

Maya Brownstein  
December 19, 2014  
HIST 312

“From the Simplest Upward”<sup>1</sup>: White American Identity at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition and Olympic Anthropology Days

At the turn of the twentieth century, the goal of the burgeoning field of anthropology was “to trace the course of human progress, and thus to learn as much as may be possible of the origin and destiny of Man,”<sup>2</sup> declared William McGee, first president of the American Anthropology Association and head of the Anthropology Department at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. The Louisiana Purchase Exposition – the name of the World’s Fair of 1904, held in St. Louis, Missouri – maintained this same lofty goal, as did the first U.S.-hosted Olympic Games, held during the Exposition also in St. Louis. 40 acres of Exposition grounds were dedicated to showcasing indigenous people from 75 societies across the globe, living in mock villages meant to allow them to display themselves and their cultures as authentically as possible in front of white American fairgoers who gawked and took photographs.<sup>3</sup> Many of these indigenous people were placed on display once more at the Olympic “Anthropology Days,” two days of the Olympics wherein indigenous participants competed in athletic contests while 10,000 people looked on.<sup>4</sup> In the audience were McGee and his colleague James Sullivan, the head of the Exposition’s Department of Physical Culture who organized the Anthropology Days and

---

<sup>1</sup> William J. McGee, “Opportunities in Anthropology at the World’s Fair,” *Science* 20, no. 503 (1904): 254, accessed October 7, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1631167>.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy J. Parezo, “A ‘Special Olympics’: Testing Racial Strength and Endurance at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition,” in *The 1904 Anthropology Days and Olympic Games: Sport, Race and American Imperialism*, ed. Susan Brownell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 64.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

sought to achieve McGee's anthropological objective through, in his own words, testing "the natural all around ability of the savage in athletic feats."<sup>5</sup>

For any of the testing and learning that occurred during the Exposition and Anthropology Days, there was more confirming and teaching – ideas about the stratification of humanity, based on race, that McGee and Sullivan didn't discover in St. Louis as much as they already possessed them, and used these ideas to conceive of and contour the Exposition and Anthropology Days. In other words, McGee and Sullivan weren't searching for answers. They were searching for opportunities to scientifically prove the differences between primitive and advanced humans, to crystallize racial hierarchy, and to establish an American identity of white superiority, all in front of wide-eyed fairgoers and during a period of developing American colonialism. This mission of white, American supremacy becomes clear in the construction of "human zoos" and the presentation of nonwhite indigenous people as obsolete at the Exposition, as well as in Sullivan's biased interpretations of the Anthropology Days results and his biased organization of the event that inevitably cast indigenous competitors as lesser than their American counterparts. Ultimately, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition and Anthropology Days promoted whiteness and Americanness as bastions of progress, further constructing the American identity as white and justifying American colonialism at home and abroad. These processes were contingent upon placing nonwhite races at an intersection between science and spectacle that presented them as inherently inferior.

World's Fairs aimed to paint the host country's culture as highly evolved and affirm that country as a world power; the Louisiana Purchase Exposition was no different. The U.S. showed off its achievements in technology, industry, science, academia and the arts, as well as its

---

<sup>5</sup> James E. Sullivan, *Spalding's Official Athletic Almanac for 1905* (New York: The American Publishing Company, 1905), 249.

distinguished history, across fairgrounds of “brilliance and grandeur,”<sup>6</sup> in the words of fairgoer Edward Schneiderhahn. Within grand, ornate buildings – from the Palace of Electricity to the Palace of Liberal Arts, the Palaces of Art to the Palace of Transportation, the Palace of Education to the Palace of Machinery – the United States displayed both artifacts from the past and technological developments that signaled American progress and innovation. Exhibits included, as *The Cosmopolitan* publisher John Brisben Walker described in the magazine, radium and its “energy so powerful, inexhaustible and apparently so abundant in nature”<sup>7</sup> and “the automobile...in its most perfected form for private use.”<sup>8</sup> These displays allowed visitors to, in the words of Missouri Historical Society archivist Martha R. Clevenger, “ponder the wonders of the world, and visualize a limitless future”<sup>9</sup> – one in which America’s prowess continued to rule.

Though other western nations and their accomplishments were featured in these buildings, an emphasis on the United States no doubt pervaded the Exposition. The Government Building, comprised of government departments such as Treasury, War, Navy and Justice, was “attractive and imposing...strengthened by the eminence on which the building stood,” and contained “interesting...elaborate...wonderfully rich and complete” exhibits, according to Schneiderhahn, who reported having “spent far more time in the...Government building than in any other Building and learned the most from the government Building’s exhibits.”<sup>10</sup> If Schneiderhahn is any indication, fairgoers devoured the stately image of the United States that

---

<sup>6</sup> Edward V.P. Schneiderhahn, “World’s Fair Diary,” in *Indescribably Grand: Diaries and Letters from the 1904 World’s Fair*, ed. Martha R. Clevenger (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1996), 41.

<sup>7</sup> John Brisben Walker, “Great Inventions and Discoveries Which Are Changing the World,” *The Cosmopolitan*, September, 1904, 621.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 622.

<sup>9</sup> Martha R. Clevenger, “Introduction,” in *Indescribably Grand: Diaries and Letters from the 1904 World’s Fair*, ed. Martha R. Clevenger (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Schneiderhahn, “World’s Fair Diary,” 58.

the Exposition constructed. Relatedly, the image of the United States leading the rest of the world toward a future of overall advancement and enlightenment was equally popular, given people's tendency to continually return to the Exposition and consume its nationalist splendor. One fairgoer, Edmund Philibert, attended the Exposition 28 times over the course of nine months.<sup>11</sup> With each visit, Philibert and his fellow fairgoers marveled at the varied displays of America's exceptional power, its cultural and scientific glory.

The Exposition not only presented a cultural and technological vision of the United States but also a racial one, asserting the country as white and essentially rendering Americanness and whiteness synonymous. According to historian James Gilbert, African Americans were largely absent from the Exposition's audience and excluded from all exhibits. Exposition organizers refused a proposed "Bureau of Colored People" that would showcase the achievements of African Americans; restaurants on the Pike – a strip of the fairgrounds featuring concessions and carnival-like amusements – were racially segregated; and, writes Gilbert, "there was significant negative publicity in the St. Louis newspapers that discouraged patrons of color."<sup>12</sup> Those in charge of the Exposition created conditions in which African Americans were explicitly shut out or that prompted African Americans to choose to stay away from the fairgrounds. In so doing, organizers crafted a lily-white image of the United States that represented the Exposition's lily-white audience, and erased the existences of nonwhite Americans on a global stage.

---

<sup>11</sup> Edmund Philibert, "World's Fair Diary," in *Indescribably Grand: Diaries and Letters from the 1904 World's Fair*, ed. Martha R. Clevenger (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1996), 115.

<sup>12</sup> James Gilbert, *Whose Fair? Experience, Memory, and the History of the Great St. Louis Exposition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 132.

A whitewashed depiction of the United States also manifested itself through the single nonwhite group deemed American: young Native Americans enrolled in Indian Schools. Native American youth wore Western clothing and demonstrated their skills in English and Western-style domesticity within the United States Indian School exhibit, tellingly named and placed atop a hill across from exhibits wherein the students' elders wore their respective tribes' clothing and demonstrated their non-Western way of life.<sup>13</sup> In directly juxtaposing old and new generations of Native Americans, and attaching the United States to only one of those groups, Exposition organizers established a plain distinction between nonwhite people to whom the American identity could apply – those who assimilated, who worked to overcome their nonwhiteness – and nonwhite people who maintained their nonwestern, nonwhite cultures and therefore could never truly be American. From the Exposition's outset, whiteness and Americanness were intertwined, and whiteness was promoted alongside the United States by exhibits asserting the country's greatness.

The presentation of Native Americans is just one example of how McGee molded the Exposition's anthropological component to further elevate white Americanness. McGee organized for various indigenous peoples to participate in the Exposition as providers of cultural education for fairgoers and as scientific subjects for anthropologists. The many Native American and Filipino tribes, Mbuti people of the Congo, Tehuelche people of Patagonia, and Ainu people of Japan, all of whom lived in "Anthropology Villages," together created, McGee advertised to his colleagues, "the largest assemblage of the world's people in the world's history...represent[ing] distinct ethnic types...so that every known stage of industrial

---

<sup>13</sup> Clevenger, "Introduction," 11.

development is typified among the peoples on the exposition grounds.”<sup>14</sup> Observing the indigenous people, McGee said, would help reveal “the transition...from the aboriginal culture to that of advanced enlightenment”<sup>15</sup> and allow “comparison of...the most primitive known [people] to the most highly advanced.”<sup>16</sup>

The revelations and comparisons to be made, however, were masterminded by McGee: the Anthropology Villages were ordered according to McGee’s view of culture-grade, in other words the hierarchy of cultures and races he’d already developed. Fairgoers walking through the Anthropology Villages first saw the Mbuti people – the group McGee deemed the most primitive – and ended their tour by climbing up to the aforementioned United States Indian School to see the indigenous group McGee deemed the closest to advanced – the young Native Americans embracing (however forcibly) white American culture.<sup>17</sup> By literally positioning these two concepts above and after the nonwhite indigenous people, McGee physically asserted the virtue of whiteness and Americanness, representing them as the pinnacle of humankind. Such aggrandizement relied upon the indigenous people living within the confines of the Anthropology Villages – not to mention the confines of the racial order that the Villages and their structuring worked to concretize.

The promotion of white Americanness was also contingent upon other aspects of the indigenous peoples’ presentation, such as McGee’s emphasis on cultural authenticity and the Anthropology Villages’ core concept of placing humans on display. That indigenous people were exhibits in the same way as automobiles or art fundamentally dehumanized them, rendering them objects. Moreover, the villages’ ordering – grounded in the notion of culture-grade – painted the

---

<sup>14</sup> McGee, “Opportunities in Anthropology at the World’s Fair,” 253.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>17</sup> Parezo, “A ‘Special Olympics,’” 66.

indigenous cultures and, by extension, all nonwhite people, as mere steppingstones toward white Americans and their culture. Relatedly, that the Exposition organizers emphasized American inventions and technological strides alongside the country's history, while providing only a snapshot of indigenous cultures, portrayed these cultures as frozen in time, without significant history and irrelevant to the future (unlike the United States). In other words, the Exposition asserted the inevitable decay of nonwhite cultures by virtue of their inability to develop and, inextricably linked, the promise of white Americanness.

Exposition organizers reinforced the image of indigenous people frozen in time through their obsession with authenticity. In addition to designing the Anthropology Villages to look like the indigenous peoples' real homes, organizers often refused to provide visible modern amenities to the indigenous people, in order to maintain the exhibits' authenticity. For instance, as cold weather approached, the Philippine Exposition Board chose to insulate and heat the huts of the Igorots, a Filipino tribe, rather than provide them warm clothing to wear in place of their traditional loincloths.<sup>18</sup> (This style of dress, it's worth noting, often scandalized fairgoers' middle class sensibilities, thereby fortifying the image of the Filipinos as uncivilized and providing Exposition organizers reason to preserve the loincloths beyond authenticity.) Indigenous people were permitted to take part in aspects of Western life only if such participation was invisible and would not compromise the scientific and cultural "truth" of the exhibit in front of fairgoers. This policy further reveals Exposition organizers' commitment to casting the nonwhite indigenous people as stuck in the past, incapable of advancement in the same way as the United States and impossible to include in a modernizing world. Nonwhiteness entailed obsolescence and an

---

<sup>18</sup> Clevenger, *Indescribably Grand*, 113.

inability to progress; these constructed associations served to uphold white Americanness as timelessly enlightened.

Perhaps due to preexisting racial biases and perhaps because the Exposition's structures primed them to do so, fairgoers contributed to the overall dehumanization of the indigenous people on display. The white, middle class Americans who comprised the majority of the Exposition audience deepened the cultural and racial hierarchies the Exposition put forth to them, not only by showing up to the Anthropology Villages as spectators and consuming the indigenous people as objects, but also by actively exoticizing and stereotyping those on display. The Exposition, in claiming to showcase entire groups rather than individuals, proved fertile ground for the formulation of stereotypes and the rendering of the indigenous people as cultural tokens as well as objects. On display in the Anthropology Villages, indigenous peoples' every move became performances of their respective cultures to the thousands of fairgoers who reduced them to mere cardboard cutouts, and treated them accordingly. Edmund Philibert exemplified the process of essentializing cultures at the Exposition, reporting in his diary, "I came to the Patagonians. There was a man and a woman sitting in a dirty looking tent, near a fire on the ground. They were very lazy looking. The Ainus were next, they were not as dirty nor as lazy looking as the Patagonians."<sup>19</sup> Philibert's account reveals both the creation of cultural stereotypes – based on the assumption that those on display were tokens rather than individuals – and the creation of cultural hierarchies – which, thanks to the Anthropology Villages' organization, were already apparent to fairgoers and available for mimicry.

---

<sup>19</sup> Philibert, "World's Fair Diary," 110.



Many other accounts further illuminate the dehumanizing relationship between fairgoers and the indigenous people they gawked at. Fairgoer Sam Hyde provided another example of stereotyping at the Exposition in addition to demonstrating the frequent practice of exoticization:

Of all the foreign nations that participated in the fair, none made so good a showing and won such universal praise as Japan...They are a nation of homely men but the women were fairly goodlooking...one in particular...[I] found her in the garb of a well-dressed American girl...I asked her which dress she preferred, she said, 'O, the other [American] is so much more comfortable.' I told her the costume of Tokio was much the most becoming.<sup>20</sup>

Hyde's record bespeaks a sense of ownership and sinister, sexualized fascination with foreign races, both of which cemented people on display's status as objects. Hyde also reveals how fairgoers often shared the Exposition organizers' fixation on authenticity, and how limiting such authenticity was for the non-Americans on display. This dynamic (along with Philibert's ranking of the Ainu and the Patagonians) reveals the positive feedback loop that defined the relationship between the Exposition planners and the audience, and in turn defined displayed indigenous peoples' experience of the Exposition. The Exposition's hierarchical, pseudo authenticity-driven design reinforced fairgoers' tendencies to stereotype and classify those on display, and vice-versa. Those on display consequently were completely constrained within the fairgrounds and under the gazes of white Americans.

Fairgoers repeatedly established a clear separation between the indigenous people and themselves. For example, fairgoer Florence McCallion wrote that the Filipino Igorots "look[ed] like bronze statues,"<sup>21</sup> while Philibert commented on this same group, "As cold as the day was; I saw an Igorotte with nothing on him but a coat and a sash, he didn't seem to mind the cold at

---

<sup>20</sup> Sam P. Hyde, "World's Fair Diary," in *Indescribably Grand: Diaries and Letters from the 1904 World's Fair*, ed. Martha R. Clevenger (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1996), 138.

<sup>21</sup> Florence McCallion, "World's Fair Letters," in *Indescribably Grand: Diaries and Letters from the 1904 World's Fair*, ed. Martha R. Clevenger (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1996), 125.

all.”<sup>22</sup> McCallion and Philibert disregarded the Igorots – and by extension all of the indigenous people they encountered and all nonwhites in general – as fellow human beings, instead viewing them as fundamentally foreign, inaccessible entities. However, McCallion also experienced a moment of connection with those on display: “At the Japanese Garden we had green Japan tea made by the Japanese, and served by Japanese girls in native costume. They served little Japanese cakes with the tea. Some of the girls were as white as we are.”<sup>23</sup> While the recurrent invocation of Japan again emphasizes foreignness, McCallion seems to relate to the Japanese girls she observes despite this foreignness, and expresses this relation racially. Her choice to perceive physical similarities rather than differences signals her positive feelings toward the Japanese girls, and broadly reveals a process of race formation wherein physicality becomes a readable marker of virtue and status. Moreover, McCallion’s account hinges on and reflects an already-established racial hierarchy wherein non-whites gained rights and privileges only through being perceived as white. Flexible notions of race, seen in McCallion’s willingness to extend whiteness to the Japanese girls whose display she enjoyed, molded a rigid hierarchy, which the Exposition both shaped and was shaped by.

Regardless of if McCallion perceived exhibited people as similar or dissimilar to herself, and regardless of how fairgoers precisely reacted to the Anthropology Villages, they and the Exposition as a whole ultimately turned nonwhite people into spectacles. The opportunity to observe and judge those on display proved a source of entertainment. As foreign race and nationality were met with awe and wonder, indigenous peoples’ very existences became spectacles ready for consumption. This process combined with another aspect of the Exposition to further dehumanize the indigenous people: non-whiteness and non-Americanness were not

---

<sup>22</sup> Hyde, “World’s Fair Diary,” 112.

<sup>23</sup> McCallion, “World’s Fair Letters,” 121.

only spectacles, but also science experiments.

Anthropologists flocked to the Exposition in order to heed McGee's promise of a singular scientific opportunity to study a wide array of cultures and trace human development. Many conducted studies on the indigenous people and fairgoers alike, aiming to compare the two groups' results. According to anthropology professor Nancy Parezo, influential psychologist Robert Woodworth measured the "stature and weight, rates of respiration and pulse, memory, feet shape, color blindness, the acuteness of senses, and reaction times" of hundreds of middle class, white adults – the Exposition's audience – and then conducted the same studies of those in the Anthropology Villages.<sup>24</sup> Woodworth, along with most of his colleagues, used physical characteristics and abilities to judge subjects' mental abilities. Writes Parezo, for example, "color recognition...was considered a critical sign of mental progress...Woodworth wanted to answer the question of whether dark-skinned peoples or 'primitive' races were especially different from whites or 'advanced' races in their recognition of the color blue."<sup>25</sup> These studies were crucial to the formation of cultural and racial hierarchies in terms of how anthropologists interpreted their results as well as in their very premise: the existence of inherent difference between people belonging to different cultures and with different physical appearances.

This scientific premise became a spectacle in the same way that the people at its center did. Just as fairgoers gawked at indigenous people in the Anthropology Villages, thousands of fairgoers watched Woodworth conduct his anthropological experiments.<sup>26</sup> The so-called science behind social hierarchies – the facts that potentially substantiated white American superiority – proved enthralling to fairgoers. Watching anthropologists quantify the indigenous people and

---

<sup>24</sup> Parezo, "A 'Special Olympics,'" 72.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 72.

verify racial difference and order was as amusing as watching the indigenous people mull around their pseudo-habitats. Science and spectacle converged: experiments were entertainment while non-whiteness and non-Americanness as entertainment were justified by experimental data. At the very heart of this convergence was the Exposition's indigenous population. Nowhere did the intersection of the science and spectacle of race manifest itself more clearly than the Olympic Anthropology Days.

During the Anthropology Days, on August 11 and 12, over 100 indigenous people left their exhibits to compete in Olympic-style events, such as “spear and baseball throwing, shot put, running, broad jumping, weight lifting, pole climbing, tugs-of-war,”<sup>27</sup> in front of entertained spectators and eager anthropologists. Sullivan – who ultimately aimed to test the popular notion that, in his own words, “the average savage was fleet of foot, strong of limb, accurate with the bow and arrow and expert in throwing the stone... natural athletes”<sup>28</sup> – organized the Anthropology Days as follows: members of each indigenous group competed against one another, and the winning Igorot or Patagonian, say, would then compete against all of the other indigenous winners. This next competition determined the most skilled of all the indigenous people, and his results would be compared to those of the corresponding Olympic winner (nearly all of whom were white Americans). Comparing the results of the best nonwhite athlete and the best white athlete allowed Sullivan and McGee to draw conclusions about the veracity of athletic ability and physical prowess among those belonging to what Sullivan called “savage tribes.”<sup>29</sup> They then more broadly determined which end of the culture-grade spectrum showed more promise based on a theory of nation-building that guided the Anthropology Days, stated in *The*

---

<sup>27</sup> Parezo, “A ‘Special Olympics,’” 59.

<sup>28</sup> Sullivan, *Spalding's Official Athletic Almanac for 1905*, 249.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

*Cosmopolitan's* coverage of the Exposition: "The maintenance of the health of the individual is the chief requirement of the healthy growth of the state."<sup>30</sup> At its core, the Anthropology Days was about far more than athletics: it was about national and racial dominance.

The circumstances of the Anthropology Days put the indigenous people at a severe disadvantage competitively and, by extension, in terms of their social stature, as determined by Sullivan and his audience. The indigenous people received explanations of the athletic events directly before competing, with no opportunity to practice or even fully understand the games in which they were participating. Their athletic performances consequently disappointed Sullivan, who assumed the events would come naturally to the indigenous people, that comprehension and training would prove unnecessary given their "primitive" lifestyles. In his summary of the Anthropology Days, he explained his confusion over the indigenous people's poor shot put performances: "Of course the argument may be made that these savages have not been taught the art of shot putting. Quite true, but one would think that the life these men have led should enable them to easily have put this shot many feet further."<sup>31</sup> Sullivan dismissed not only the indigenous peoples' lack of experience as legitimate reason for their difficulty competing but also cultural differences. In track events, for instance, many of the indigenous people would stop before crossing the finish line in order to wait for their fellow competitors "as a sign of graciousness...in many cultures,"<sup>32</sup> which Sullivan interpreted as grounds for disqualification and "a sign of mental weakness."<sup>33</sup> From the outset of the Anthropology Days, indigenous competitors were bound to fail because of unfair conditions that Sullivan produced and refused

---

<sup>30</sup> John Brisben Walker, "Athletics and Health: The Department of Physical Culture," *The Cosmopolitan*, September, 1904, 593.

<sup>31</sup> Sullivan, *Spalding's Official Athletic Almanac for 1905*, 251.

<sup>32</sup> Parezo, "A 'Special Olympics,'" 92.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

to acknowledge.

Sullivan's belief that the indigenous competitors had no reason to perform poorly fueled his overall conclusion that "never before in the history of sport in the world were such poor performances recorded"<sup>34</sup> than at the Anthropology Days, and that overarchingly the indigenous people were inferior to white Americans. In his account of the Anthropology Days, Sullivan continually asserted, implicitly or overtly, that the indigenous competitors demonstrated a deficiency in athletics that carried over to their intelligence and potential to match Americans in societal advancement. In his remarks that "the performances of the Ainus would compel many to believe that they had a great deal to accomplish in the way of developing their bodies"<sup>35</sup> and that the physical performances of "the Pigmies and the Cocopa Indians...showed conclusively the lack of the necessary brain,"<sup>36</sup> inadequate physical showings become proxies for indigenous competitors' inadequate cultures.

Sullivan contrasted such inadequacies with American success: "Now the African Pigmy leads an outdoor life...termed a natural athletic one, but, nevertheless, we find that...any of our American champion sprinters could easily, in this particular race, have given the African Pigmy forty yards and a beating."<sup>37</sup> Sullivan's further comments – that "the Pigmies indulged in...a mud fight...and it reminded one very much of a snowball fight of the average American boy,"<sup>38</sup> that "in the running high jump, the Americanized Indian again out-classed the savage, the savages showing in very poor form,"<sup>39</sup> that "the exhibition of archery shooting by the savage tribes was very disappointing, particularly to those, who, a few weeks later had the pleasure of seeing the

---

<sup>34</sup> Sullivan, *Spalding's Official Athletic Almanac for 1905*, 253.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 251.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 255.

American archers use their bows and arrows”<sup>40</sup> – established the clear superiority of Americans over the indigenous (even in the case of Native Americans, whose edge over their fellow indigenous competitors seems to be their assimilation, in Sullivan’s mind). Ultimately, Sullivan used indigenous competitors’ losing results as grounds to make general claims such as “that the savage has been a very much overrated man,”<sup>41</sup> particularly when pit against the white American man.

While Sullivan drew broad conclusions about indigenous cultures’ inferiority based on their poor performances, he chose to view their athletic feats through a lens of specificity. When an indigenous competitor’s results were substandard, Sullivan deemed indigenous people as a whole also substandard. When an indigenous competitor’s results were impressive, however, they reflected only upon that single competitor. Sullivan wrote, for example, of an Igorot’s pole-climbing performance – which he declared as “the most marvelous performance at pole climbing ever witnessed in this country” – that the “performance showed conclusively the marvelous strength of limb, and great endurance of this particular Igorot.”<sup>42</sup> The discrepancy between Sullivan’s treatment of indigenous competitors’ perceived successes and failures reveals the extent to which Sullivan purposefully molded the data he collected from the Anthropology Days, in addition to the event’s organization. Sullivan chose to deny the indigenous competitors practice time or sufficient explanations of what was expected of them; to neglect the legitimate reasons for the indigenous peoples’ underwhelming performances; and to interpret athletic results in such a way that posited indigenous failure a standard and indigenous accomplishment an anomaly. Sullivan actively crafted a narrative of indigenous inferiority in the same way that

---

<sup>40</sup> Sullivan, *Spalding’s Official Athletic Almanac for 1905*, 255.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 257.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid* 255

McGee and the Exposition organizers did: by rendering indigenous people spectacles and biasedly implementing science. The Anthropology Days bolstered the Exposition's message of white American supremacy through Sullivan's calculated disapproval of indigenous athletic ability and, transitively, disapproval of indigenous ability to exist in a modern world revolving around statehood.

The issue of statehood was at the crux of the Anthropology Days and the Exposition as a whole, given that they took place at a moment in time when the United States was growing as an imperial power. Establishing white American superiority not only affected the nation within its existing borders, in encouraging assimilation and celebrating domestic colonialism at Indian boarding schools. It also pushed for the expansion of these borders in order to replace "savagery" with "enlightenment" globally. In particular, the Exposition aimed to foster support for American colonial presence in the Philippines. The Philippine Exposition within the Louisiana Purchase Exposition was massive, advertised as "second only to the World's Fair itself" and "the overshadowing feature of the World's Fair," and paid for by Congress.<sup>43</sup> Special attention was directed to the Philippines in emphasizing the primitiveness of the over 1,000 Filipinos at the Exposition, as a way to address an immediate policy issue and convince Americans of colonialism's necessity in the Philippines. But in general this narrative extended much further, priming fairgoers to support future foreign conquests based on knowledge, spoon-fed to them by the Exposition and Anthropology Days, of the dichotomy between American and non-American cultures, white and nonwhite races. In the Philippines and elsewhere, including at home, an American takeover of inferior culture was justified, even righteous or inevitable according to the Exposition and Anthropology Days' model of nonwhites as undeveloped, barbaric and doomed.

---

<sup>43</sup> Clevenger, *Indescribably Grand*, 12-13.



Amongst the Exposition and Anthropology Days' dehumanization, indigenous participants retained agency and actively undermined the narrative of inferiority that Sullivan, McGee and their colleagues generated for them at every turn. Indigenous people's refusal to become spectacles and science experiments illuminates a power and a shrewdness that Sullivan and others overlooked in perceiving instances of noncooperation as mental inadequacy rather than willful protest. At the Anthropology Days, many indigenous people took part in athletic trials but chose not to compete any further because they would not be paid (a sure sign of their ability to exist in modernity) and/or because they did not want to participate without sufficient explanation of the events.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, many indigenous people refused to undergo anthropological experiments such as "climb[ing] trees in their bare feet simply to see how long it would take or to measure the shape of their feet."<sup>45</sup> And again at the Anthropology Days, in between events indigenous people performed skits in which they "poked fun at the entire undertaking...the Mbutis...thought it was fun to satirically mimic the events, pantomiming the athletes and referees, disrupting the proceedings,"<sup>46</sup> and ultimately making a spectacle of the spectacle. The indigenous people were not mindless figures like fairgoers and organizers believed and asserted, or like we may believe based on the fact that their voices are largely absent from these events' histories. The Exposition was an oppressive place for the indigenous people on display but it also was a place of resistance.

Nonetheless, the Exposition and Anthropology Days' oppressiveness far outweighed indigenous peoples' small protests in terms of historical legacy. McGee, at one point during the Exposition, wrote of the clearly "established in quantitative measure...inferiority of primitive

---

<sup>44</sup> Parezo, "A 'Special Olympics,'" 87.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 107.

peoples, in physical faculty if not in intellectual grasp, and especially in that coordination of mind and body which seems to mark the outcome of human development and measure the attainment of human excellence.”<sup>47</sup> This narrative defined the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, Olympic Anthropology Days and their lasting impact. Through painstakingly constructing events that positioned nonwhite, non-American indigenous people as objectified spectacles and scientific specimens, next to the proud history and innovations of the United States, the anthropologists who organized the Exposition and Anthropology Days sold to fairgoers a story of destined white American domination. In so doing, the Exposition and Anthropology Days became justifications for American imperialism at home and abroad, and further ingrained into American culture whiteness’ virtue and non-whiteness’ hopeless inferiority. This racism persists within the Exposition’s memory as white Americans, fascinated by the grandiosity of St. Louis in 1904, ignore the nonwhite people whose presence proved integral to the Exposition’s success, and on whom they are largely dependent for the racialized privileges they take for granted.

---

<sup>47</sup> Parezo, “A ‘Special Olympics,’” 105.

### Works Cited

- Clevenger, Martha R. "Introduction." In *Indescribably Grand: Diaries and Letters from the 1904 World's Fair*, ed. Martha R. Clevenger, 3-38. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1996.
- Gilbert, James. *Whose Fair? Experience, Memory, and the History of the Great St. Louis Exposition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Hyde, Sam P. "World's Fair Diary." In *Indescribably Grand: Diaries and Letters from the 1904 World's Fair*, ed. Martha R. Clevenger, 128-146. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1996.
- McCallion, Florence. "World's Fair Letters." In *Indescribably Grand: Diaries and Letters from the 1904 World's Fair*, ed. Martha R. Clevenger, 120-127. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1996.
- McGee, William J. "Opportunities in Anthropology at the World's Fair." *Science* 20, no. 503 (1904): 253-254. Accessed October 7, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1631167>.
- Parezo, Nancy J. "A 'Special Olympics': Testing Racial Strength and Endurance at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition." In *The 1904 Anthropology Days and Olympic Games: Sport, Race and American Imperialism*, ed. Susan Brownell, 59-118. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.
- Philibert, Edmund. "World's Fair Diary." In *Indescribably Grand: Diaries and Letters from the 1904 World's Fair*, ed. Martha R. Clevenger, 74-119. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1996.
- Schneiderhahn, Edward V.P. "World's Fair Diary." In *Indescribably Grand: Diaries and Letters from the 1904 World's Fair*, ed. Martha R. Clevenger, 41-73. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1996.
- Sullivan, James E. *Spalding's Official Athletic Almanac for 1905*. New York: The American Publishing Company, 1905.
- Walker, John Brisben. "Athletics and Health: The Department of Physical Culture." *The Cosmopolitan*, September, 1904.
- Walker, John Brisben. "Great Inventions and Discoveries Which Are Changing the World." *The Cosmopolitan*, September, 1904.