A Temporary Taming of the Wild West: The Events of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898

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Source: *Great Plains Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (SUMMER 2016), pp. 187-205
Published by: University of Nebraska Press
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/44684143
Accessed: 08-05-2024 17:46 +00:00

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The Events of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898

ABBY WHALEN

The white buildings emblazoned with thousands of lights that brightened a nighttime walk around a lagoon did not resemble the images of the frontier presented by dime novels. Organizers of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition carefully reconstructed the grandeur of the Chicago World's Fair and other events which epitomized the advancement of society in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Within a breath of Frederick Jackson Turner announcing the end of savagery and the triumph of civilization closing the frontier, the planning of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition detailed the evidence to support Turner's views. A closer look at those buildings noted their temporary status, as the entire event only managed to temporarily hide the truth of the difference between life in the cosmopolitan cities and life on the edge of the Great Plains.

The opening of the middle of the present-day United States to settlers seeking to go to the frontier West shifted the dynamics of the country. During the initial stages of western expansion and subsequent migration into the Great Plains, many people assumed that the lands would never produce. In fact, the Plains erroneously gained the title of the Great American Desert. Harvest seasons would soon prove the doubters wrong. In 1854 people received official governmental approval to settle in the newly formed Nebraska Territory, although illegal squatting had occurred for decades. Within a generation, Nebraska had proven itself capable of enormous manufacturing and agricultural production.[1] Residents of the region sought to demonstrate their prowess to those not fully willing to believe statistics. The opportunity to display the characteristics intrinsic to Nebraskans and Plains-state residents—productivity, morality, and a fondness for amusement—arrived

Key Words: African Americans, American Indians, American West, Buffalo Bill, women

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in the form of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition.

The latent displays had little to do with agriculture, machinery, or buildings, but instead focused on the societal changes of the region. If the Omaha Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition represented the closing of the frontier, the new West did not manage to shut out every unique societal aspect of the former cultural norms. Socially, the exposition subverted the political powers of people of color and treated them as akin to the rides and sideshows while attempting to neglect the growing political power of women. The fair indicated the United States military's rise to international power while also reciting an epitaph for Native Americans. While the white settlers had claimed most of the land and effectively closed the frontier of real-estate opportunities, the region did not abruptly adopt all aspects of the Euro-American version of civilization promoted on the East Coast. The Wild West show that fair attendees could pay to attend represented a tamed false version of the real issues presented by the transition to new cultural, economic, and political norms in the region and the United States as a whole.

The Trans-Mississippi Congress

The nature of an exposition appealed to the ambitions of members of the Trans-Mississippi Congress. Cities across the world used world's fairs and expositions to promote different aspects of their history, culture, and technological developments to groups of people not necessarily aware of that city's capabilities. World's fairs brought innovations to the general population, including the Eiffel Tower from the Paris World's Fair of 1889 and the Ferris Wheel from the Columbian World's Fair in Chicago. Once the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition closed its gates in 1898, it had displayed technological advancements of great importance. In his review of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition for *Nebraska History*, historian Kenneth G. Alfers succinctly explained the necessity of a new exposition following the Columbian World's Fair when he wrote that "despite the magnificence of its scope and the extravagance of its style, Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893 was unable to capture fully all aspects of American life. The West had been ignored and slighted, its people felt, since the exposition emphasized industrial growth then concentrated in the East."[2] The West needed its own opportunity to display the strengths, artistry, and potential of the region, after the previous fair neglected to promote agricultural prowess.

The lingering effects of the Great Panic of 1893 motivated the influential men in Nebraska politics to call for and plan an exposition to be held in Omaha. The economic depression caused Nebraska banks to lose almost half their deposits, resulting in the failure of 101 banks. Industrial growth halted. Cities did not gain in population. But bankers such as the highly influential Gurdon W. Wattles and the community group the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben refused to allow Nebraska to stay in the pits of a depression.[3] Soon after the first stages of the financial recovery from the panic began, the promotion for an exposition commenced. At the meeting of the Trans-Mississippi Congress in 1895, Williams Jennings Bryan put forth a resolution for an exposition to be held in Omaha.[4] By the next year, both houses of Congress and President Grover Cleveland

Fig. 1. The Wild West Show showed a sanitized version of the West as a whole. From the Collections of the Omaha Public Library.

approved the Trans-Mississippi Bill, granting Omaha the right to hold an international exposition promoting agriculture, manufacturing, and the arts.[5] The Trans-Mississippi Congress gathered some of the most prominent men in Nebraska politics for the Exposition's board of directors. In 1897 the *Omaha Daily Bee* proudly displayed portraits and biographies of the men who would run the Exposition and its committees. The board included president Gurdon W. Wattles, vice president Alvin Saunders, treasurer Herman Kountze, secretary John A. Wakefield, and a group of other men who were given the title of vice president for each state in the Trans-Mississippi region. The publisher of the *Omaha Daily Bee*, Edward Rosewater, served as the manager of publicity for the Exposition. Rosewater used his newspaper as the main vehicle for Exposition publicity.[6]

Once the Congress had approved of the Exposition and the men had gathered into a board of directors, the vision for the Exposition began to coalesce. Although differences would exist in what exactly planners wished to display, the overall goal clearly was to exempli-

fy the best of the Trans-Mississippi region: "on this spot the vast resources and mighty wealth of this extensive trans-Mississippi territory are today put on exhibition, not so much for our own instruction and entertainment as that the rest of mankind may come and see for themselves, look on with a startled amazement and depart with astonishment and wonder."[7] The display of wealth necessitated an outpouring of money. Through both state and national bills, in addition to significant private donations, planners of the Exposition raised over one million dollars in less than three years. The money arrived because of a uniform eagerness to support the Exposition's mission of establishing Omaha, Nebraska, and the entire Trans-Mississippi region as strong factors in the United States.[8] That mission extended to the advertising of the Exposition:

> The West, conscious of its strength and of its wealth-producing resources not yet developed, was of one mind as to the wisdom and necessity of making an extraordinary effort to attract the attention of the people of the East by a colossal object-lesson of the marvelous development of the natural resources of the country between the Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains since the close of the Civil War.[9]

The committee promulgated the concept of the Exposition in as many newspapers as possible, tabulating the total word count concerning it.[10] The idea made its way through Congress and the American people's minds, then out came their wallets.

"Civilization vs. Savagery"

Organizers decided to transform the meatpacking and agricultural center of Omaha into a European utopia, using previous expositions and classic examples of architecture across the Atlantic. The Columbian World's Fair held in Chicago in 1893 inspired the design and layout of the buildings. Planners of the Columbian World's Fair transformed the infamous Windy City into a model of European excellence. Six years later, the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition sought to improve upon Chicago's exceptional displays while tailoring the event toward the aim of showcasing the unique attributes of Nebraska and the Trans-Mississippi.

Matching the glory of Chicago's experience with a fair led to architects who worked at the Columbian World's Fair submitting building designs for the Trans-Mississippi Exposition.[11] From the inception of the idea for the Exposition came an unequivocal ambition to transform Omaha's fairgrounds onto a level unparalleled by previous expositions, including Chicago's. The centerpiece of the grounds would be the Midway, around which the main buildings and attractions were situated. The intended effect of impressing the visitor at least impressed the planners, who believed that "entering the grounds through this arch, the visitor found himself transported to a fairyland splendor far beyond any conception of his childhood days."[12]

Few traces of the Omaha of 1896, or even the Omaha of 1900, existed during the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition. Inside those boundaries were built structures that failed to resemble much else in the city. Between the Grand Plaza, different states' buildings, a lagoon with gondolas and swan boats, viaducts, flowers, shrubs, and trees, the Exposition went a long way from Omaha to look a different version of spectacular. A pond

full of colorful water lilies added extra attraction in front of the Palace of Horticulture. Throughout the winter months of 1897 and 1898, horticulturists worked in greenhouses built to house the plants meant to be used on the Exposition grounds and in the Palace of Horticulture. The flowers cultivated included "varieties of lilies, geraniums, oleanders, dahlias, cannas and arbutus."[13] Just as they had done in Chicago, arc bulbs and incandescent bulbs added dramatic grace to the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition.[14] The new Omaha created for the exposition served as an artifice; the real Omaha lingered behind the buildings, ponds, and flora.

Advertising across the country and internationally indicated the degree to which the planners wanted to incorporate Omaha into the realm of white American normalcy rather than let the city remain the edge of the untamed frontier. The issuance of an official guidebook to the Exposition helped promote the event. The guidebook opened with "all roads lead to Omaha this Trans-Mississippi jubilee year. Geographically, in the heart of the continent, accessible by rail from all sections of the country, attractive in topography and ornate in architecture, the metropolis of the Trans-Missouri invites the world to come into her midst and be her guest from June 1, to November 1, 1898."[15] The guidebook provided a table of distance in miles when traveling by train from all major United States cities to Omaha.[16] The words of speeches from the early days of the Exposition indicate a strong compulsion to establish an environment that welcomed people from a variety of locations and social and economic situations. A choir of 150 people, accompanied by the United States Marine Corps Band, sang the lyrics,

Here science weaves her wonders, her wonders for the mind
Here stands arrayed the golden pride, the golden pride of art,
And commerce hath searched the world to find
The treasures rare of many, of many a far-off mart.
Welcome, welcome, welcome to the people of the world![17]

Planners threw out the welcome mat, but more efforts would be needed to entice people to come from areas other than Omaha. The guidebook listed hotels based on whether they were American or European style, with price ranges between fifty cents and five dollars a night.[18] Meanwhile, the *Omaha Daily Bee* conveniently included hotel advertisements with its Exposition promotions starting over a year before the Exposition first opened its gates.[19] The range in prices allowed for a range in classes to lodge in Omaha. Train companies readily published the timetables of the Burlington Route, which led to Omaha.[20] The board of directors made extensive efforts to entice people to come to Omaha.

Though the European ideal had little to do with the previous history of Nebraska, it overwhelmingly represented the concept of the Trans-Mississippi region as an equal to the cities that permanently constructed European-style buildings, the concept planners of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition wished to present. On Nebraska Dedication Day, held June 14, Nebraska governor Holcomb remarked upon a sod house as an illustration of the strength of character and creativity of early migratory settlers in the face of extreme difficulty.[21] Though the temporary structures of the Expo created a magnificent visual display, the

true nature of the Plains state was represented in the less grand yet more innovative sod house. Why build these structures then if they did not accurately depict the prowess of the Plains? The answer rests not with the residents of the Trans-Miss but with those among the residents of the Trans-Mississippi region who were attempting to impress—the eastern United States. Planners of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition needed to create a display equal to anything done by the East and by European cities idealized by the East. Exposition president Gurdon W. Wattles elucidated the planners' aspiration to impress the East in multiple addresses, including when he stated in reference to the opening of the grand Nebraska building "the east has misunderstood the west and has not appreciated its resources, its citizens and its magnificent opportunities. To the state of Nebraska, the future historian will give the credit of erecting in times of adversity a great exposition destined to break down prejudices, build up commerce and promote peace and good will throughout the land."[22] The Exposition and its buildings demonstrated the abilities of Nebraskans to construct what the East considered necessary elements of a successful city. Sod houses indicated a primitive culture to most people outside the Plains, not an advanced and powerful region. Statistics on productivity alone did not prove to the East that the Trans-Miss wielded great power, making it necessary for Nebraskans to cast aside their unique architectural attributes in order to visually satisfying the doubtful East. Planners willingly sacrificed the style of buildings so they could lure people from the East onto the fairgrounds. Once there, everyone could witness the products and amusements that made the Trans-Mississippi region exceptional.

After years of planning, fundraising, promoting, and construction, the Exposition opened with many of its aspects revolving around agriculture, farming, animals, and botany. Attendees could not doubt that the board of directors had achieved its mission to promote the industries of Nebraska and the Trans-Mississippi region. As using the land for the advantage of humans correlated with a key theory of civilization, the promotion of these industries in the Exposition demonstrated how the region joined in combating savagery. To celebrate the best of agriculture, machinery, and domestic goods produced in the Trans-Mississippi, as well as to open the Exposition to residents' participation, jurors from the Bureau of Medals gave out gold, silver, bronze, and honorable mention medals for the best of the best in hundreds of categories. The jurors most often awarded medals for agricultural products. Medals for butter dominate the listings, with varieties of corn, apples, pears, and other fruits, as well as farm implements, also receiving great amounts of attention from the Bureau of Medals.[23] In a region where to this day state and country fairs hold competitions over elaborately detailed butter sculptures, it comes as no surprise that there were 205 butter exhibitors in five different butter exhibits at the Exposition.[24]

The Main Event

The center of the world's breadbasket first and foremost decided to demonstrate its agricultural capabilities to the masses. Documents unequivocally supported agriculture as the main event of the Exposition. James B. Hayes, in his history of the Exposition which the Omaha Historical Society commissioned in 1902, wrote that "one of the chief objects of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was to show the

progress of the development of agriculture. The extraordinary exhibits of productiveness were intended to convey a clear idea of the wealth-producing power of the farms and ranges attained up to the year 1898."[25] Even though Nebraska was still known as the Antelope State instead of its present-day moniker the Cornhusker State, the state's claim as an agricultural production leader had already been made, but the Exposition granted a valuable opportunity to feature agriculture.[26]

Entire buildings were constructed to feature the glories of farming and food production, not the natural beauties present in the region prior to the arrival of white settlers. In accordance with the nature of the region, builders decorated the Palace of Agriculture with corn, grain, and other agricultural products.[27] Included in the Palace of Agriculture was a United States flag made entirely of corn leaves.[28] The Horticulture Building contained flora typically not capable of surviving outdoors in the Plains. The display featured lines of palm trees, cactus, ferns, fruits, and tropical flowers surrounding Corinthian columns. An indoor spring and stream maintained the humidity needed for the flora's survival.[29] By displaying a wide variety of agricultural products instead of simply showing the stereotypical mainstay of corn, the Exposition demonstrated that the Trans-Mississippi region could support most if not all agricultural needs for the country. Palm trees did not and do not accurately reflect the nature of the Plains. Proof of progress in the region necessitated outlandish displays of flora. The production of honey received not only the attention of the Bureau of Medals but also the consideration of the Exposition planners. For those fortunate enough to not be highly allergic to bee stings, a 1,340-square-foot apiary stood on the grounds.[30] The Trans-Mississippi region's pride in agricultural production showcased itself at the Exposition.

Turner emphasized the spread of Christianity into the West, causing exposition organizers to emphasize the means by which religion conquered savagery. Leaders of the West did not neglect the religious sentiments found throughout the history of European expansion into North America. Puritan leaders espoused the religious duty of settlers to create a City on a Hill in early seventeenth-century Massachusetts, and Trans-Miss leaders similarly called on citizens to create a moral stronghold in the heart of the country. The connection of western progress being superior to that of eastern mechanical progress was linked to morality. On the first day, visitors heard, "It is sad to say, but it must be said, that in our own time there are so many individuals who insist that there is no progress today except in mechanics. . . . they philosophize that this is an age of machinery, not an heroical, devotional, philosophical or moral age."[31] The Exposition opened with the Reverend Samuel J. Nichols exclaiming reverence for God. His remarks demonstrate the beliefs held by evangelical Christians throughout the United States at the time:

> It is our privilege to call Thee our Father in Heaven, unworthy and sinful as we have made ourselves, Thou has not forsaken us, but hast by Thy Holy Spirit, given us wisdom and understanding and power. Thou dost inspire men with high purpose and lead them to execute good and great designs, so, today, in this hour of finished labor, we would not glory in ourselves, or in the work of our hands, but only in Thee, from whom came the wisdom to devise and the power to execute. This glory of

human achievement which surrounds us in this place, and which speaks of man's skills and industry, of profess in knowledge and increase in power over the land which Thou hast given us for our inheritance is only a witness and a memorial of Thy great favor toward us. When we remember the way by which Thou hast led us, and from what to what we have come, we are moved to cry in adoring gratitude, "Thou hast not dealt so with any nation," Thou art the God of our fathers, who didst lead them to this western world, Thou didst keep a continent hidden until the fullness of time came, when Thou didst throw open its gates that the people prepared for it, and of Thy own choice, might enter in and possess the land. In it Thou hast lifted up the people and established a nation of freemen. Thine hand hast led us, marvelously in the past, and through Thy favor we are crowned with riches and honor and might. Our eyes have seen the wonders which Thou hast wrought in our midst, so that this day the aged among us stand amazed when they recall the past. For all this Exposition represents, for the transfiguration of a wilderness into fruitful fields, and an uninhabited land into populous states, for progress in arts and manufactures, for the fruits of the field, the riches of the vines and the abundance of the forests, for growth in education, refinement, wealth and the comforts of life, for the supremacy of law, the continuance of our free institutions and the bright hopes for the future, we give Thee, O God, our most hearty and grateful thanks.[32]

Few residents of Tornado Alley fail to respect a higher power, even if they only acknowledge the wrath of Mother Nature. The speeches contained in the secretary's account of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition indicated a strong belief in the power of God, and a perpetuation of the Judeo-Christian norms valued in many western societies of the time. This form of Christianity, emphasizing a right for white settlers to conquer the land, connected capitalism with religious faith.

Prohibition and Images of "The West"

While the attendees of the Exposition enjoyed the sights and sounds, the growing power of religion through the temperance movement made its presence known in Omaha. In a state that William Jennings Bryan, the man who put forth the resolution to hold the Exposition in Omaha, chose to leave when his fervent anti-alcohol opinions were strongly opposed by the ardently alcohol-consuming German population, it comes as no surprise that the issue of alcohol presented itself to the planners and population. Whether or not to sell alcohol or allow its consumption became a debated topic before and after the Exposition commenced. Eventually the planners decided to allow alcohol sales Monday through Saturday but prohibited its sale on the Sabbath. On Sunday, exhibitors could freely invite people into their exhibits constructed from beer kegs but could not tap the keg to give away samples.[33] In Haynes's history of the Exposition, he made sure to boast that among the amusements of the Streets of All Nations, "no spirituous liquors were sold within the gates, nor was any place of amusement allowed to present any feature which could be criticized for a lack of moral tone."[34]

The prohibitionists won their fight to pre-

vent alcohol sales on Sunday, and also the prohibition of hard alcohol sales at any time within the fairgrounds, but they did not achieve their goal of eliminating alcohol's influence on the Exposition. The alcohol industry had firmly established its place, with the Bureau of Medals awarding participants for excellence in whiskey, brandy, beer, and wine.[35] Pabst Beer sponsored an entire building that also served as a restaurant for the visitors.[36] Schlitz Beer, Canadian Club Whiskey, and other alcohol manufacturers built exhibits within buildings.[37] The guidebook promoted Omaha's breweries both the different breweries and their four-hundred-thousand-dollar investment in the Exposition.[38] Though prohibition enthusiasts attempted to ban alcohol from the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, breweries and distilleries instead showcased their drinks at the insistence of the fervent alcohol-consuming population.

The battle between the new norms of civilization and the history of the West was on view in the Wild West show. The legendary "Buffalo Bill" Cody made his entertaining appearance at the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition. While the leaders of the Columbian World's Fair in Chicago inexplicably chose to bar Buffalo Bill from participating,[39] the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition's board of directors did not make the same mistake. Cody Day brought 22,359 people onto the Exposition grounds. The world-renowned Wild West show, led by the famous Col. William F. Cody, involved his Rough Riders and groups of Native Americans demonstrating their equestrian abilities on the Grand Plaza, with the band playing and flags snapping. Governor Holcomb did not miss the opportunity to proudly point out Cody's close involvement in Nebraska history.[40]

The legend of Buffalo Bill engendered many of the stereotypes of the Wild West and its images of violent gunslingers, gamblers, hunters, and men with loose morals. William Cody constructed his image to his advantage. In his 1879 autobiography, Buffalo Bill claimed to have worked as a Pony Express rider, fought with men who were never hurt while the bloody battles raged on, killed countless bears, turkeys, antelope, and buffalos, fought off numerous Native American attacks when the Native Americans outnumbered Cody and his men, soundly defeated other men in horse races when they had the better-looking horse, and had driven cattle between the battles and hunts.[41] At his Wild West show, Cody said that he had received 137 wounds from Native American knives, yet lived to ride again. Though the Wild West show may not have been an authentic representation of the West, nor were the performers longer capable of the feats they claimed to have performed in their youth,[42] it still represented the motive to link the image of the Wild West with that of Omaha's contemporary status. Buffalo Bill brought the rough qualities of the West to the grandeur of the European idealistic structures.

Organizers intended the Wild West show as entertainment for posterity, not as a perpetuation of that culture in the region. The aspects of the West that correlated with savagery received a shroud of civility. Buffalo Bill defeated the Native American in his sham battles, as the people wished to believe they defeated issues of violence with and against Native Americans in the West. The American bison, a legacy of the West, no longer roamed freely in the Omaha area. People who entered the exposition grounds could see the animal of the West behind an enclosure produced by Omaha Anchor Fencing Company.[43] Modern

industry reigned in the wilderness. The frontier was closed, and so the United States would look across its borders to target new frontiers to dominate.

The Rise of Militarism and Technological Innovation

The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition allows for a glimpse at the means by which society contended with the increased international presence of the United States at the closure of the nineteenth century. War with Spain could easily have prevented the Exposition from occurring at all. The United States Congress provided more than one hundred thousand dollars for the Expo. If the dubious explosion of the *USS Maine* had taken place prior to February 1898, one would have to wonder whether Congress would have instead decided to appropriate those funds for the military. Wartime sentiment against Spain seeped into many speeches at the Exposition. Though Senator Allen from Nebraska could not return to Omaha for the opening of the Exposition, he did take the time to send off a letter bashing the Spanish.[44] Nebraskans in particular felt a connection to the proceedings of the Spanish-American War because the first troops to set foot in Cuba were from Nebraska.[45] On the North Midway of the fairgrounds, visitors could enter a building with bold letters screaming, "U.S. VERSUS SPAIN. HAVANA AND THE MAINE. REMEMBER THE MAINE! A REALISTIC PRODUCTION ON REAL WATER," if those visitors desired to satisfy their patriotic passion over a questionable ship explosion.[46] Also situated on the Midway was "Edison's Wargraph," described as "a moving picture, illustrating the bombardment of the Cuban fortifications which occurred April 27th last."[47] Patriotic fervor against Spain staked its claim at the Exposition.

One of the most enticing days during the Exposition brought President William McKinley to Omaha. Who better to truly represent the United States' military might than the commander in chief? The board of directors had worked for months trying to bring the president to Omaha.[48] The *Omaha Daily Bee* claimed that over half a million people gathered to welcome and cheer McKinley when he finally arrived in Omaha.[49] The Exposition's board of directors created Jubilee Week in the last month of the Exposition in order to both commemorate the president's arrival and celebrate politics in general. Fortunately for the legacy of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, McKinley's future assassin would wait to kill McKinley until the president spoke at an exposition held in Buffalo. Planners decided to use the week as a Peace Jubilee Week celebrating the United States' victory over Spain. The connection of the war to the Exposition is demonstrated by the statement that "the war with Spain was begun and ended during the building of the Exposition, and came near to wrecking it, by reason of the absorption of the whole people in the sanguinary event to the exclusion of other things; but out of it came the Peace Jubilee of the exposition, the most brilliant of historic events."[50] Haynes may have been dramatically overenthusiastic in his claiming that the Jubilee Week was "the most brilliant of historical events," but the week did exhibit the political passions of Americans.

Away from the Shoot the Chutes and Giant See-Saw rides, the exposition denoted the United States' wish to ascend not only to global power militarily but also in technological innovations and historical importance. The

Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition marked the first public display of incubators in the United States by German physician Martin Courney.[51] Other medical innovations were housed in buildings at the Exposition. The newly created X-ray technology created a buzz at the Exposition. Satisfaction of curiosity over the Roentgen Wonderful Ray of Light cost visitors an additional ten cents.[52] While those interested in medicine thrilled over the incubators and X-rays, the history buff did not go home unappeased either. The United States Government Building housed the desk Thomas Jefferson used while writing the Declaration of Independence, a vast coin collection, and the signatures of a majority of the United States presidents.[53] The Exposition brought various pleasures and items of interest to the people willing to pay to enter its gates. If any visitors cared to take photographs of what piqued their interest within the fairgrounds, Frank A. Rinehart, the Exposition's official photographer, opened his darkroom to those wishing to develop their pictures, though they had to pay one dollar to bring their cameras into the Exposition.[54] The United States displayed its power of progress in technology and politics at the exposition.

People of Color and Women at the Exposition

Native American participation in the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition illustrated the changing opinions of race in the United States. The inclusion of the Indian Congress, a gathering of over thirty different Native American tribes from August to October, exposed the sentiment Caucasian Americans held toward Native Americans. Relations between Native Americans and settlers moving to the West had frequently resulted in bloodshed. Mutual fears of potential slaughter had strong historical precedent. As more battles resulted in victories for the settlers, the diversity of Native American tribes soon began to dwindle. The controversial Dawes Act placed Native Americans into an inferior status in the United States. Forced to either assimilate or never leave a reservation, the lives of the Native Americans no longer allowed for the exercise of their unique way of life.

Many members of the press attempted to express their appreciation of Native American culture, yet an undertone of racism pervades their words. In his review of the Indian Congress, an anonymous writer for the *Nebraska City Conservative* vacillated between racism and willingness to improve the public image of Native Americans. The writer warned that "one who wishes to observe the Indians seriously should go by himself. This is because two Americans can hardly be together but they must begin scoffing. It is easy to ridicule the ways of these natives, but it is also easy to be impressed."[55] According to these people, Native Americans in the nineteenth century were not Americans; only those of European descent received that title. Men and women from Native Americans tribes were considered an exhibit, equal to corn, beer, and manufactured goods. The passage of the Secretary's Report concerning the Indian Congress illustrates the populace's predilection to treat humans like animals in a zoo. Wakefield wrote:

> It was realized by the Government authorities in charge of the exhibit that the people at large held little interest in the educated Indian of the time. They wanted to see him in his wild state, in his blanket and aboriginal tepee. They were curious to witness the foot races, the fire dances, the native games

Fig. 2. Organizers had Native Americans perform a Sham Battle for paying customers. From the Collections of the Omaha Public Library.

> of the Indian of savagery, and cared little to see him if not wrapped in a blanket of primitive weaving and decked out with paint and feathers. The authorities endeavored to meet these ideas, but of course the Indian of the people's fancy had passed away.[56]

The individuals eager to see true Native Americans culture may not have realized that their western expansion, their invasion of lands upon which Native Americans had lived for centuries, and their unwillingness to maintain peaceful relations with Native Americans had made their curiosity impossible to be satisfied. Tribes from the Trans-Mississippi region numbered twenty-five, with perhaps seven hundred Native Americans in total taking part in the Indian Congress. Apache leader Geronimo attracted the attention of many.[57] Reinhart's photographs of Geronimo show a wary man no longer capable of the warrior feats that made him infamous. At the Indian Congress, he appeared very much the man taken from his lands and wrested into the control of the US government.[58] Geronimo had previously given up wearing Native American clothing,

but instead wore popular American-style suits and ties. Geronimo believed that western expansion had eliminated Native American livelihood. He was once quoted as saying, "[H]ow long will it be until it is said, there are no Apaches?"[59] His attitude at the Exposition can only be imagined as not overtly optimistic about the status of Native Americans in the United States. As part of the Indian Congress, organizers had the Native Americans demonstrate sham battles for the paying customers.[60] In one of the few moments during which planners of the Exposition truly recognized the importance of Native Americans, members of the tribes were allowed to form a reception for President McKinley.[61] Despite their moment of political importance, Native Americans could not escape the "red man" image at the Exposition.

The entire concept of celebrating the Anglo-Saxon triumph in the Trans-Mississippi region placed Native Americans in a position of inferiority. Throughout the Exposition, speakers reiterated that the Anglo-Saxons had accomplished more than any other group could have foreseen as possible. The former pioneers extolled themselves as true Americans. One speaker stated that

> it may be important to note the fact, in passing, that the men who pioneered the West in whatever pursuit were native Americans who had inherited from their forefathers the true national spirit. . . . Invariably the founders of these new commonwealths were native Americans determined to take part in the great movement of territorial expansion in the region west of the Mississippi River.[62]

If Anglo-Saxons achieved the status of native Americans, where were the true Native Americans? In his opening-day speech, John N. Baldwin boasted about settlers coming from the east battling against Native Americans, pairing those slaughters with killing buffalos and bears. Baldwin continued that the change from "wandering and uncivilized aborigines" to twenty-two million churchgoing, well-educated folk had transformed the western territory for the better.[63] Baldwin solidified his opinion, doubtlessly shared by many at the time, that the United States and specifically the western region of the country could not have attained the level of production it did without western expansion by people of European descent:

> [T]he results which this exposition will show have been attained are largely due to the character of the people who took possession of this land. They were of the best blood of the union; men of depth and range; of aplomb and reserve; of judgment and common sense . . . men who soon found that agriculture was just beginning when they felled the forest, and that driving from the streams the Indian and his canoe was not the end of commerce.[64]

According to Baldwin, the Exposition demonstrated that fifty years of defeating, killing, and removing Native Americans from territories where they had lived for centuries had helped society progress. People of European descent crushed Native American cultures in order to advance the principles they believed to be superior. The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, along with the inner Indian Congress, strongly demonstrated the results of western Expansion on Native Americans.

In addition, the planning and execution of the Exposition changed the role of African Americans. In the 1893 Columbian World's

Fig. 3. The "Old Plantation" Exhibit at the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition. From the Collections of the Omaha Public Library.

Fair in Chicago, planners had not allowed African Americans to participate in the organization of the fair, nor were they allowed to hold any position of authority. At the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, African Americans served as security guards, as well as occasionally leadership of certain committees. African American Ellsworth Pryor was given a supervisory position at the Exposition.[65] Nonetheless, the execution of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition still contained elements of blatant racism. The "Old Plantation" exhibit especially gains historians' ire. At the Old Plantation, African Americans were costumed as slaves as they stood before a reconstructed slave quarters shack.[66] The Old Plantation exhibit, supposed to represent the antebellum South, allowed those attending the Exposition to pose for photographs as slave owners.[67] The official guidebook even expressed pride that the exhibit included "genuine darkies."[68] Besides the Old Plantation exhibit, the Exposition made little effort to mention African Americans as part of the Trans-Mississippi. Only Missouri's building included a portion about African Americans, and the African Americans who took part in the Exposition on Missouri's behalf did not receive mention in the guidebooks or historical reviews.[69] The former slave state received two gold medals for their "Negro Educational Exhibit, Manual Training" and "Negro Educational Exhibit."[70] Though African Americans lived and worked in the Trans-Mississippi region, little to no evidence supported that fact at the Trans-Mississippi

and International Exposition. The United States today contains vast amounts of racial prejudice. In 1898, society had barely begun the process toward racial equality.

The presentation of foreign cultures existed as a sideshow rather than an appreciation for cultural differences. Visitors could purchase a gondola ride on the lagoon, marketed as "A Night in Venice,"[71] just as they could gander at the stereotypes of people from around the world. A Moorish Village, Streets of Cairo, and Japanese Tea Garden were all featured on the Streets of All Nations, located on Midway. Advertisements promoted "The Cuban Atom: Chiquita, the Living Doll."[72] The official guidebook's description of Chiquita would set politically correct Americans into a tirade: "this midget was born in the City of Matanzas, on the Island of Cuba, a little over twenty-eight years ago. Her height is but twenty-six inches, though she is proportionately well developed and has a sprightly, beautiful little face."[73] Extending beyond humans in international costumes, the Streets of All Nations featured camels for visitors' riding pleasure, handled by men in Arabian costumes.[74] The Chinese Village was located next to a dog show and a haunted swing rather than the grand buildings of innovation.[75]

The Parade of All Nations, which took place on July 4, demonstrated the desired connection of non-Euro-American culture to savagery. In the parade, those who regularly worked on the Midway staged a grand parade for all. The description of the parade states that "the participants were from many nations of the earth, costumed in the garb of the countries from which they came."[76] The men and women from the "Streets of Cairo" staged an allegorical play, with a bride being taken to the home of her new husband, trailed by her bridesmaids and protective father. Fireworks ended the evening.[77] The Parade of All Nations included wild animals from Hagenbach's Wild Animals exhibit. Haynes described Hagenbach's participation in the parade as "an open float surrounded by wild beasts from the jungle."[78] Hagenbach's Wild Animals included elephants, tigers, bears, lions, monkeys, and elk among the five hundred species it claimed to present, all shown by highly trained professionals.[79] White American ideals represented civilization, while all other cultures represented an opportunity to treat the legacy and struggles of population as equal to the wild beasts of a zoo.

The involvement of women in the Exposition foreshadowed the issues women in the next century would address as first-wave feminism sought to build the political and social power of women in the United States. As the nineteenth century closed, the position of women in society stood on a precipice. The 192-page *Official Guide Book to the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition* gives half a page of consideration to female efforts at the Expo. The writers of the guidebook concluded that "the fair sex has contributed its full share to the success of the great Exposition."[80] The supposed full share only meant that women did work on a few exhibits and buildings, mainly the education exhibits and the Boys' and Girls' Building, in addition to the women's congress. Though their role did not match male activity in the Exposition, women did participate. The twenty-seven-member women's congress used their domestic experience to plan and host banquets and entertain special guest of the Exposition.[81]

Physical beauty of the "fair" sex appealed to Exposition planners in interesting ways. The medals awarded were designed with the

Fig. 4. The "Ladies in Drawing Room" exhibit presented Western women in positions of Victorian morality and superior to their Eastern counterparts. From the Collections of the Omaha Public Library.

images of forty-five "beauties." Planners of the exhibition used female beauty as another manner of asserting western differences and potential superiority over the eastern portion of the United States. Authors of the *San Francisco Call* proudly stated that "not one Eastern face will lend its grace of its presence to this galaxy of feminine charms, for the idea is to have the type presented of a distinctively Western character, which, while it will detract nothing from its beauty, will add greatly to its value from a strictly scientific point of view."[82] The outfits women wore displayed the position of Victorian morality through showing little skin despite often extreme heat. Over eighty years after attending the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, Ruth Pagel still held fond memories of what she saw there, including the people on megaphones, called "barkers," who yelled for visitors to enter their attractions, while also remembering the ways that women presented themselves at the fair. Specifically, she commented on the misfortune of the contemporary style of dress as limiting to the comfort of women. Ruth Pagel stated, "There was one big problem with the

midway. It was dusty. The other part wasn't. But the midway . . . the women wore long dresses in those days and I remember when we'd get home they would just be filthy, just covered in dirt."[83] Eighty-two years after the Exposition closed, Ruth Pagel remembered the discomfort of dress, an issue that within decades would motivate feminists to seek change. Layers of lace and fabric led women to retreat to the drawing rooms, as pictured, stifling their participation in the exposition.

Women at the exposition represented the civilized lady, though an undercurrent of rebellion against this notion existed. The secretary's report refers to the female participants as "Mrs. So-and-So" instead of their actual names. Among those listed are Mrs. Charles Offutt (Bertha Yost) and Mrs. George A. Joslyn (Sarah Joslyn), who founded Omaha's premier museum, the Joslyn Art Museum, in her husband's memory.[84] Leaving off a woman's first name indicates the cultural acceptance of a husband's legal rights over his wife. In an era of men controlling almost all aspects of society, most women could not even find their names in the history books. Especially in the case of Joslyn, the legacy of the woman deserved to not be subverted. Two women did manage to steal a few words in the pages of retrospective narratives. Salvation Army lieutenant Dorothy Maurer and Ensign McCormick strongly objected to the statues of naked women placed throughout the fairgrounds. On May 23, the two women broke into the fairgrounds by using a ladder to climb the fencing, and maimed statues with axes. Both women were soon arrested, but the incident served as a surprisingly positive piece of advertising for the Exposition, most likely to the chagrin of the two women.[85] Women's protests did not receive significant press coverage if other events occurred, yet the issue of discontent with the era's restraints on women exemplified by the exposition would soon by challenged across the country.

Conclusion

After the disassembly of the Exposition structures, Omaha visually returned to the city of 1897, but its productive powers only grew. Bands no longer played every day. The gondolas left. Soil filled the majority of the lagoon, creating a small pond until the pond too was covered. The productivity of Nebraska, promoters noticed, did not wane after the Exposition ended. Omaha's production capabilities in 1900 had increased to ten times the level of production in 1880, an increase greater than that of Chicago, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Denver, and other major cities in the central United States.[86] The population of Omaha did not exponentially grow following the exposition, nor did Nebraska. According to the United States Census Bureau, the state had a population of 1,062,656 in 1890 and by 1900 had 1,066,300 individuals residing in the state. Another decade saw a population increase of a little more than 120,000 people, comparable to other states in the Midwest.[87] The boom in agriculture and manufacturing that began in the twenty years between 1880 and 1900 did continue until the Great Depression. Farm valuations more than doubled throughout the state. Per capita income jumped.[88] The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition may not have encouraged many people from the rest of the United States or abroad to move to Nebraska, but the Exposition did achieve its goal of illustrating that Nebraska was a state of prominent money-making and production power.

The Trans-Mississippi and International

Exhibition managed both to exemplify distinct qualities of Nebraska and to broadly illustrate many aspects that defined the late nineteenth-century United States. The problems inherent in dispossessing people of their ancestral lands and eliminating their traditional means of survival did not disappear with an exposition. Refusing to give women an entire exposition building did not stop their momentum in gaining political stature. Continuing to associate black people with the experience of slavery did not integrate them into the future economic glory portrayed in the magnificent edifices. Native Americans did not all die, though the public willingness to acknowledge their struggles slipped away from the public view. The frontier as an area without massive exploitation by white male interests did indeed end, but the frontier of a new emerging culture quickly rushed in to fill the void. Though the organizers of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition may have tamed the fury of change for a few months, the reality of the wild potential proved too strong to be tamed for long.

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