

---

## Representations of the Middle East at American World Fairs 1876-1904

*Eric Davis*

The old nations in the earth creep at a snail's pace; the Republic thunders past with the rush of an express. The United States, the growth of a single century, has already reached the foremost rank among nations, and is destined soon to out-distance all others in the race. In population, in wealth, in annual savings, and in public credit; in freedom from debt, in agriculture, and in manufactures, America already leads the civilized world.

Andrew Carnegie, *Triumphant Democracy*.<sup>1</sup>

But one can observe for five dollars in the Plaisance what it would cost twenty thousand dollars to see if he traveled purposely to see it, and no one complains. The greatest attraction of all, undoubtedly, is the "Streets of Cairo," with its 180 men, women and children, theatres, camels, donkeys and dogs.

Ben C. Truman, *The History of the World's Fair*.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most significant debates to emerge in recent years centers on the concept of Orientalism. In his path breaking study which gave name to this debate, Edward Said defines

---

Eric Davis, Associate Professor  
Department of Political Science and  
Director, Program in Middle Eastern Studies  
*Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA*

Orientalism as, “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.”<sup>3</sup> At its most basic level, Orientalism seeks to explain the problems Westerners have encountered in understanding the Middle East due to their biases and preconceptions about the region. For Said, however, Orientalism is not just a powerful conceptual prism that distorts Western understandings of the Middle East but has also provided a rationale for legitimating Western domination of the region. Although Said proffers cogent arguments to substantiate his thesis about British and French colonial domination of the Middle East, his arguments are less persuasive when applied to the United States which never possessed colonies in the region. Nevertheless, despite the lack of a colonial tradition, stereotypical understandings of the Middle East - the core of Orientalist thinking - have been an integral part of American public culture from the very founding of the North American colonies.<sup>4</sup>

Using representations of the Middle East at American world's fairs of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this essay examines the following questions. First, why was such strong interest in the Middle East evident at these world's fairs well before the United States' economic and political interests in the region crystallized following World War II? Second, to what extent can the Orientalist paradigm help us understand the United States' cultural encounter with the Middle East as expressed through world's fairs? Finally, what types of alternatives paradigms need to be developed to comprehend those aspects of the United States' relationship with the Middle East that Orientalism fails to explain?

Focusing these questions still further, what did the spate of Middle Eastern exhibits at *fin de siècle* world's fairs represent as

---

a cultural encounter with the Middle East? In what ways was this cultural encounter linked to political, cultural and economic developments in the United States during this period? What processes led to the fairs' formation? What impact did these fairs have on American society and its understandings of the region? Why was the representation of non-Western peoples, including those from the Middle East, such a prominent part of these fairs? What ties did the United States develop with those Middle East countries represented at the fairs?

The world's fairs examined in this study, the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, the 1893 Chicago World Columbian Exposition, the 1901 Pan-American Exhibition in Buffalo, and the 1904 St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition, constituted one of the most important economic, political, and cultural phenomenon in post-Civil War United States.<sup>5</sup> They presented a myriad of exhibits that juxtaposed the United States' expanding technological prowess to the technological advances of its main competitors in the global political economy, Great Britain, France and an emerging Germany. Large steam driven turbines, such as the Philadelphia Exhibition's Corliss engine, the Chicago Exposition's Worthington pumps, and other newly developed machinery in the fairs' ubiquitous Machinery Halls, were designed to drive home the point that the United States was one of the world's great industrial powers. Likewise, these fairs contained a plethora of exhibits in which a wide variety of non-Western societies and cultures were represented. The representation of African villages, Far Eastern architecture, Middle Eastern bazaars, and Oriental decor, just to name a few genres of exhibits, were part of an effort to represent all the world's cultures, thereby assembling a truly global exhibition. While some literature has situated the world's fairs within the changing political economy of late 19<sup>th</sup> century

American society, very little has been said about the role Middle Eastern exhibits played in these fairs despite the fact that each fair presented exhibits from the region.<sup>6</sup>

An overview of foreign exhibits, especially those from Europe, indicates that they were organized for economic ends, especially to increase trade by stimulating American interest in foreign commodities.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, anticipating significant foreign attendance, the fairs' organizers sought to translate the United States' growing industrial power into the sale of its products in the world market. However, from another economic perspective, it was clear that businessmen and manufacturers who invested in world's fairs did not realize much if any return on their money. Despite large attendance, the fairs did not turn a profit. Because fairs did not provide significant returns on investment yet business elites continued to support them, economic concerns can explain only one of the motivations for their organization.

If economics, understood in terms of a utilitarian cost-benefit analysis, only partially explains the impetus behind the world's fairs, then a broader perspective is needed to explain their genesis and organization. First and foremost, the world's fairs must be situated within the context of the United States' industrial revolution during the post-Civil War era and the extension of its power into the global arena. They also need to be understood within the changing political economy of late 19<sup>th</sup> century America which was affected by several crucial factors. Specifically, the world's fair exhibitions were as much a response by political and business elites to changing domestic political and social conditions as they were an effort to promote their immediate economic interests whether at home or abroad.

---

First, the post-Civil War era witnessed extensive population redistribution resulting from rural to urban migration and the massive influx of immigrants, primarily from eastern and southern Europe. These developments led to the rapid growth of cities such as New York and Chicago. Further, the growth of cities created large urban ghettos comprised of immigrants who often did not speak English and whose cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations (mostly Roman Catholic and Jewish) differed markedly from those of the heretofore dominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestant population.

Second, this period witnessed great labor unrest. As American capital rapidly expanded following the Civil War leading to dramatic increases in production in the railroad, steel, meat packing, timber, sugar, and oil refining industries, among others, workers in the growing labor force rebelled against poor working conditions and fought to form unions to represent their interests and discontent. The new captains of industry strongly opposed these efforts with the active support of the state. Federal troops, which were considered more reliable than local militias, were frequently sent to quash worker protests. Ethnic and religious differences produced a nativism that often set immigrant labor against domestic labor. The Haymarket Riots of 1886 and the killing of many immigrant workers represented but the tip of the iceberg of labor unrest during this period. Cross-cutting cleavages pitted state against labor, on the one hand, and domestic versus immigrant worker, on the other.

Third, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a dramatic increase in the interest in race and racial classification. Certainly this increased interest was stimulated in part by the spread of Social Darwinism. However, Social Darwinism would never have drawn the attention it did had WASP culture not felt so

threatened by the large influx of new immigrants and the suspicion that they rejected the values that “traditional” American culture held dear. After all, many white Protestants asked, were not many immigrants either Papists or Jews and active supporters of labor unions, with their attendant collectivist and anarchist ideas? Race became a discourse through which WASP elites could intellectually wrap their dominant position in American society in a veneer of pseudo-science. And technological progress became an indicator of their status as a “superior race.”

Finally, the new industrial elite was largely comprised of parvenus, many of whom felt insecure in their wealth and political power. The American business and social elite still looked to the European bourgeoisie, particularly the French and British, for guidance in aesthetic sensibilities, whether in the plastic arts, architecture, fashion or interior decor.<sup>8</sup> Domestically, they worried about recurring economic recessions that threatened their newfound wealth. Anti-modernism among the middle classes and labor protest among the working class challenged their economic, political and cultural position in society.<sup>9</sup> Despite the lack of immediate economic gain from the world’s fairs, these expositions served a broader function as many of their organizers were quick to point out. Even though business elites did not realize significant returns on their investments, the publicity that their firms and products accrued at the world’s fairs would serve to promote their image and position in society at large over the longer term. Thus the fairs served to discipline business elites as well as they were encouraged to think less of immediate individual gain and more in terms of their interests as a corporate entity with broad political, social and cultural responsibilities. Not surprisingly, the world’s fairs served as tremendous stimulants to

---

the development of modern advertising as the organizers of the fairs generated extensive publicity to attract visitors.

Beyond the overt commercial *raison d'être* proffered by their organizers, the world's fairs represented an effort to "discipline" the American populace through structuring as much as possible its experiences while visiting the exhibitions. The fairs would instill patriotism and a sense of political and social deference among middle and working class visitors. Rather than perceive themselves as immigrants or workers, visitors would instead develop an identity as American citizens who could share in the Republic's new status as a global power. At the same time, the fairs sought to instill support for the idea that the United States' status as a global power was divinely ordained. Manifest Destiny was not just a domestic duty but an international obligation as well, as speeches by presidents Grant, Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt and Taft and fair presidents made clear.<sup>10</sup> The fairs were also intended to ameliorate social class cleavages. Rather than view themselves as pitted against the new captains of industry, workers and middle class visitors were encouraged to identify with America's ruling elites. Indeed, the fairs were intended to provide proof of the political and economic elites' excellent stewardship of the United States' emerging imperial interests. Thus the fairs promoted a sense of corporatism in which "Americanism" rather than ethnic identity or social class conflict were intended to become the dominant societal motifs. Almost all the visitors were Americans since the anticipated foreign attendance did not materialize.

At the Philadelphia Exhibition, the price of admission was halved on designated days from \$.50 to \$.25 to encourage workers to attend the fairs.<sup>11</sup> The representation of each state

in the Union by “state houses” served to instill pride in both rural farmers and urban workers, according to one account. Although these buildings offered little in the way of exhibits, people could eat lunch there and register as visitors to the fairs. The state houses were also associated with “state days” where each state was celebrated at the fair. The houses, “...offered an excellent point of view for observing the national unrest of which we hear so much. The trait was isolated here; the mob element, the mobile trait...seemed to be disengaged and in full play.” Instead of being controlled by an “intelligent will,” the crowd wandered through the Exhibition in awe “as in a dream.” Clearly, the exhibits were meant to disengage thoughts about labor and ethnic unrest. On Saturdays, large numbers of school children visited the fair. As one observer noted, “...and there were throngs of children too, for on Saturdays the schools, then recently opened, sent what appeared to be a large part of the rising generation, with a view, I believe, to forming their minds.”<sup>12</sup>

Foreign exhibits such as those from the Middle East played a central role in promoting this type of political and social identity.<sup>13</sup> Among the many intellectuals associated with the fairs were museum directors and curators, ethnologists, and archaeologists who argued that the fairs needed to become a new type of museum. Rather than providing the passive experience of a conventional museum, the world’s fairs would be “living” museums which would provide first and foremost an educational experience that would teach the visitor how to properly understand American and foreign societies. Especially in terms of foreign exhibits, the visitor was meant to have an interactive experience that created the illusion that he or she had in some sense actually been transported to the culture in question.<sup>14</sup> Foreign exhibits demonstrated



---

by way of comparison the United States' superiority in many realms. Where foreign countries such as Egypt had more auspicious civilizational heritages, their glories were portrayed as relics of the past, especially when compared with other exhibits devoted to contemporary life. In other words, if foreign countries possessed greater civilizational depth, their current levels of economic, scientific, cultural and political development paled when compared with late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century America.

Thus the concern with race, which was most closely associated with exhibits of non-Western peoples, was part of the process whereby the fairs sought to educate the populace on the desired manner in which they should understand the organization of the world's peoples. The fairs' treatment of race manifested itself concretely in the ethnology departments that were responsible for exhibits of so-called "primitive peoples." In all instances, the directors of these departments were distinguished members of the academic community.<sup>15</sup> A close scrutiny of these exhibits illustrates the manner in which they were intended to create a cultural and spatial hierarchy of the world's peoples in the eyes of the viewer visiting the fairs.

The spatial representation of foreign peoples at the four world's fairs demonstrates that foreigners were viewed not as a homogenous unit but as politically, socially and culturally differentiated. Countries like Great Britain, France and Germany were treated with great respect as indicated by the placement of their exhibits at privileged positions within the respective expositions and by the descriptions of their exhibits in promotional literature on the fairs.<sup>16</sup> Semi-industrialized nations such as Spain, Italy and Greece were viewed with respect but as quaint given the emphasis on agricultural and artisanal rather than industrial products in their exhibits. At the next level in the hierarchy of nations were the countries of the

Middle East, Latin America and Asia. These countries such as the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, Persia, Tunisia, China, Mexico and Brazil engendered a certain level of respect primarily because they were organized as nation-states. However, their cultures were viewed as strange, exotic and radically different from American culture. Below these states were so-called “primitive” or “savage” peoples, especially those from Africa who did not inhabit nation-states but who were organized along tribal lines. Middle Easterners often were placed in this category as well in exhibits that depicted allegedly authentic beduin and desert scenes but which were not associated with specific countries.

Only Japan did not fit neatly into this hierarchy. While it was non-Western, it was also engaged in a process of rapid modernization. While fair literature commented on the peculiarities of the Japanese exhibits and cultural aspects of the Japanese delegation, references to the Japanese as the “Greeks of the East” or “Anglo-Saxons of the East,” were prescient indicators of the sense that Japan was likewise an emerging global power. Undoubtedly, the fact that Japan had never been subordinated to Western colonial domination played an important role in differentiating it from other non-Western countries. However, its rapid modernization during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and its efforts to mount a campaign in the United States extolling its progress also contributed to the perception that it stood apart from other non-Western nations and peoples.<sup>17</sup>

What was the specific content of the Middle Eastern exhibits at the four major world’s fairs? The Middle East was represented in a variety of ways. First, there were actual exhibits organized by individual governments in the region following an invitation by fair organizers to attend a particular exposition. In the case of Philadelphia’s Centennial

---

Exhibition, American consuls in Egypt and Tunisia served as conduits for these invitations and facilitated arrangements to mount specific exhibits at the fairs. In other cases, local businessmen joined with private business interests in the Middle East to organize exhibits. Some Middle Eastern merchants responded to publicity inviting foreigners to establish exhibits at the fairs. Finally, many exhibits contained artifacts from the Middle East. If we add the organization of replicas of urban quarters such as Cairo and Jerusalem, and generic desert scenes such as beduin encampments, and the fact that Islamic architectural motifs were evident at the fairs, especially the World Columbian Exposition, then clearly the Middle East maintained a significant presence.

At the Philadelphia Exhibition, formal exhibits were established by the Egyptian, Ottoman Turkish and Tunisian governments. Although efforts were made to entice Persia to participate through contacts with its diplomatic representatives in London, no response was forthcoming. The American consuls in Cairo, Istanbul<sup>18</sup> and Tunis, were responsible for contacting the respective governments in question and encouraging them to send representatives to the Philadelphia world's fair.

In the case of Egypt, the United State Agent and Consul in Cairo, Richard Beardsley, notified A.J. Goshorn, the Director-General of the Philadelphia Exhibition that he had contacted the Egyptian Khedive (Isma'îl Pasha) and that the Egyptian government had indicated that he would be "gratified to receive an official invitation."<sup>19</sup> Beardsley noted that, "A choice of and artistic collection of her products, costumes, archaeology and antiquities, together with a good representation of her customs, manners people and laws would form a picturesque and interesting feature of the great Exhibition..." After an extended correspondence from December 1874 to

May of 1875, the Egyptian government accepted the proffered invitation. The Egyptian Crown Prince and Minister of the Interior, Mohammed Tawfik Pacha was designated as President of the Egyptian Commission to the Fair while Riaz (Riyad) Pacha, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, was designated as Vice-President. However, it was A. (Adolphe?) Brugsch Bey, a Belgian national and professor of Egyptology, who was designated as Director-General of the Egyptian Commission. At the time of the Khedive's acceptance of participating in the Centennial Exhibition, Brugsch had just returned from the 1876 Vienna Exhibition where he was head of the Egyptian Commission.

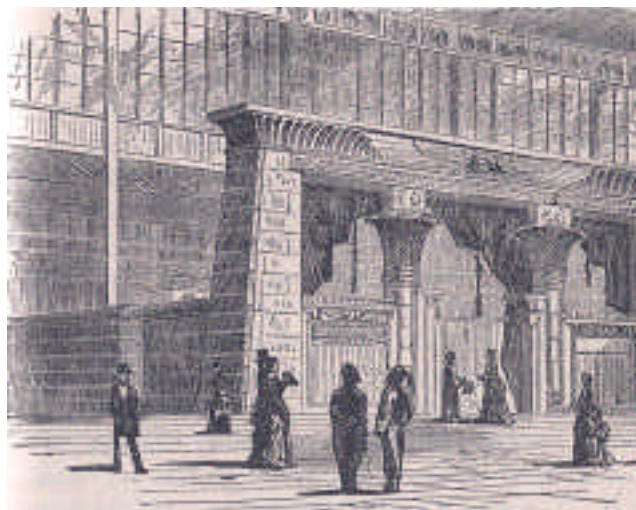
What is noticeable was the readiness of the Egyptian state to participate in the Centennial Exhibition coming on the heels of its participation in several European fairs including the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London, the 1869 exhibition in Paris and the 1876 exhibition in Vienna. However, it was not members of the ruling Turco-Circassian elite who oversaw the implementation of the Egyptian exhibit. Rather it was left to those Europeans resident in Egypt who occupied the strange position of "third nationals" (*al-mutamisriyun*), meaning that they might or might not be Egyptian citizens, but were permanently domiciled in Egypt to create and implement Egypt's exhibition.<sup>20</sup> Thus A. Brugsch, his brother Émile and a Mr. N. Daninos, most likely of the Egyptian Greek community were responsible for the exhibit. The Khedive and those who controlled the Egyptian state felt that these European members of Egyptian society were best suited to negotiate the various bureaucratic and cultural hurdles in Western countries necessary to mount a successful exhibit.

The Egyptian exhibit was one of the larger exhibits. Its entrance consisted of an arch suggesting entry into an ancient Egyptian temple indicating that its main thematic focus was

---

not Egypt's Arab-Islamic heritage but rather its Pharoanic past. Indeed, the words inscribed on the sides of the exhibit entrance clearly indicated the image the Egyptian state sought to project: "Egypt-Soodan [sic]-the oldest people of the world sends its morning greetings to the youngest nation."<sup>21</sup> A small model of the Pyramids of Giza and a bust of Ramses II were presented alongside "magnificent saddles and furniture for horses" used by their owner, the Khedive, for great ceremonies. Although one description of the exhibit mentions "a fine exhibit of Egypt's chemical products," almost all the exhibit focused on ancient artifacts, rugs and carpets, agricultural products, and items associated with desert life such as camel saddles.

The one area where economic questions informed the exhibit was the emphasis on Egypt's cotton industry. Thus, "The Khedive makes a collective exhibit of over two thousand samples of native cotton, representing the crops of eight years." The fact that the exhibit's large photography collection focused on the infrastructure that supported the cotton industry, such as "the Egyptian system of public works, bridges, (and) railroads," rather than photographs of the Great Pyramids, the Sphinx, or the monuments of Luxor and Aswan, indicates that an effort was expended to stimulate interest in the Egyptian cotton industry.



**Entrance to Egyptian Exhibit at 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition**

Interestingly, the Egyptian exhibit also included its own “Orientalist” dimension. Referring to the Sudan with which it shared in 1876 a condominium status, the Egyptian government noted that its exhibit offered, “A large collection...of the rude arms and armor, the rough wooden sandals, the hats woven of reeds, the noisy tomtoms, and a barbaric canopy for the chief or monarch of the tribes of central Soudan in Central Africa.”<sup>22</sup>

The Ottoman or Turkish exhibit was arranged as a “Turkish Coffee House and Bazaar.” Although the *Authorized Visitors Guide to the Centennial Exhibition and Philadelphia, 1876* lists the same square footage for the Egyptian and Turkish exhibits, the *United States Centennial Commission International Exhibition 1876, Report of the Director-General*, indicates that the Ottoman exhibit was larger. In the center of the exhibit building was a café where coffee was served “in the peculiar Turkish style.” Each of four bazaars which

---

surrounded the café offered goods such as rugs, daggers, swords, carpets, dresses and other items. Organizing the Ottoman exhibit around a Turkish café was first proposed to the United States Consul in Istanbul, George H. Boker, who in turn strongly urged A.J. Goshorn to incorporate it into the fair. Unlike the Egyptians, the Turks were much less efficient in organizing their exhibit failing, for example, to have the list of items in their exhibit delivered in time to Goshorn for inclusion in Centennial Exhibition Catalogue. This was true despite their possessing a legation in Washington, D.C., while the Egyptians benefitted from no such diplomatic representation.



**Furniture in Turkish House - 1876 Philadelphia  
Centennial Exhibition**

Following the Egyptian model, the Commission responsible for the Turkish exhibition was largely comprised of “third nationals” and even foreigners. The head of the Commission

was G. D'Aristarchi Bey who headed the Ottoman Legation to the United States.<sup>23</sup> A member of the Italian nobility, Count Tancrede Della Sala was appointed honorary member of the Commission, and Edward Sherer, Acting Consul of Turkey at New York City, and a Mr. August Giese, of 58 Cedar St, New York, were appointed honorary members of the Commission. However, the Commission's work seems to have remained primarily in the hands of Baldazzi Effendi and Rustem Effendi, the First and Second secretaries respectively of the Ottoman legation in Washington. Their titles of effendi indicated their educated and respectable but otherwise undistinguished status within Ottoman society.

The third and smallest of the Middle East exhibits was that organized by the Bey of Tunis who, like the Egyptian Khedive, owned much of the articles included in the exhibit. Despite its size, the Tunisian Prime Minister, General Keredine (Khayr al-Din) assured George H. Heap, the United States Consul in Tunis, that the Bey would make sure, "...that nothing will be spared to make the Tunisian section as attractive and interesting as it was at London, Paris or Vienna, and General Hussein hopes it will excel them." Clearly the Tunisians, who, like their Egyptian and Turkish counterparts, had already participated in a number of large European exhibits, had by now become well accustomed to the culture of world's fairs and what was expected of them.

The Tunisian Commission, like the Egyptian and Turkish commissions, contained many Europeans domiciled in Tunisia with members of the country's ruling elite assuming an honorific role. While Sidi Halloura El-Wazir, Minister of Public Works, and General Sidi Hussein, the Minister of Public Instruction, were designated as the heads of the Tunis Commission, a "Chevalier," Motet Valenti was assigned to represent Tunis at Philadelphia. The exhibit offered fine silks,



---

inlaid furniture and the *pièce de resistance*, a mosaic lion from ancient Carthage owned by the Bey of Tunis which Heap convinced him to allow to be exhibited at Philadelphia.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps in keeping with the perceptions which he thought Westerners would have of Middle Eastern society generally, the Tunisian Minister of Public Instruction, Sidi Hussein, requested sufficient space at the fair to erect “a large Arab tent showing the domestic habits of the Bedoween.”<sup>25</sup>

Both the Turkish and the Tunisian exhibits were oriented towards the sale of products in contrast to the Egyptian exhibit which did not sell any items. However, through its cotton exhibit, the Khedive seems to have been concerned more in attracting interest in this product by American merchants or investors in Egypt proper. Problems developed as a result of both the Turkish and Tunisian exhibits. An American company, Messrs. Fleming, protested the sale of Turkish tobacco at the fair because it claimed to have exclusive rights to such sales. This problem was solved when the Turkish exhibit agreed to pay a 20% commission to the American firm for the right to also sell tobacco. The Turks, in turn, complained about the Tunis exhibit claiming that it sold, “all kinds of Oriental ornaments,” when, “a country must exhibit only its own products.”<sup>26</sup> The Tunis Exhibit encountered serious problems when customers at the Tunis Café claimed that the waiters and waitresses were cheating them. George Heap, the American Consul in Tunis who had received a special dispensation from the United States Senate to serve as Tunisia’s Commissioner at the Philadelphia Exhibition after the Bey requested he assume that position, convinced the Exhibition administrators not to send the Tunisian employees home but rather require the concessionaire to pay for police presence at the café to insure no further repetitions of the situation.<sup>27</sup>

A small family business from Bethlehem, Palestine, arrived in Philadelphia on May 13, 1876 with many religious artifacts, especially artifacts made from olive wood and mother-of-pearl. This small firm, the sons of Banayotte, Zachariyeh, Michael and Habib, requested a space on the fair grounds near the Turkish coffee house and near the Jerusalem Bazaar which the Turkish government had also erected.<sup>28</sup> This firm and the other concessionaires associated with the Jerusalem Bazaar seem to have caused a stir because kiosks began to appear throughout the fair which claimed to be selling authentic items from Jerusalem and the Holy Lands. While the fair organizers encountered increasing difficulties in keeping foreign exhibitors in their local or “native” costume, scores of “natives” began to appear hawking “authentic” items from Jerusalem and the Holy Lands. However, as one source notes, these supposedly indigenous Middle Easterners were belied by their speech which had the “distinct brogue of the Emerald Isles.”

A final exhibit mentioned in the press of the time was “The Moorish Villa.” which seems to be organized by Moroccans, “From Tangiers, that somnolent country so ludicrously described by Mark Twain in his ‘Innocents Abroad.’” Despite the fact that the door, “Is hardly high enough for a grown man to enter without removing his hat,” the inferior walls and ceiling were described as beautifully inlaid with, “moresque decorations so intricate in their intersecting lines and so elaborate in ornamentation that it would puzzle a photographer to reproduce them.” Again, while the Middle Eastern aesthetics were favorably commented upon, the attendants at the villa did not enjoy the same fate: “The half dozen individuals who superintend this exotic residence are equally strange and interesting, their costume being half Arabic and

---

half Turkish, *and their faces of that noble but unintellectual east familiar to travelers in the Orient.*" (italics added)<sup>29</sup>

What can we conclude about the impact of the Philadelphia Exhibition on perceptions of the Middle East? Clearly the Middle Eastern exhibits did not have a particularly positive impact on visitors to the fairs. Commenting on the Egyptian exhibit, for example, one text asserted that the Egyptians who actually ran the exhibits did not understand the artifacts from ancient Egypt or appreciate their own Pharoanic heritage.<sup>30</sup> In addition, Egypt was portrayed, "as not a healthy country, as beside the plague and cholera, other diseases prevail. The European races can not become acclimated to Egypt."<sup>31</sup> Thus an idea, which had been already propagated in Orientalist art earlier in the century, that the contemporary peoples of the Middle East did not appreciate their civilizational heritage and, by extension, did not deserve to have this heritage under their control. The contact with Middle Eastern vendors certainly did not produce more positive feelings since, if anything, the publicity surrounding the Tunis Café generated negative publicity for the Tunisian exhibit. Nevertheless, the Philadelphia Exhibition cannot be said to have had a widespread and significant impact on generating new images of the Middle East if for no other reason than the technology for the spread of images of the region at this point in time was not as yet that developed. What the Philadelphia Exhibition did was to underscore existing views of the Middle East as either an area of spent if once glorious civilizations, e.g., Egypt and Carthage, or the idea of the region as linked to the Holy Lands.

Clearly the fair did intersect in very real ways with discourses of power in American society at the time. For example, an article in *The New York Times* of May 23, 1876, entitled, "The Nation's Centennial," contained a sub-section

called, "A Question of Color," in which the *Times* correspondent reported on an affront to one of the Turkish exhibitors while walking through the Exhibition, "clad in the flowing silk gown peculiar to his country, and accompanied by a beautiful young woman who seemed to be his wife, and who was magnificently attired and brilliant with many gems..." Attracting a great deal of attention, the correspondent noted that the couple were met by, "a certain well-known negro (sic) member from South Carolina, who was accompanied by two of those peculiarly beautiful colored women who are so often met with in the Palmetto state." As the exhibitor and his wife approached, the congressman "who was swelled out in all the dignity of a dress-coat and white kid gloves, exclaimed, looking fixedly at the Turkish lady, 'I 'clares to man, dat am a stunnin' looking women.'" Clearly jealous, one of the congressman's escorts ran up to the Turkish woman and, "inspected the little lady from the East with her gold-mounted eyeglasses." Returning, she remarked, "Well Mr. S—, I'se sure I can't say I admires your taste. Dat poor Turk gal a'int neither nigger nor white—just a poor yaller half-way thing—notin' more, notin' less."

What is instructive about this commentary is the intersection of two discourses. One represents American racism in which the *Times* correspondent is obviously parodying an African-American Congressman and implying that he, and by extension other members of his race, are not fit for high public office. Concurrently, the article subtly classifies Middle Easterners as well. While they are not black, and thus cannot be reduced to the status of African-Americans, neither are they white and therefore cannot attain the same cultural (and at this period "racial") status as the Caucasian population in the United States. Representation in this instance simultaneously marginalizes two groups but within different points in the racial/ethnic hierarchy which was intended to provide the

---

manner in which white Americans were supposed to view the world.



**View of the Midway Plaisance - 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition**

Despite the passage of less than 20 years, the differences between the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the 1876 Philadelphia Exhibition in Philadelphia were striking. These differences also manifested themselves in the manner in which Middle Easterners were portrayed at the respective expositions. Part of the differences in presentation and content can be explained by the different social structures of the two cities and the business elites that dominated them and part of the differences can be explained by the tremendous development of American capitalism and technology during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Philadelphia was a very established city in 1876 with a well defined elite. It did not have an identity problem and was not experiencing dramatic social change. The organizers

of the Exhibition did not follow any particularly innovative strategies aside from presenting impressive exhibits of American technology such as the Corliss Engine.

The Chicago Exposition provided great contrasts in decorum and spirituality, as represented in the so-called White City section of the exposition,<sup>32</sup> and the Barnumesque or “honky tonk” section of the fair exemplified by the exhibits of the Midway Plaisance. Whereas the Philadelphia Centennial Commission had discouraged non-authorized exhibitors, street vendors and anything that would distract from the decorum and propriety of the fair, going so far as to burn stalls and stands set up just outside the fair grounds, the organizers of the Chicago Exposition encouraged a much more dichotomous approach to mounting a world’s fair. Visitors entered the Exposition at the beginning of the Midway Plaisance moving eastward towards Lake Michigan through a maze of foreign exhibits, side shows, and past a giant Ferris wheel before arriving at the White City which was set on the Lake itself. This choreographed “journey” by which the visitor moved from pleasure to more serious and higher spiritual level was part of the idea of fair organizers that the visitor’s experience should be an educational one. The placement of foreign exhibits in the Plaisance clearly symbolized their lesser status within the Exposition’s overall structure. As one commentator cynically noted, “Most of the denizens of Midway Plaisance care little for the formalities or niceties of speech. They “size” you up for what amount of “dust” you may be good for and act accordingly...They have not come thousands of miles merely to add a picturesque feature to this wonderful exhibit. Almost all of them are professional traveling showmen, who pitch their tents in whatever portion of the globe offers the greatest inducement in hard cash. All the profuse explanations that they are here by the special permission of Sultan this or

---

Emperor that is bosh.” Interestingly, after describing how the Chinese try and cheat you out of money, the commentator goes on to select examples from the Middle East to drive home his point that the Midway is an exotic and somewhat disreputable area: “The visitor is free to admire and take his pick of any of the manifold entertainments offered on both sides. You may drift into a Soudanese theater and witness a dance that will deprive you of a peaceful night’s rest for months to come. The Algerian village offers equally great temptations in the way of dances with and without names.”<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, the Midway Plaisance offered visitors a view of the Middle East never before seen in the United States. The most popular exhibit by far was the “Street of Cairo.” Conceived by Max Herz, the chief architect of Khedive Isma‘il, the Cairo scene was not meant to represent any particular street but a composite of urban architectural styles. The exhibit was largely a replica of the Rue de Caire at the 1889 Paris Exhibition only larger.<sup>34</sup> One hundred and eighty Egyptians came to populate the “street” and were sent by the Cairene firm of Raphael and Benyakar which held the concessions for the fifty stores. The exhibit was managed by the firm of Arthur H. Smythe of Columbus, Ohio. The exhibit included a replica of the mosque of Sultan Qayt Bey, the home of a former wealthy Cairene merchant, and a “theater devoted to the sword dances, candle dances, and the other gymnastics indulged in by Cairo dancers which are weird and indescribable.” In the theater’s auditorium, dancing girls either reclined on “rich divans” on stage or in dressing rooms where they, “Adjourn to smoke cigarettes or to take a leisurely pull at nargileh, of which form of smoking the Egyptian dancing girl is a devotee. The exhibit also included Soudanese, Nubians, donkeys and camels, Cairene barbers who daily offered their

services and the Khedive's chief photographer, who did a lively business selling photographs of the exhibit."



Coverplate, "Cairo Street Waltz" - 1893 World's Columbian Exposition

The dancing girls in the Midway, both at the "Street of Cairo," at the adjacent "Algerian Village," and at the "Persian Palace of Eros," caused great scandal. Commenting on the Egyptian spectacle performed by, "an Arabian beauty known as 'Little Egypt'," one commentator noted, "No ordinary Western woman looked on these performances with anything but horror, and at one time it was a matter of serious debate in the councils of the Exposition whether the customs of the



---

dancers of Cairo should be faithfully reproduced or the morals of the public faithfully protected.” While recognizing that the Algerian dancer’s theme was love, it was observed that, “but it is the coarse animal passion of the East, not the chaste sentiment of Christian lands. Every motion of her body is in the illustration of animalism.” Only male audiences attended the Persian dance theater where they came to “gape at an Arabian odalisque giving a performance that ‘should not be permitted in any place of public entertainment.’”<sup>35</sup>

Each day a number of commentators noted, there were daily fist fights in the street. The prevalence of verbal rather than physical fights in Cairo itself would indicate that these encounters on the Midway were staged to attract attention to the exhibit. The hiring of “pretty American girls” dressed in Egyptian garb to work in the various concessions underscored the fact that this exhibit was intended to bring profits to its organizers. Again, the following comment was telling: “Of course all these people are not going through their acts for fun, for each of them is to the Cairo street what the Italian organ-grinder is to the street of an American city. They are after the fleeting penny for which everybody in the Midway Cairo has great respect and desire.”<sup>36</sup>

The organizing of the Cairo street by the firm of Raphael and Banyakar, the reference to one Roberto Levy who was responsible for the Egyptian employees at the Midway, the fact that the Khedive’s architect, Max Herz, designed the street, and that the Khedive’s personal photographer, G. Lekegian, sold photographs of the exhibit, suggests that this was an itinerant group of “professional” fair employees who probably had some financial arrangement with the Khedive and the Egyptian government to mount the exhibit. Even more so than Philadelphia, this exhibit underscored the racial ideology that began to permeate the world’s fairs and which would

reach its apex in the 1904 St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition. In terms of the logic of the fair's organization, which was much more self-consciously structured than the Philadelphia Exhibition, the exhibits in the Midway Plaisance required a "seedy" quality in order to serve as a counterpoint to the symbolism of the White City which foretold Chicago's future greatness.

However, the fair's symbolic construction must be integrated with its political economy. When American political and business elites first decided that the United States needed to mount its own world's fairs as had been done throughout Europe during the 1850s and after, the problem of funding these expositions immediately arose. In Europe, it was understood that the state would assume all costs of the fairs. However, debates ensued in the United States whether, given the federal structure of the political system and the fact that fairs would be located in individual states, the Federal Government could assume all costs of the proposed expositions. The compromise that emerged was the passage of laws by Congress which gave each of the four fairs an official imprimatur and partial funding. Each city which was awarded the concession to mount an exposition was required to match these funds through local efforts. In Philadelphia, Chicago, Buffalo and St. Louis, commissions were formed of local businessmen and prominent members of the community to issue stock subscriptions as well as solicit direct contributions to fund the fairs.

Because each city tried to exceed the accomplishments of all previous expositions, the costs of mounting a world's fair escalated sharply.<sup>37</sup> In addition to local pride and competitiveness, technology and political competition also increased costs. The use of electricity to light buildings at night, and to run the many machines and pumps at the Chicago exposition,

---

added to its costs. Whereas in 1876, the Rhode Island firm of George Corliss had been the only American manufacturer of engines, by 1893, 60 such firms had joined the ranks of engine manufacturing.<sup>38</sup> Because competition in Congress among contending state delegations was intense and Chicago organizers feared that the fair would be awarded to New York or St. Louis, the other main candidates for the exposition, pressures intensified to offer the most grandiose plan.<sup>39</sup> At the World Columbian Exposition, the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building was the largest structure of its type ever constructed. Longer than the Brooklyn Bridge by a 100 feet and, “three times as large as St. Peter’s cathedral,” it could seat 300,000 visitors. This building alone cost \$1,800,000 to erect. The Exposition was required to spend large amounts of funds on land reclamation because Jackson Park, the site of the fair, had been comprised largely of sand and scrub oak.<sup>40</sup>

Although the Chicago organizers of the fair had already raised over \$5 million prior to President Benjamin Harrison’s signing of the bill awarding Chicago the exposition concession, they were still lacking funds just before the fair opened in May, 1893.<sup>41</sup> Efforts to obtain further funding from Congress was successful. Columbian half-dollars in the amount of \$5 million were issued by the Department of the Treasury, half of which would be used to fund exposition construction expenses. However, a stipulation that the Exposition could not open on Sundays was appended to the bill authorizing the additional government subsidy. This led to a great debate in which the City of Chicago ultimately went to court successfully arguing that the fair, given its spiritual dimension in the White City, would uplift the moral fiber of Sunday visitors and not deprive churches of the ability to preach to their congregations.

What this struggle between the City of Chicago and exposition organizers, on the one hand, and Congressional opponents of Sunday attendance, on the other, indicates is the increasing tension in American society between traditional Protestant religious norms and the new entrepreneurial spirit of the so-called "Gilded Age." Fair organizers were disappointed by revenues as the exposition progressed and pressed for Sunday openings to boost the number of visitors. Perhaps to offset the impression of that Chicago was not a God-fearing city, the city fathers and prominent religious figures organized alongside the Columbian Exposition the so-called World Parliament of Religions. This gathering invited representatives of major world religions to come to Chicago for an ecumenical gathering designed to focus on commonalities between them. Although representatives of Islam were not in attendance, an instance was reported in the Chicago press in which an Egyptian imam, who was part of the "Street of Cairo," substituted for a Protestant minister who the fair organizers had forgotten to call to perform a scheduled religious service on the Midway. As *The Chicago Morning Tribune* pointed out, it was a strange sight to see a Middle Easterner with robes flowing in the breeze offer an invocation blessing an exposition that celebrated a Christian country and its heritage.<sup>42</sup>

This tension between profit and spirituality had an impact, however indirect, on changing perceptions of Middle Easterners in American society at the time. Although the identification of the Middle East continued to maintain its primary hold on the public imagination, the Columbian Exposition served to promote an image that had also lurked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century American psyche through the continued popularity of *The 1001 Nights* (sometimes referred to as *The Arabian Nights*) and works such as Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra*, Herman Melville's *Orienda*, and especially

---

Twain's *Innocents Abroad*. Here the Orient became the world of fantasy, escapism, irrationality, and the unexpected. As Lears has suggested, escapism was part of the anti-modern impulses of the urban middle classes who lamented the loss of the rurally based myth situated in the Republican ideal of the self-reliant citizen. With the increasing regimentation of middle class life as Americans moved from self-sufficient agriculture to urban white and blue collar employment with its attendant time clocks and industrial discipline, the Middle East was a realm of fantasy in which the populace could escape the tedium of daily life.<sup>43</sup>

Yet the organization and content of the Columbian Exposition also needs to be understood in the context of Chicago's social structure which was a heterogeneous mix of European ethnic groups and African-Americans who had migrated from the South after the Civil War.<sup>44</sup> It was a frontier city which had experienced a tremendous population increase after the Civil War, growing from 500,000 inhabitants in 1880 to more than a million in 1890.<sup>45</sup> The greater concern with "race" and the "sliding scale of humanity," i.e., the need to organize the world's peoples according to their alleged civilizational development, reflected a city that had not yet found its cultural and social anchor. The circus-like quality of the Midway Plaisance and the brash emphasis on grandeur and technology were all part of the city's view of itself as a growing metropolis poised to conquer still further markets, especially to the West, but with a need to assert at the same time the legitimacy of the parvenu business elites which included the Swifts, Pullmans, Wackers, McCormicks and others. That the Orientalist paradigm offers little or no conceptual space to accommodate this type of argument represents an important theoretical shortcoming.

At the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, organized to assure the United States' Latin American partners after the Spanish-American War that they had nothing to fear from their neighbor to the north, overt ideas of race and linear progress dominated its organization.<sup>46</sup> In one sense, this emphasis reflected the evolution of American world's fairs themselves and the fact that Buffalo, like Chicago and St. Louis, the venue of the next great fair, was itself still a frontier city. It too lacked the historical depth of Philadelphia, Boston or New York. Its organizers sought to use the fair as a vehicle for disciplining the middle and working classes. On the one hand, great emphasis was again placed on technology. If the Chicago Exposition had foregrounded its whiteness and purity which assured its forward march towards progress, the Pan-American Exposition stressed its position as the "Rainbow City" given its architects' focus on color and extensive electrical lighting of its buildings. The Ethnology Building, for example, boasted a red tile roof and light yellow walls.

However, the most important event to structure the Exposition was the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the United States' acquisition of colonies. The presence of large numbers of Filipino tribesmen at the fair was of course no coincidence. Not only did the fair seek to assert the United States' role as an *arriviste* imperial power but its role in imposing a Pax Americana on the world. Themes of aggression and world peace which had been evident at the Columbian Exposition, e.g., the overt hostility towards non-Westerners such as tribesmen from Dahomey as opposed to the World Parliament of Religions, were much more pronounced at the Buffalo fair. Nevertheless, despite the focus on the United States' emerging imperial interests in the Western Hemisphere, "traditional" exhibits such as those from the Middle East were not neglected. As the *Official Catalogue and*

---

*Guide Book to the Pan-American Exposition* made clear, a Midway had been incorporated into the fair because it, “has come to be a fixture, and without it the Exposition would lose much of its charm. This part of the Pan-American does not consist of mere fun making exhibitions, but in addition to the legitimate amusement which is afforded visitors, there is much that is instructive and profitable.”<sup>47</sup>

At least two exhibits drew visitors’ attention to the Middle East. The Moorish Palace was the first building on the left as one entered the Midway. Also known as the Pan-Opticon, it offered views of many countries throughout the globe and not just the Middle East. Exhibits such as McGarvie’s Streets of Mexico, the Fall of Babylon, the Old Plantation (representing the “South be’fo de Wah”), the African Village, the Hawaiian Village and Theater, Cleopatra’s Temple, the Philippine Village, Fair Japan, Venice in America and The Evolution of Man complemented the two main Middle Eastern exhibits, (Ferdinand) Akoun’s Beautiful Orient, and Jerusalem on the Day of Crucifixion. Each of the Middle Eastern exhibits provided a counterpoint to the prevalent stereotypes in American society about the area. Akoun’s Beautiful Orient was described as, “A dazzling, realistic display of the charms of the far east, reproducing the streets, villages and encampments of the principle countries. Some of the most noted building, mosques and minarets are reproduced and occupied by hundreds of natives, traders, fortune tellers, etc., occupying booths, bazaars, theaters and coffee houses. Camel riding, donkey riding, elephant riding and the Oriental sports and pastimes furnish an endless amount of amusement to the visitor, while in the theater may be seen the congress of Oriental dancing girls, including La Belle Rosa, Fatma, Fatima, Carmen and many other girls in their peculiar native dress.” The Jerusalem

Exhibit, on the other hand, stressed the continued perception of the Middle East as linked to the Holy Lands. "This consists of a cyclorama representing the scenes, conditions, etc., in and about Jerusalem on the day Christ was crucified. The fame of this production is quite well known throughout the country, and will be of special interest to those religiously inclined, and a lesson to others."<sup>48</sup>

The Pan-American Exhibition gives us insights into the transmission belts of stereotypical understandings of the Middle East, a conceptual and theoretical task often not confronted by texts informed by Orientalism. Because funding was such an issue for all the fairs, the proven record of the Midway as a profitable venture led to its incorporation into subsequent expositions. Clearly, Middle Eastern exhibits, especially so-called Oriental dancing, became *de rigueur* at the fairs along with other spectacles such as H.F. McGarvie's Mexican exhibit complete with bull fights and dancers.<sup>49</sup> The Midway thus became an important vehicle for transmitting images of the Middle East which it defined as a realm of the exotic, the sensual and fantasy.

Although more research in this area is needed, the expositions obviously began to have an impact on popular culture. One of the most interesting texts is a parody of the Buffalo fair written by Thomas Fleming entitled, *Around the Pan with Uncle Hank: His Trip Through the Pan-American Exposition*.<sup>50</sup> What is interesting about this volume is that significant portions of it are written in the prevalent colloquial English of the period thereby highlighting one of the main foci of the book which is to poke fun at foreigners and foreign cultures represented at the fair. Indeed the pejorative illustrations of Arabs and other non-Western peoples of the fair could only have reinforced the racial climate that dominated the exposition.



---

By far the largest of the four exhibitions considered here was the Louisiana Purchase Exposition which the City of St. Louis organized to celebrate the centenary of Thomas Jefferson's purchase of the Louisiana Territories. Here the president of the fair, David Rowland Francis, bragged not only that the exposition was twice as large and wide as the Chicago Exposition and had, "50 percent more acreage under roof," but that it had cost twice as much. But Francis was particularly proud to have over 2,000 foreigners which greatly exceeded the number at any previous fair.<sup>51</sup> Although at both the Pan and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, indigenous peoples made up a large percentage of the "foreigners" brought to the fair, the St. Louis fair did not neglect non-Western societies. Egypt, Persia and, for the first time officially as a nation, Morocco, were represented at the Exposition. In addition, "Syria was represented unofficially by many natives of that country who were interested in various selling and amusement concessions. In the Streets of Cairo, the Constantinople Bazaar and Theater, Morocco, Jerusalem and Damascus, Syrians were interested and Syrian goods were on sale."<sup>52</sup> As with the Tunis Café at the Centennial Exhibition, the majority of vendors seemed to have been Christians and Jews.



**Morrish Palace - 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition**

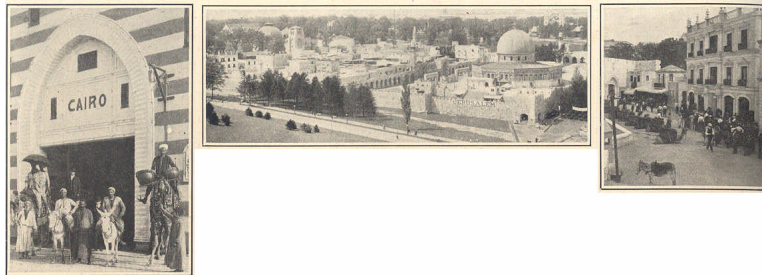
While the Persian Exhibit made a favorable impression due to the beautiful carpets and other artisan crafts that it presented, this positive impression seems to have been offset by the further proliferation of negative stereotypes. Although the Egyptian Government maintained a formal exhibit, with many artifacts from the Egyptian Museum, it was the Streets of Cairo that again attracted large crowds. The "Midway" exhibit of Cairo at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition was the same one that had first been mounted in Paris in 1889, then in Chicago in 1893, and now in St. Louis in 1904. Following the practice in Chicago where local women were hired to supplement the dearth of native Egyptians, so too in St. Louis did local women find the opportunity to "go native."<sup>53</sup> As for the Moroccan Exhibit, "the reproduction of the Sultan's harem fitted out in Oriental style and occupied by six young women from Fez, engaged in occupations illustrative of Moorish domestic life," could not have impressed upon American visitors anything but the underdeveloped nature of Moroccan society.<sup>54</sup> This general appeal to the exotic would seem to have been reinforced not just in St. Louis but elsewhere in the Mid West. In the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* of May 4, 1901, a large sketch appeared on page two which was captioned, "Moorish Girls Consulting Fates," showing a number of women on the roof of a mud brick house. Under the photograph, the caption read, "On the flat housetops of Morocco girls may often be seen flying kites which they believe will give an augury for the future. If the kite remain unbroken good fortune is in store for them; if mishap befall it, evil days will be their portion. Their faith in his oracle is so great that mishap to the kite plunges hem in dejection." Here, of course, religion becomes conflated with superstition and the exotic.



**Cairo Street - 1904 St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition**

Perhaps the most impressive accomplishment of the organizers of the St. Louis Exposition regarding the Middle East was to construct a complete replica of the Old City of Jerusalem. This was reproduced with great pride in many stereoscope photographs of the time and seems to have been one of the star attractions of the Exposition.<sup>55</sup> Along with the martial arts that were strongly emphasized at the St. Louis Exposition reflecting the new cult of masculinity, the “construction” of Jerusalem seems to have part of the fair organizers’ efforts to Jerusalem-Mosque of Omar - 1904 St Louis Louisiana Purchase make certain that religion, American Protestantism in particular, was never far from focus and always linked to the United State’s role as a Christian civilizing power. Nevertheless, the painting in the Fine Arts Building by the

well-known American artist, Elihu Vedder, entitled, “The Questioner of the Sphinx,” seems to summarize the experience of America’s contact with the Middle East during the four expositions in question, namely that it could not be comprehended by the West.



**Jerusalem-Mosque of Omar - 1904 St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition**

What does this survey of the four world’s fair expositions tell us about Orientalism? First, it points to the fact that Oriental attitudes were part of American culture well before the United States became a global power intimately involved in the economic and political affairs of the Middle East. Second, it cautions us not to see perceptions of the Middle East as cut from the same cloth but rather as changing over time. With the development of travel to the Middle East following the Civil War,<sup>56</sup> and the spread of photography, the focus on the Holy Land remained salient to be sure, but increasingly the Middle East acquired a cultural space distinct from a site as the origin of the Christian religion and Judeo-Christian heritage. The Chicago, Buffalo and St. Louis fairs in particular seem to have set the stage for the emergence of a large genre of films after the turn of the century that focused on the Middle East portrayed as a realm of fantasy. Third, the exhibits from the Middle East, whether organized by

---

nation-states or by individual entrepreneurs, were complicit in the aims of the expositions. This cooperation between “core” and “periphery” underlines Sadiq al-ʿAzmi’s critique of Orientalism as formulated by Edward Said as too culturally dichotomous and not sufficiently attuned to the question of social class.<sup>57</sup>

Apart from a source of amusement, the American visitors to these fairs, who were primarily middle and, to a lesser extent, working class and farmers, gained little in the way of material benefit. The emerging American industrial bourgeoisie, on the other hand, used the fairs as a means of enhancing their hegemonic position in society. The fairs were above all grandiloquent testimonies to those who were shaping the Gilded Age. For the leaders of the Middle East, participation in the fairs was not intended to help their subjects in any meaningful way but rather represented a vehicle to achieve greater recognition in the West. In short, these exhibits were for Middle Eastern states exercises in publicity and the promotion of the dominant elites which controlled them.

Mired in post-modernist epistemology, the discourse of Orientalism often fails to see that attitudes and perceptions must be viewed as multi-dimensional and dialectically interrelated as well as related to material underpinnings. Orientalism may have indeed existed under the ancient Greeks as Said argues but it was a very different Orientalism than that of the Exposition Midway. The hypothesis that negative perceptions of one region or country by another constitute a crucial prerequisite to the process of economic and political domination represents one of the Orientalist paradigm’s major contributions. However, Western attitudes towards the Middle East rest on critical power structures which are both constituted in the domestic as well as international arenas and are not limited to ideas. To restrict Orientalism largely to the international

realm while failing to theorize its role in domestic hegemonic structures of thought and power is to conceptually forego one of its most important explanatory contributions.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ben C. Truman et al, *History of the World's Fair being a Complete and Authentic Description of the Columbian Exposition*, Philadelphia, PA: Mammoth Publishing Co., 1893, 552.

<sup>3</sup> *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon, 1978, 3.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of American Orientalist predispositions among the Puritans, see Fuad Sha'ban, *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought*, Durham, North Carolina: Acorn Press, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Many other fairs also included exhibits representing the Middle East. For example, the 1915 Panama-Pacific World's Fair in San Francisco offered fair goers the opportunity to visit "Mohammed's Mountain." However, I have chosen to focus on the largest fairs and those with the most extensive exhibits from the Middle East.

<sup>6</sup> See especially, William Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

<sup>7</sup> The importance of the fairs in stimulating such interest can be seen in the following comment in *The New York Times* on the difficulty of competing in the world market: "...if we have taught our visitors from abroad 'that some things can be done as well as others,' our own people have had

---

before them striking examples of the difficulties with which we must contend in any international competition." November 11, 1876.

<sup>8</sup> It was not a coincidence that during the same period that world's fairs were being organized, business elites were actively involved in establishing art museums in major American cities and building the largest estates ever constructed in the United States according to European architectural styles. Some of the most prominent museums were the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Chicago Art Institute, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Cincinnati Museum of Art. Palatial residences ranged from the Vanderbilt mansion in New York City, the summer mansions in Newport, Rhode Island, and the Biltmore in Ashland, North Carolina.

<sup>9</sup> On middle class anti-modernism, see T. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Anti-Modernism in American Life, 1880-1914*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> At the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, special attention was paid to bringing Filipino tribesmen to the fair to justify the United States *mission civilatatrice* following the seizure of the country during Spanish-American War.

<sup>11</sup> "The World's Exhibition: Twenty-Five Cents Day. Crowd of American Working People-How They Talk, Look, and Act-What Amuses and Interests Them-Amusing Scenes and Laughable Incidents-'What's That Soap Made Of?'" *The New York Times*, September 20, 1876.

<sup>12</sup> Titus Munson Coan, "People and Pictures at the Fair," *The Arena*, 22 (December 1876): 761-762.

<sup>13</sup> Thus at the close of the Centennial Exposition the *New York Times* opined on November 11, 1876 that, "The Exposition has had a good effect in keeping alive the patriotism of the people...we have been made more proud of our country...It is certain that an increased respect for the capabilities, history, and institutions of the Republic will be among the fruits of the Exhibition that has closed."

<sup>14</sup> Speaking of the Midway Plaisance, “where may be seen many strange people from the uttermost parts of the earth, who, with barbaric dancing and weird music may depict the manners and customs of their times,” F. Hopkinson Smith commented that there, “My dreams are all true. Along the crowded thoroughfare move half the wild tribes of the earth—Javanese, Esquimaux, natives of the Soudan, Bedouins from the Great Desert, Algerians, Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, F. Hopkinson Smith, “The Picturesque Side,” *Harper’s Monthly Review*, 1893.

<sup>15</sup> One such intellectual, Dr. William McGhee, was director of the Department of Ethnology at the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition. McGhee also held different academic posts including president of the American Anthropological Association

<sup>16</sup> At the Chicago Exposition, Germany, along with Great Britain and France along with the United States were given “as a place of honor one of the four sections surrounding the court of the Manufactures Building,” the largest building at the 1893 Exposition. Bancroft, *Book of the Fair*, 197.

<sup>17</sup> As part of this effort, see, for example, the article by William McGee, director of the Department of Ethnology at the St. Louis Exposition. “Anthropology at Ithaca,” *The American Anthropologist*, XI (January 1898): 15-22.

<sup>18</sup> In correspondence with the U.S. Department of State, the American consul, George H. Boker, referred to Istanbul by its pre-Ottoman name, Constantinople. See, for example, Boker to A.J. Goshorn, Director-General of the Philadelphia Exhibition, March 17, 1875. United States Centennial Exhibition (hereafter referred to as USCE), Foreign Correspondence (hereafter referred to as FC), File “Turkey,” City of Philadelphia Archives (hereafter referred to as CPA).

<sup>19</sup> CPA/ USCE/FC/File “Egypt,” Beardsley, Agency and Consulate General of the United States in Egypt, Cairo, to A.J. Goshorn, Director-General, United States Centennial Exhibition, January 29, 1874.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of this social stratum, see my *Challenging Colonialism: Bank Misr and Egyptian Industrialization, 1920-1941*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983, 61, 93.



---

<sup>21</sup> James D. McCabe, *The Centennial History of the United States From the Discovery of the American Continent to the Present Time...with a Complete History of the Centennial Exhibition*, Philadelphia: The National Publishing Co., 1877, 986.

<sup>22</sup> McCabe, *Centennial History*, 987.

<sup>23</sup> Sitting on the platform of the Centennial Exhibition's closing ceremonies, one observer described D'Aristarchi Bey as "cynical and saturnine in appearance." James D. McCabe, *The Centennial History of the United States*, 1108.

<sup>24</sup> USCE/FC/File "Tunis"/CPA, G.H. Heap, Tunis, to A.J. Goshorn, Philadelphia, February 12, 1876.

<sup>25</sup> USCE/FC/File "Tunis"/CPA, G.H. Heap, Tunis, to A.J. Goshorn, Philadelphia, May 26, 1875.

<sup>26</sup> USCE/FC/File "Turkey"/CPA, G. D'Aristarchi, Washington, D.C., to A.J. Goshorn, Philadelphia, May 25, 1876.

<sup>27</sup> USCE/FC/File "Tunis"/CPA, Heap to

<sup>28</sup> USCE/FC/File "Turkey"/CPA, Zachariah, Michael, Habib, sons of Banayotte, Bethlehem, Judaeh, to Baltazzi Effendi, Washington, D.C., May 20, 1876; Baltazzi Effendi, Washington, D.C. to A.J. Goshorn, Philadelphia, June 1, 1876.

<sup>29</sup> "The Exposition," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 16, 1876.

<sup>30</sup> "As we enter (the exhibit), we are met by two Egyptians dressed in their national costumes; and who welcome us to the country of the Pharaohs. We turn to the right, where we find a plaster model of the great pyramid of Cheops. Even the people, now familiar with every stone of the mighty structure, are ignorant of the slightest inkling of its ancient use." Samuel J. Burr and S. De Vere Burr, *Four Thousand Years of the World's Progress From the Early Ages to the Present Time*, Hartford, CN: L. Stebbins, 1877, 216.

---

<sup>31</sup> Burr and Burr, *Four Thousand Years*, 215.

<sup>32</sup> This theme dominated the inaugural ceremonies of the World Columbian Exposition where Chicago was lauded as representative of, “The ceaseless, restless march of civilization, Westward, ever Westward, (which) has reached and passed the great lakes of North America, and has founded the greatest city of modern times.” David F. Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893*, Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976, 102.

<sup>33</sup> Ben C. Truman et al, *History of the World’s Fair Being a Complete and Authentic Description of the Columbian Exposition From Its Inception*, Philadelphia: Mammoth Publishing Co., 1893, 550.

<sup>34</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair: An Historical and Descriptive Presentation of the World’s Science, Art and Industry, as Viewed Through the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893*, New York: Bounty Books, 1984, v. 1, 62.

<sup>35</sup> Burg, *The White City*, 222-223.

<sup>36</sup> Truman, *History of the World’s Fair*, 554. That this was a general perception can also be seen in an article by one of the most prominent writers and social commentators of the period, William Dean Howells, who commented that, “ the citizens of the Plaisance are not there for their health, as the American quaintly say, but for the money there is in it.” “Letters of an Altrurian Traveller,” *The Cosmopolitan*, 16 (1893): 223.

<sup>37</sup> *The New York Times* reported on April 16, 1893 that, “the cost of the World’s Fair buildings at Chicago has been \$16,708,826, or twice the sum expended for the same purpose in Paris in 1889.”

<sup>38</sup> Burg, *The White City*, 205.

<sup>39</sup> The *Index to the Congressional Record*, lists countless Senate and House bills proposing that the proposed Columbian Exposition be held in either New York, Washington or St. Louis. See the *Index* for 1889, Washington,

---

D.C.: Government Printing Office, 254, 35, 50, 51, 162, 172, 299, 301, 347, 392, 745.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of the finances of the Chicago Exposition, see, “The World’s Fair Finances,” *The New York Times*, May 9, 1893.

<sup>41</sup> Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> September 20, 1893.

<sup>43</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*, esp. 171-172, 304-305.

<sup>44</sup> Burg, in *The White City*, 67, notes that 77.9% of the 1890 population was of foreign parentage, including large numbers of German, Irish immigrants and “sizeable numbers of Scandinavians, Poles, Britons, Italians, and Bohemians-over three times as many of the last, curiously enough, as there were blacks.”

<sup>45</sup> Burg, *The White City*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 127.

<sup>47</sup> Buffalo, NY: Charles Ahrhart, 1901, 42.

<sup>48</sup> *Official Guide*, 47, 54.

<sup>49</sup> Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 148.

<sup>50</sup> New York: The Nutshell Publishing Co., 1901.

<sup>51</sup> Mark Bennett and Frank Parker Stockbridge (eds.), *History of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition*, St Louis, Universal Exposition Publishing Company, 1905, ix.

<sup>52</sup> Bennett and Stockbridge, *History of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition*, 313, 319.

---

<sup>53</sup> Eric Breitbart, *A World on Display: Photographs From the St. Louis World's Fair 1904*, Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1997, 42.

<sup>54</sup> Bennett and Stockbridge, *History*, 313.

<sup>55</sup> The importance of stereoscopes in promoting images of the world's fairs underscores the critical role of technological advances in promoting understandings of foreign cultures.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Cook and Sons had an office and exhibit of the Holy Lands at the Centennial Exhibition where they offered tours to Jerusalem and the Levant.

<sup>57</sup> See al-ʿAzm's critique of Said in, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," *Khamsin* 8 (1981): 5-25.