six months; collectively their ideological impact was profound and permanent.

The London Crystal Palace exhibition was classically imperialist in conception and construction: on display was the material culture of an industrial, commercial empire, with an emphasis on manufactured goods derived from colonial raw materials. The Paris Exposition of 1867 celebrated another form of colonial appropriation in featuring archaeological and ethnological materials. Virtually all subsequent fairs embodied these two aspects: displays of industrial achievement and promise for the regional or national metropolis, and exhibits of primitive "others" collected from peripheral territories or colonies. As a collective phenomenon the industrial exposition celebrated the ascension of civilized power over nature and primitives. Exhibition techniques tended to represent those peoples as raw materials; within the regnant progressivist ideology they occupied the same category.

The display of touring or stationary human groups, especially Native Americans, for profit, entertainment, or public edification has a long and problematic history.[2] The first American exposition, presided over by Phineas T. Barnum in New York in 1853, adopted "Machinery" as its motto and publicly introduced the sewing machine. But Barnum also introduced the Lady in Red, a mysterious dancer; and on the edge of the fairground stood Shantyville, more than a mile of amusements, including the Wild Man of Borneo, Fijian man-eaters, a Pennsylvania oil well (twenty-five cents admission), and an encampment of three hundred Indians from fifty tribes under the charge of "George Anderson, the famous Texas scout."[3] But the practice of dispatching agents to remote regions for the sole purpose of bringing back groups of exotic types for public display and private profit seems to have originated in the late 1870s with Hamburg animal trainer and zoo master Carl Hagenbeck. Sometime around 1876 Hagenbeck hired Johan Adrian Jacobsen to bring a collection of artifacts and a Greenland Eskimo family of six to Hamburg, then travel with them through Europe for eight months. This tour was so profitable that in 1878 Jacobsen repeated the experiment with Lapps (and reindeer), then toured with three Patagonians, and in 1880 set out again with eight Labrador Eskimos. This last *Völkerschau* ended in tragedy, as the troupe all died of smallpox, somewhat dampening Hagenbeck's enthusiasm for human displays. Two years later he resumed his efforts. They resulted in an eleven-month tour by nine Bella Coolas through Germany in 1885–86—twenty-seven cities, including three weeks dancing in Hagenbeck's Hamburg Thierpark. The tour, which was accompanied by a collection of about two thousand artifacts, received sober reporting in the German press.[4]

While a few live Native Americans did appear at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, the introduction of ethnographic villages as a central component of the fair was initiated at the Paris Exposition of 1889. Otis T. Mason, curator of ethnology at the U.S. National Museum, came away deeply impressed by the educational power of the exposition's live groups. The entire fair, which he thought the "most thoroughly anthropological" to that time, taught the history of human culture by means of models of habitation and working scenes set out along the banks of the Seine. Mason reported enthusiastically on the twelve African villages and the Tonkinese temple with Buddhist priests performing rites. The crowds, he noted, thronged like children to watch exotic peoples in their daily routines. "It was an exposition," he wrote home, "whose presiding Genius was a teacher, a professor of history, whose scholars were the whole world."[5]

By 1890 two traditions of human display were established: the Hagenbeck-type tour, which occasionally made some claim to ethnographic authenticity and sobriety, and the Barnum-type sideshow of human freaks and oddities. Both were already being incorporated into world's fairs for the public, and each usually had elements of the other. Hagenbeck's Arena, an exhibition that appeared on the Midway Plaisance in Chicago, for example, featured "Dwarf Elephant Lily, 35 inches High."[6] Still, as the Smithsonian Institution set about planning the upcoming celebration of four hundred years of New World settlement, Otis Mason and his colleagues were confident that vital lessons could be taught at Chicago. George Brown Goode, who had organized the U.S. National Museum in 1881, had a single theme for 1893: "The fair, he wrote, would illustrate 'the steps of progress of civilization and its arts in successive centuries, and in all lands up to the present time.' It would become, 'in fact, an *illustrated encyclopedia of humanity.*' " The exposition would be in essence "an effort to educate and 'to formulate the Modern.' "[7]

Frederick Ward Putnam, director and curator of the Peabody Museum at Harvard, shared the views of the Washington group and after his appointment in 1891 as head of the Department of Ethnology and Archaeology for the Chicago fair, he and his chief assistant, Franz Boas, worked assiduously and cooperatively with the government scientists toward an anthropologically informative exposition. Putnam deeply believed in the public function of anthropological presentation. He explained his vision and his proposed method to the Committee of Liberal Arts in Chicago on 21 September 1891:

> The part of the ethnological exhibit, however, which will prove of the greatest popular interest and at the same time be regarded as an essential and appropriate display, will be the out-of-doors exhibit of the native peoples of America, in their own houses, dressed in their native costumes and surrounded by their own utensils, implements, weapons, and the results of their own handiwork.
>
> I have used the words "essential" and "appropriate" in this connection, and have done so after due consideration; for we must never lose sight of the fact that this Exposition is a Columbian Exposition; that its very existence is due to the fact that the voyage of Columbus 400 years ago led to the discovery of America by our race, its subsequent peopling by the Europeans and the consequent development of great nations on the continent. This development, as we shall show, has been of a most remarkable character upon this continent; and all nations of the world will show what they have done in the great struggle during four centuries. The result will be such a wonderful exhibition of the works of man that even those of us who know in part what it is to be will be surprised and astounded when we see it from day to day as a grand whole.
>
> But what will all this amount to without the means of comparison in the great object lesson? What, then, is more appropriate, more essential, than to show in their natural conditions of life the different types of peoples who were here when Columbus was crossing the Atlantic Ocean and leading the way for the great wave of humanity that was soon spread over the continent and forced those unsuspecting peoples to give way before a mighty power, to resign their inherited rights, and take their chances for existence under the laws governing a strange people? We know the results, and we know well that four hundred years has [*sic*] brought the last generation upon the stage of action, when it will be possible to bring together the remnants of the native tribes, with probably a few exceptions in South America, in anything approaching purity of stock, or with a precise knowledge of the ways of their ancestors. These peoples, as great nations, have about vanished into history, and now is the last opportunity for the world to see them and to realize what their condition, their life, their customs, their arts were four centuries ago. The great object lesson then will not be completed without their being present. Without them, the Exposition will have no base.[8]

Putnam then described a charming "ramble" through a wooded island on the fairground, with the natives working quietly in their houses, far removed from the Machinery Building and the bustle of industrial-exposition life. Central American ruins and monoliths would grace the pathway. "After such a stroll amid the scenes I have only briefly sketched, one will visit the other departments of the Exposition with singular feelings and with an appreciation which could only be aroused by such contrasts."[9]

Investors in the Fair had different ideas. Thomas W. Palmer, president of the National Commission for the Fair, had also been deeply impressed by the popularity of the villages at the 1889 Paris Exposition, and he insisted on native groups living on the Midway Plaisance, a mile-long strip of land set aside for amusements and sideshows. Thus, in addition to the Anthropological Building and the live outdoor ethnographic exhibits adjacent to it at the southern end of the fairground, Putnam received responsibility for the Midway exhibits, too. Their installation, though, lay in the hands of a very different type of man: Sol Bloom, a future real-estate developer, who had also attended the Paris Exposition. As it turned out, Bloom worked largely independently of Putnam. Years later he observed, with some justice, that placing Putnam in charge of the Midway was "tantamount to making Albert Einstein manager of Barnum and Bailey's circus."[10]

BOAS, PUTNAM, AND POPULAR ANTHROPOLOGY

> Be it known in the first place that the Anthropological Building is the most serious place on the face of the earth. The man who enters there leaves fun behind. The man who has studied its mysteries, like King Henry of the song, never smiles again. Before you study anthropology, you must have learned all about history, physiology, geology, zoology, and all the other topics ending in y. Your hair must grow long and your tongue must caress with the familiarity of an old love words of fifteen syllables. You must know at a glance the touching history of a piece of flint, and you must become enraptured with the tales expressed by a long buried image.[11]

For nearly two years (1891–93) Putnam and Boas supervised archaeological and anthropological expeditions throughout the Western Hemisphere. The collections, photographs, and data poured into Chicago—from the Southwest, the Great Plains, Alaska, Yucatan, Peru. They oversaw fifty-five fieldworkers. But from the moment of his arrival in Chicago every conceivable obstacle seemed to be placed in Putnam's way by the exposition's directors; they were far more solicitous of the commercial and industrial exhibits and showed less and less interest in serious public anthropology.[12] Putnam's promised space in the Anthropological Building was reduced by more than sixty percent. He moved his office nine times in eight months. Desperate for a place to put the mass of exhibit materials, he managed to secure a dairy barn as an annex, but eventually he was removed from there as well to make room for a cheese exhibit. As it turned out, the Anthropological Building was not ready for visitors until one month after the fair had opened.

It was at the Chicago fair that Mayan architecture first came to North American public attention—with invigorating results for future Mayan archaeology, epigraphy, and ethnography. In addition to the casts of Mayan stelae inside the Anthropological Building, and case after case of specimens, just to the north of the entrance stood a model of Yucatecan ruins (Uxmal) and, a few feet away, a reproduction of a Southwestern cliff dwelling. The juxtaposition was intended to emphasize evolution in house structures. Each edifice was surrounded by well-manicured, rope-bounded lawns and pathways. Near the entrance to the cliff dwelling was a convenient lemonade stand; within, Anasazi shards and pots were placed about. An American flag flew overhead (Figure 18-1).

A few yards north of the model ruins stood the outdoor ethnographic exhibits, notably Boas's group of Kwakiutl Indians from Fort Rupert, British Columbia. Working through George Hunt, his informant among the Kwakiutl, Boas had brought fourteen individuals to Chicago (Figure 18-2).To add to the authenticity a village from Skidegate, on the Queen Charlotte Islands, was disassembled, complete with doorposts, and brought as well (Figure 18-3). In these environs, Boas intended, the Kwakiutl would perform various ceremonials and live as normally as possible. They slept on the floor in the Stock Pavilion.

The Northwest Coast village was set up in the outdoor exhibits area adjacent to the Leather and Shoe Trades Building. Here, Boas engaged in ethnographic production, as his Indians, placed in front of a white sheet backdrop, performed dances for his own study and for the public (Figure 18-4). He hired Chicago photographer John H. Grabill to record several dances, arguing to the administrators that copies of the photographs could be profitably sold to visitors and promising copies to the Kwakiutl dancers and singers—a promise that he kept the following year.[13] In Chicago Boas's Kwakiutl performers

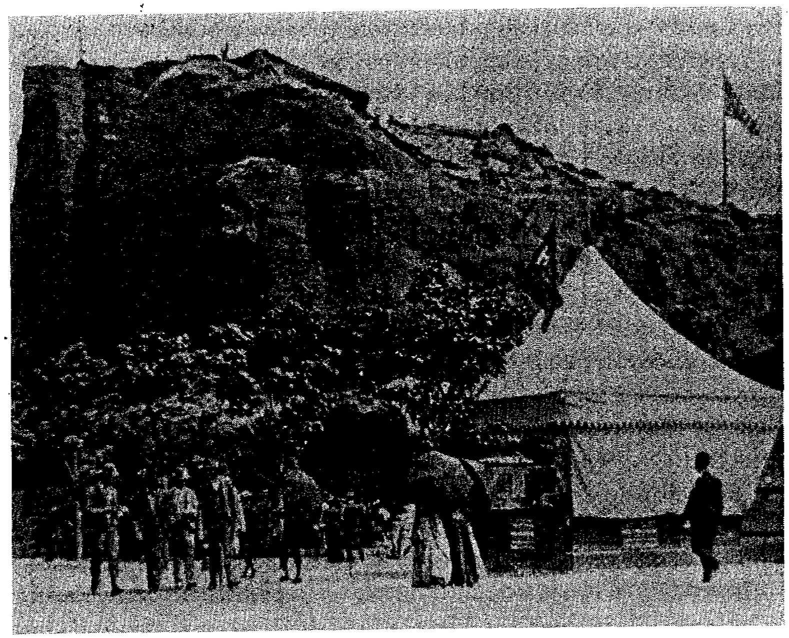


Fig. 18-1. *Model of Southwestern cliff dwelling at the World's Columbian Exposition.* From *Glimpses of the World's Fair: A Selection of Gems of the White City Seen through a Camera* (Chicago: Laird and Lee, 1893).

reproduced rituals that in some cases were no longer practiced—certainly not under such conditions. They were aiding Boas in his effort to recapture a presumed pristine, pre-Columbian condition. In their determination to establish a baseline against which to measure civilized progress, Putnam and Boas were risking erasure of the past and current dynamics of history, literally blocking out the changes of time.

Other ethnographic exhibits, even outside the Midway, displayed more commerce than science. The Eskimo village, for example, was owned and run by J. W. Skiles and Company of Spokane, Washington, which charged an entrance fee and sold Eskimo manufactures. From July to November the small group of Eskimos paddled about North Pond in their kayaks and, enclosed by fences and surrounded by fairgoers resting at safe distances on benches, gave demonstrations of the uses of whips (Figure 18-5).

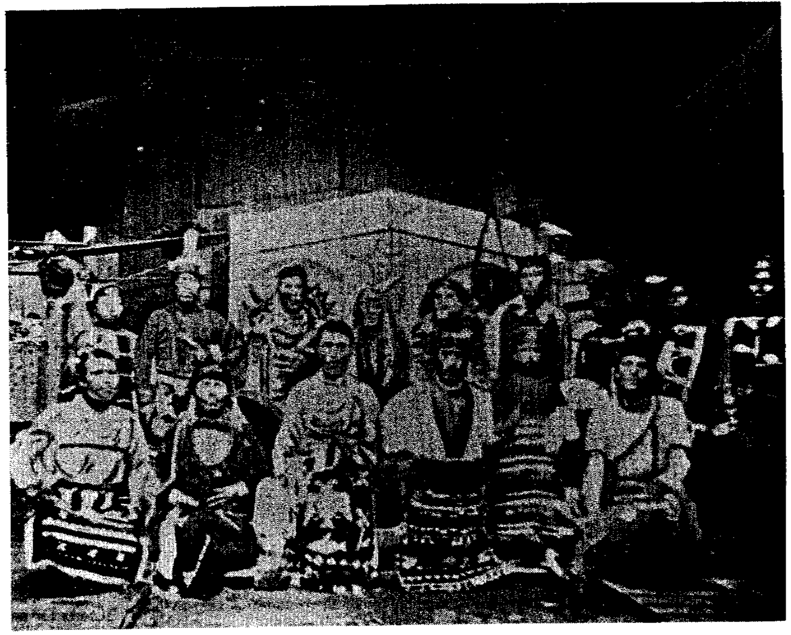


Fig. 18-2. *Kwakiutl Indians at the fair, 1893.* From F. D. Todd, *World's Fair through a Camera: Snap Shots by an Artist* (St. Louis: Woodward and Tiernan, 1893).

THE MIDWAY

> It will be a jumble of foreignness—a bit of Fez and Nuremberg, of Sahara and Dahomey and Holland, Japan and Rome and Coney Island. It will be gorgeous with color, pulsating with excitement, riotous with the strivings of a battalion of bands, and peculiar to the last degree.[14]

Julian Ralph's description of the Midway appeared before the exposition opened and was intended to shape rather than report on the Midway experience. Ralph reveals intentions that are radically different from the public education of Putnam and Boas. The terms he uses—"jumble," "bit"—are deliberately imprecise and piecemeal. They suggest purposeful confusion: the Midway would be deliberately constructed chaos. The repeated phrase "of . . . and" and, more telling, the strings of equivalent conjunctions, further suggest a linear, kaleidoscopic passing of scenes, appearing quickly and discouraging valuation or judgment. All are different yet somehow equally fascinating. The observer is led on to the next scene. He or she is invited to suspend certain faculties, relax, and simply let the stream of phenomena pass before him. "Gorgeous," "pulsating," "riotous," "peculiar": Ralph's adjectives present sensual energies loosened, defying categorization or even pause for analysis. There is barely time to take it all in, none to reflect.

This is the language of the Midway. The pace has quickened noticeably from the serenity of the Anthropological Building, Uxmal in the grass, and the cheese exhibit. The striking aspect, however, is the ambiguous position of the fairgoer. The scenes of this world appear to pass before the eyes of the passive observer/consumer, but both colonialist ideology and the dynamic demographics of the Midway demand that control remain with the strolling crowd. The central concourse, with its escalatorlike movement of humanity, indicates both a successful history in the New World and a successful fair. Thus, as the fairgoer strolls among the bazaar of exotica, he or she steps from the concourse of history and commerce into the sidestreets of stasis, clamor, and sensual temptation. H. H. Bancroft, in his four-volume *Book of the Fair* (1894), describes the process:

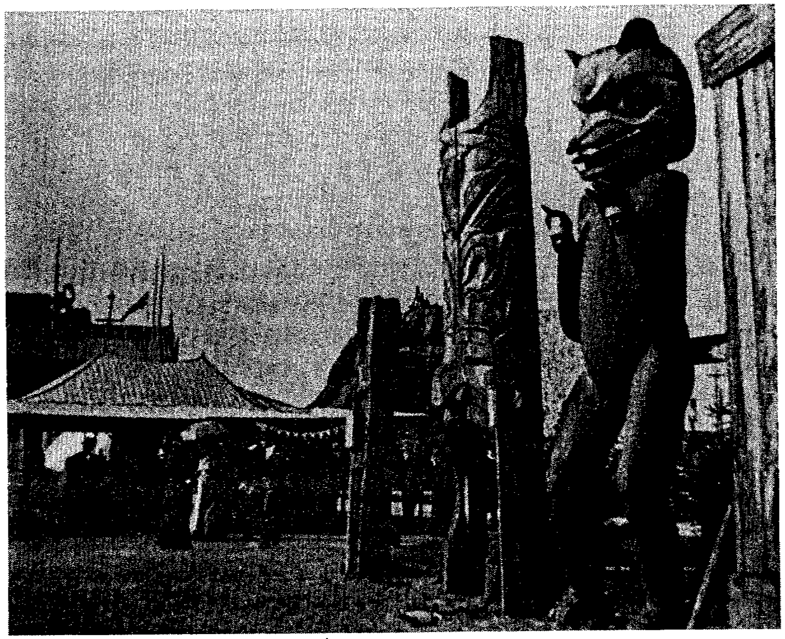


Fig. 18-3. *Partial reconstruction of Skidegate village.* From *Glimpses of the World's Fair: A Selection of Gems of the White City Seen through a Camera* (Chicago: Laird and Lee, 1893).

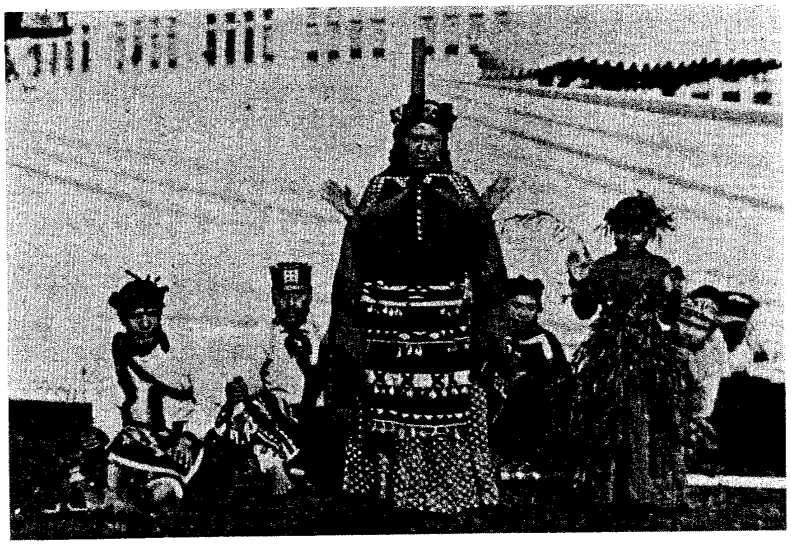


Fig. 18-4. *Kwakiutl dancers at the fair. Note the white sheet used as backdrop and, in the distance, the Leather and Shoe Trades Building.* Photo by Hillel Burger. Reproduced courtesy of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University.

> Entering the avenue a little to the west of the Woman's Building, [the fairgoers] would pass between the walls of medieval villages, between mosques and pagodas, Turkish and Chinese. . . . They would be met on their way by German and Hungarian bands, by the discord of Chinese cymbals and Dahomeyan tom-toms; they would encounter jugglers and magicians, camel drivers and donkey boys, dancing-girls from Cairo and Algiers, from Samoa and Brazil, and men and women of all nationalities, some lounging in oriental indifference, some shrieking in unison or striving to outshriek each other, in the hope of transferring his superfluous change from the pocket of the unwary pilgrim. Then, as taste or length of purse determined, for fees were demanded from those who would penetrate the hidden mysteries of the plaisance, they might enter the Congress of Beauty with its plump and piquant damsels, might pass an hour in one of the

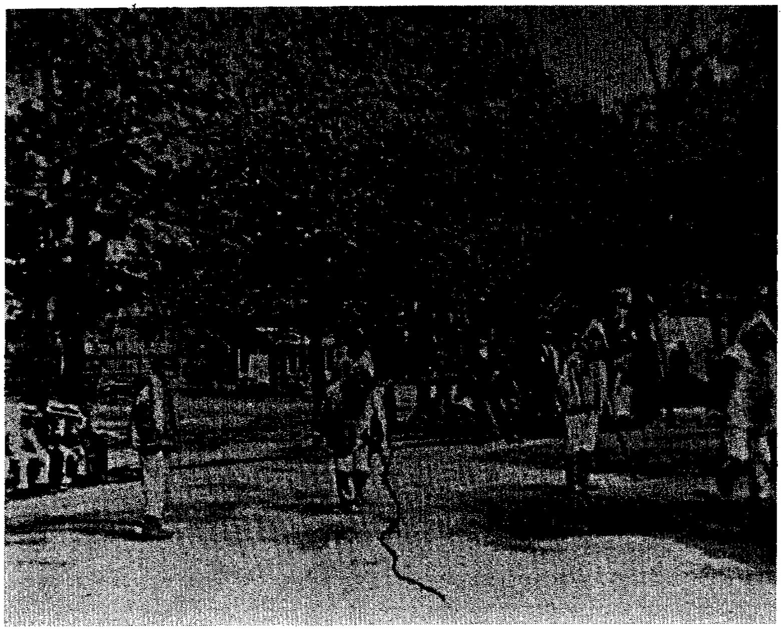


Fig. 18-5. *"Esquimaux Snapping Whips."* From F. D. Todd, *World's Fair through a Camera: Snap Shots by an Artist* (St. Louis: Woodward and Tiernan, 1893).

> theatres or villages, or partake of harmless beverages served by native waiters.[15]

Bancroft's verbs suggest a specific behavioral stance. They constitute the passive/active vocabulary of early tourism: foreigners "would pass . . . would be met . . . would encounter . . . might enter . . . might pass an hour . . . or partake." Entering this literary/Midway passage, the reader/fairgoer witnesses a bewildering human display "pass" before his or her eyes, "hears" a cacophony of sounds. It is a moving chamber of horrors and delights, leading ever deeper to penetration of the hidden sexual mysteries and dark energies of the plaisance: "plump and piquant damsels." The exotic and forbidden erotic merge as commodity. The change purse mediates this world, for the promised indulgence in the fantastic underside of the White City and civilized reason comes at a price. It can and must be bought.

Like Julian Ralph, Bancroft establishes a rhythm of language, a staccato of repeated and compounded pairs: "by German and Hungarian bands, by the discord of Chinese cymbals and Dahomeyan tom-toms," and so on. The effect is a linear parity, as successive image-experiences move like a film past the stroller. The observer does not stop to learn; rather, he or she strolls, window-shopping in the department store of exotic cultures. The White City's Midway, indeed, combined street and department store, as Walter Benjamin perceived:

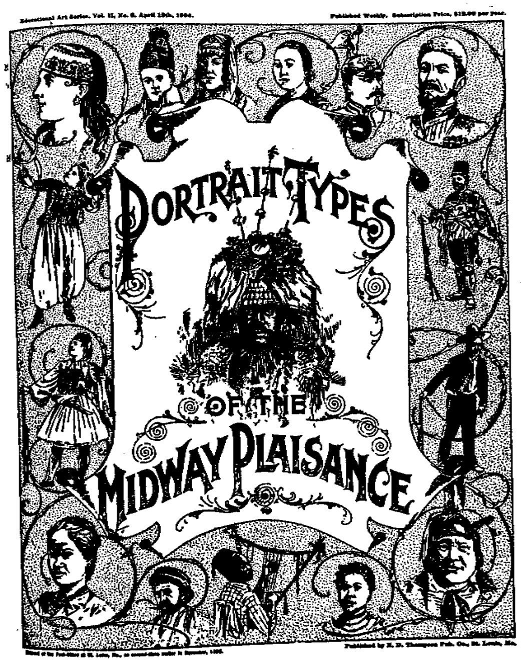

Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance

Fig. 18-6. *Title page of* Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance, *published in Chicago in 1893 with an introduction by F. W. Putnam.* Photo by Hillel Burger. Reproduced courtesy of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University.

> The bazaar is the last hangout of the *flâneur.* In the beginning the street had become an *interieur* for him, now this *interieur* turned into a street, and he roamed through the labyrinth as he had once roamed through the labyrinth of the city.[16]

The Midway was a mile-long strip of land between 59th and 60th streets, extending from Jackson Park and coming into the main fairground from the west, at a right angle, by the Woman's Building. Figure 18-7, taken from the Ferris wheel in the center of the Midway, spans the concourse looking eastward. In its message it is typical of hundreds of such photos and illustrations of the Midway: traffic, exchange, and movement are the heart of the fair and of human progress.

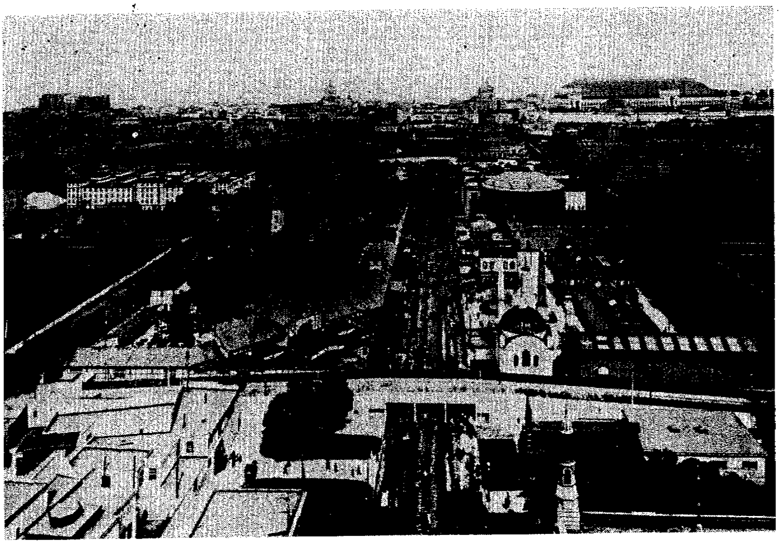


Fig 18-7. *View from the Ferris wheel along Midway Plaisance.* From H. H. Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair: Columbian Exposition, 1893* (Chicago: Bancroft, 1893).

Contemporary pictorial representations of the fairground stressed the static and formal: statuary, colossal buildings, paintings, cases of exhibits, and massive machinery. Not so the Midway. Here one found an unmediated commerce among peoples. The flow of human traffic occupied the center of the picture.

Julian Hawthorne, author of a popular book on the Chicago exposition, observed that Barnum should have lived to see the Midway. But the modernism of the Midway was neither the hucksterism of Barnum nor the public science of Goode, Mason, Putnam, or Boas. Rather, it was the modernism of Baudelaire as described by Benjamin: here the *flâneur* "goes botanizing on the asphalt."[17] The eyes of the Midway are those of the *flâneur,* the stroller through the street arcade of human differences, whose experience is not the holistic, integrated ideal of the anthropologist but the segmented, seriatim fleetingness of the modern tourist "just passing through."

The most famous section of the Midway was the narrow and dark Street in Cairo, where donkey-boys accosted the visitor and Little Egypt lured him with the belly-dance. Modeled on the Rue de Caire of the 1889 Paris Exposition, the street was advertised as presenting "a theater, mosque, bazaar, private dwellings, and a full representation of life in the open street by Egyptians in costume. . . . Of course," Ralph added, "all will sell wares and meals, and give performances for which there will be a charge."[18] In one of the hits of the exposition, twice a day camel drivers led a chain of bespangled beasts through the street to reenact a desert wedding procession. The troupe was constantly photographed. In Figure 18-8, from Bancroft's book, the group is removed from background context and an American flag has been artistically added.

Such misrepresentation was typical of the exposition-publication genre. By one count, some six hundred photograph albums were published during or immediately following the fair. Scenes from the Midway, as well as other ethnographic images, supplied decorative offset to text. Figure 18-9, a typical example, is one of three images from the Street in Cairo, displayed together on a page along with a small peephole view of a "Turk." But the illustrations, of a Moorish barbershop, an Algerian donkey, and an Egyptian shoe store, bear no relation to the text. There is, in fact, no textual description whatever of these images in Bancroft.

Alternation and ambivalence mark the exposition-photo-album genre. It seems clear that the central problem of the exposition as a psychological construction of white Americans was to determine distances and relative placement between peoples, physically and ideo-

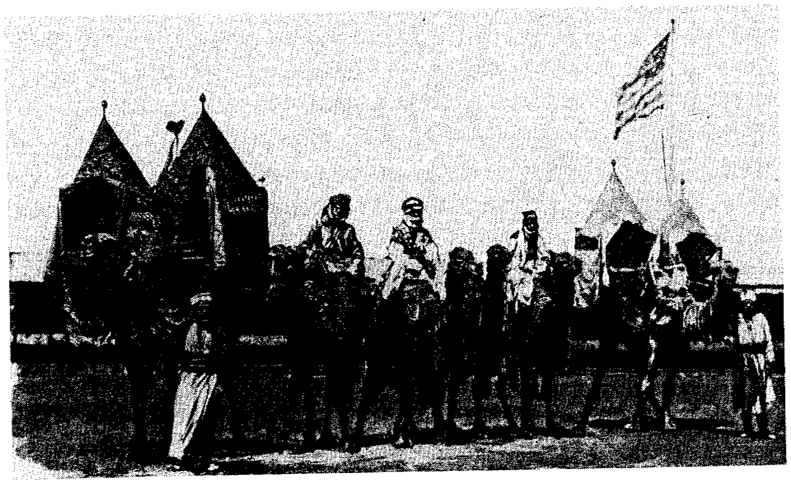


Fig. 18-8. *Page 835 of volume 4 of H. H. Bancroft,* The Book of the Fair (Chicago: Bancroft, 1893).

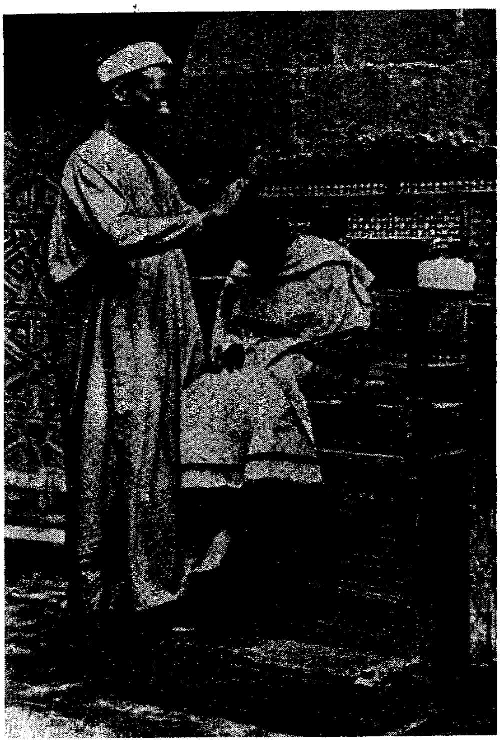


Fig. 18-9. *Page 81 of volume 1 of H. H. Bancroft,* The Book of the Fair (Chicago: Bancroft, 1893).

logically. Where the gaze can be returned, specular commerce becomes uneasy (Figure 18-10). Lines must be drawn, and they are drawn in telling ways. On the simplest level, frequently a fence, chain, rope, bench row, or other physical boundary demarcated visitor and performer spaces. Fairgoers spent much time looking over fences. A September 1893 cartoon in the *Chicago Herald* (Figure 18-11), poking fun at the mundaneness of the exotic lives on display, has one central element: a horizontal fence dividing the fairgoers (rendered in light lines) from the dusky female subject. It also presents a second, common element of distancing: the fairgoers wear certain pieces of clothing or carry accessories such as the woman's parasol or the man's cane or umbrella. In the exposition context these easily served as personal emblems of civilized status. In modern tourism the camera serves as the central portable element of distancing and self-definition.

Most distinctively, the exposition produced a humor that revealed deep uneasiness and uncertainty about boundaries. It was a humor

evidently intended to encourage sympathy with the exotic and simultaneously to keep a certain ironic distance. When ethnographic images were not purely decorative they appeared heavily captioned, as if to add lighthearted weight. "Mohammedan with Wife and Child"(Figure 18-12) was a particularly popular photograph because it depicted a nuclear family and because the baby boy, Columbus Chicago, had been born at the exposition. One photograph album captioned the picture in part as follows:

> THE BABY ARAB, COLUMBUS CHICAGO. Selim, a Bedouin Arab, and one of the tribe of Hassan, was presented with a son and heir in the encampment on the Midway Plaisance. The picture above does not represent Selim as being very pleased. But that is nothing. These people do not express their pleasure by wreathed smiles. "Columbus Chicago" does not appear to have the wide-awake characteristics of his geographical namesake. He is asleep. Chicago never is. The moth-

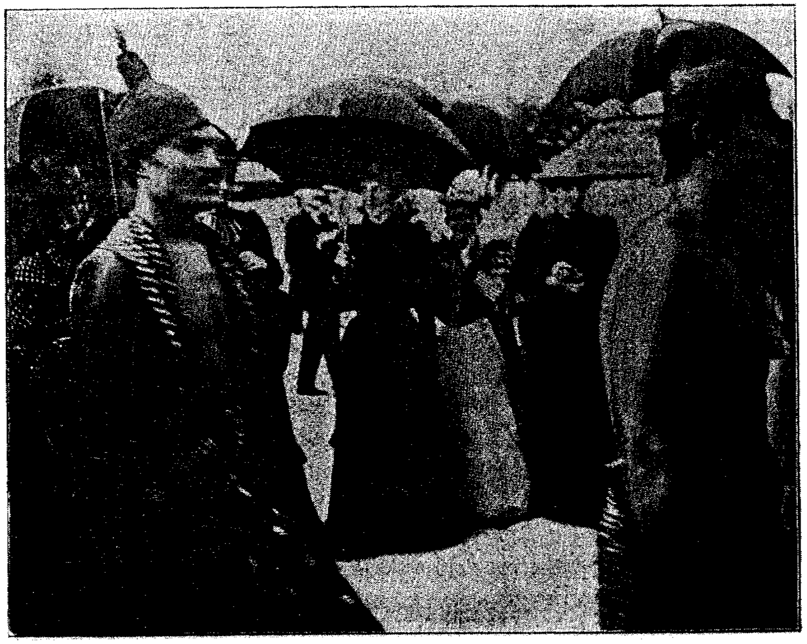
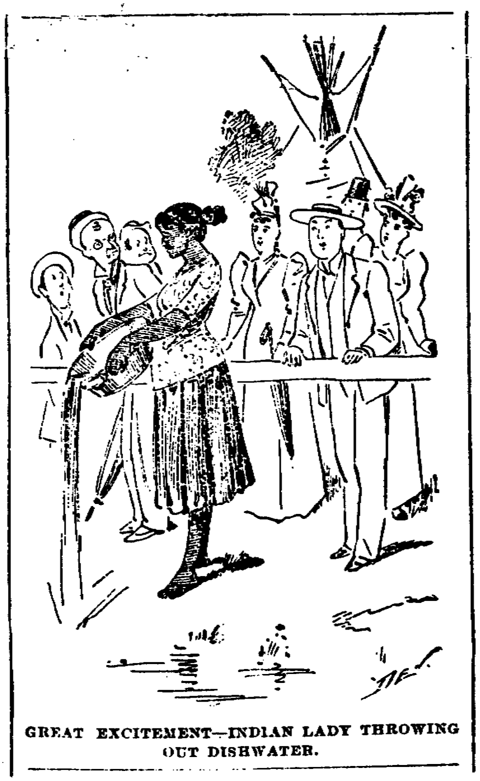


Fig. 18-10. *Watching natives parade in the Samoan village.* From *Glimpses of the World's Fair: A Selection of Gems of the White City Seen through a Camera* (Chicago: Laird and Lee, 1893).



GREAT EXCITEMENT—INDIAN LADY THROWING OUT DISHWATER.

Fig. 18-11. *"Great Excitement—Indian Lady Throwing Out Dishwater."* From *Chicago Sunday Herald*, 17 September 1893.

> er's name is Bander. She is not very attractive as to features but for all that she possessed sufficient influence over Selim to induce him to forswear his Christian faith and become a Mohammedan for her sweet sake. As Arabs go this is undoubtedly a happy family. Selim has his hookah stem in his mouth and his scimeter [*sic*] in one hand, and though he is scowling fiercely it is no doubt his habitual expression. He would probably look much worse should he attempt to smile.

This passage expresses simultaneously a fondness for the family as a unit and an admission that they are incomprehensible as a group or as individuals: "as Arabs go this is undoubtedly a happy family." It is futile, in other words, to try to grasp exotic peoples' values and tastes. Implicitly, anthropology is a fool's errand. This stance is particularly apparent in the cases of two aesthetic subjects: female beauty

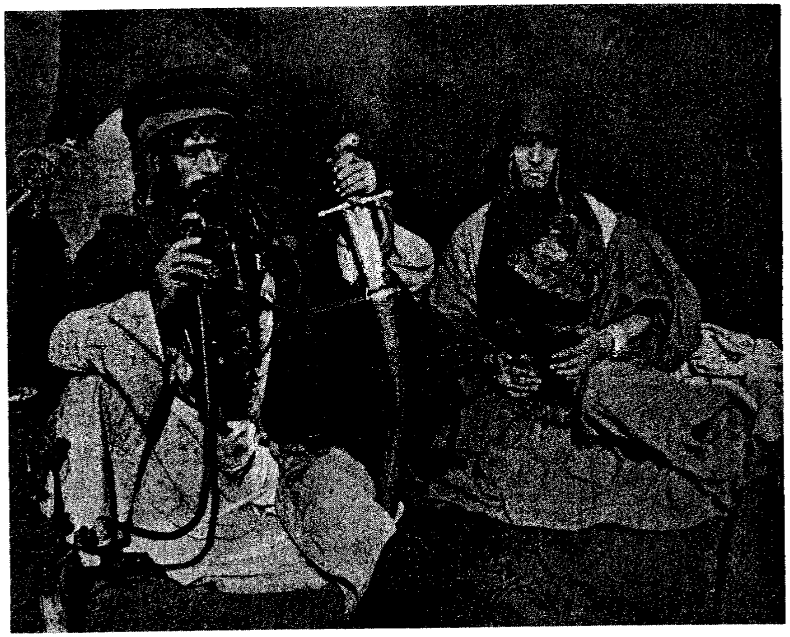


Fig. 18-12. *"The Baby Arab, 'Columbus Chicago.'"* From H. H. Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair: Columbian Exposition, 1893* (Chicago: Bancroft, 1893).

and dancing. "Three Island Beauties," in the same volume, presents three seated female figures but leaves aesthetic judgment curiously suspended. While granting that one of the women "is undoubtedly a very attractive creature," the author adds that "one hardly expects to find any great beauty" in the Indian Ocean.[19]

In defending the great anthropological lessons of the fair, Putnam at one point suggested that a certain tolerance had been instilled where dance was concerned, due to the great variety on display in Chicago. It is an interesting consideration that dance played such a large part in the ethnographic exhibits, but the public evidence does not bear out Putnam's hopeful assertion. However, one uncomprehending observer of the Egyptian dances, who saw nothing but "a series of unnatural and awkward muscular twitchings . . . entirely foreign to the poetry of motion," nonetheless felt constrained to qualify himself by adding, "at least it so appeared to western eyes."[20] Verbal vacillation pushes and pulls the observer/reader, preserving reservations, establishing bonds with the subject while retaining a psychological exit. The "other" remains roped off; the fairgoer remains uncommitted.

In the end, the fair itself provided a means of resolving the ambivalence, and it offered a single, powerfully familiar measure of human relationships: money. The Columbian Exposition was in the final analysis a celebration of market flow. Ultimately the magic of trade and exchange promised to resolve the troubling questions of human difference. The process of commodification rested on the premise that at bottom everything is for sale and everyone has a price—that the world, no matter how bizarre, is reducible to cash terms.

The 1890s saw, in American political and economic circles, the nineteenth century's high-water mark of free-trade rhetoric, since widely held dogma taught that domestic overproduction required open markets overseas for dumping manufactures and obtaining cheap raw materials. Only in this way would America's capitalist culture be restored and reinvigorated, it seemed. Bancroft begins *The Book of the Fair* with an extended discussion of the history of fairs, markets, and bazaars. He opens with the significant statement: "Of all the distinguishing features which separate mankind from the brute creation, perhaps there are none more noticeable than that man is a trading animal."[21] Whether in the near-worshipful attitude toward engines of trade (ships or trains), or in the sliding railway that paralleled the Midway, or in the photographic focus on human traffic, the exposition was a monument to movement of goods, services, and people.

The primary flow of movement was colonial: from center to periphery and back. Not surprisingly, the nature of the peoples at the peripheries was of some interest. Equally unsurprisingly, they tended to be imagined and evaluated in terms of the market and its functions. In other words, the ultimate judgment of these peoples was levied not on aesthetic or cultural grounds but on economic ones: *Do these people know their price? Can we do reasonable business with them?* Status followed the answers to these questions, and the Chicago fair provided reassuring images. Thus, Bancroft writes humorously of the Midway that it "will be filled with things calculated to draw a visitor's last nickel, and to leave his pocket-book looking as if one of Chicago's twenty-story buildings had fallen upon it." In an admiring vein he follows the entrepreneurial exotics who did well:

> Most of the orientals employed on the plaisance took home with them a considerable sum of money; the Turks from $200 to $300, the dancing girls at least $500, and the donkey boys a larger amount. Of the last many had enough to purchase a camel or a number of donkeys on their return to Cairo, where they would probably start in business for themselves. Nearly all carried their funds in sovereigns or napoleons, exchanging therefor the silver which they received and hoarded until it amounted to a larger sum than they had ever seen before. They were experts on coin, it is said, and neither Turk nor Egyptian was ever known to accept a counterfeit piece.[22]

With luck and pluck, in short, the "other" could go into business for himself.

The World's Columbian Exposition provided the first of a series of shocks to Franz Boas's faith in public anthropology. The second came with the Spanish-American War of 1898, and by 1900 he had begun to retreat from American museum anthropology as a tool of education or reform. By 1916, Boas had come to recognize with a certain resignation that "the number of people in our country who are willing and able to enter into the modes of thought of other nations is altogether too small. . . . The American who is cognizant only of his own standpoint sets himself up as arbiter of the world."[23] The Chicago experience clarified some disturbing truths. The temptation of the dark energies of the Street in Cairo or the Midway is made all the more alluring by the knowledge that the sensual feast can be bought. From cigar boxes to cartographic emblems to public statuary, the continents have always brought their offerings to the sandaled feet of Columbia. It is but a short step in such an ideological construction of the world to an Open Door policy, gunboat diplomacy, and banana republics. Chicago suggested that wherever we traffic in the world, there are those market informants who understand the commodity premise and are prepared to authenticate their cultures accordingly. As economic man overspreads the globe, the market vision prefers these "reasonable others," eroding peripheral lives. At Chicago in 1893, public curiosity about other peoples, mediated by the terms of the marketplace, produced an early form of touristic consumption.

NOTES

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1. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings,* ed. Peter Jemetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 152.

2. Carolyn Foreman, *Indians Abroad* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943); Christian Feest, ed., *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays* (Aachen: Edition Herodot, Rader Verlag, 1987).

3. Edo McCullough, *World's Fair Midways* (New York: Arno, 1976), 34–35.

4. Wolfgang Haberland, "Nine Bella Coolas in Germany," in Christian Feest, ed., *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays* (Aachen: Edition Herodot, Rader Verlag, 1987).

5. Otis T. Mason to George Brown Goode, 31 July 1889, 3 August 1889, and 16 August 1889, Smithsonian Institution Archives; compare Otis T. Mason, "Anthropology in Paris," *American Anthropologist,* o.s., 3 (1890).

6. *Glimpses of the World's a Fair: A Selection of Gems of the White City Seen through a Camera* (Chicago: Laird and Lee, 1893).

7. R. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 45–46.

8. Frederick Ward Putnam, draft of speech, 21 September 1891. Frederick Ward Putnam Papers, Pusey Library, Harvard University.

9. Ibid.

10. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair,* 62.

11. *Chicago Sunday Herald,* 12 September 1893.

12. Ralph W. Dexter, "Putnam's Problems Popularizing Anthropology," *American Scientist* 54 (1966).

13. Ira Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Photography," *Studies in Visual Communication* 10, no. 1 (1984), 6.

14. Julian Ralph, *Harper's Chicago and the World's Fair* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893).

15. H. H. Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair: Columbian Exposition, 1893,* 4 vols. (Chicago: Bancroft, 1893), 4:835.

16. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism,* trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1983), 54; compare R. Lewis, "Everything under One Roof: World's Fairs and Department Stores in Paris and Chicago," *Chicago History* 12, no. 3 (1983).

17. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire,* 54.

18. Ralph, *Harper's Chicago,* 208.

19. *The Columbian Gallery: A Portfolio of Photographs from the World's Fair, including . . . Marvels of the Midway Plaisance. Correct and Graphic Descriptions with Each View* (Chicago: Werner, 1894), n.p.

20. *Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance,* with an introduction by F. W. Putnam (Chicago: 1893), n.p.

21. Bancroft, *Book of the Fair* 1:22.

22. Ibid., 4:883.

23. Franz Boas, *The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1885–1911: A Franz Boas Reader,* ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 332.